

# Journalism

## *The Greatest Good for the Most People*

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“As a news organization, we are constantly growing, changing, and adapting. We’re innovators. I want to lead in that space.”

—Raney Aronson-Rath, Executive Producer, *FRONTLINE*

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Journalism is at the heart of the WGBH mission, and of a healthy democracy. And, at the moment, journalism is under fire. In an era of fake news and manufactured credibility, where can we, as citizens, turn with trust for news? Increasingly, according to surveys, the answer is public media. Viewed as a noncommercial, independent voice with an unswerving dedication to accuracy, WGBH is expected—in Boston and across the country—to speak as a leading voice for truth. The digital century has only amplified that voice, and America has found a digital journalism leader.

Original reporting is the cornerstone of WGBH’s journalistic enterprise. Today, our commitment to journalism reaches national television audiences through the reporting on *FRONTLINE*. Every day, a national radio audience of more than two million explores international perspectives listening to WGBH/BBC/PRI’s co-production, *PRI’s The World*. Regional radio and television coverage provided by *WGBH News* ranks among the finest local coverage in the nation. In addition to producing groundbreaking journalism in traditional broadcast formats, WGBH is rapidly growing its reporting on digital platforms across all its editorial teams.

## Local Impact

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“Our emphasis at *WGBH News* is obviously local, but because this is Boston, we know that local isn’t just about here. It’s about the nation and the world.”

—Phil Redo, General Manager for Radio and News

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As New England’s primary public media news source, *WGBH News* offers unparalleled breadth and depth. *Boston Public Radio* brings issues of civic interest to the airwaves. Television programming includes *Greater Boston*, which invites regional leaders to answer questions of local importance on air. Programming also includes the nationally distributed radio shows *Innovation Hub* and *The Takeaway*, the latter co-produced with PRI, WNYC Radio, and *The New York Times*. New England-centered radio and television programming includes *Open Studio with Jared Bowen* on the arts, *Living Lab* on environmental science, *Basic Black* addressing communities of color, and *Beat the Press*, which covers the media. We also produce original podcasts, including *The SCIF*, which covers national security, and *The Scrum*, covering politics and media. Elsewhere at WGBH, Studio Six produces the current events debate program *Third Rail with OZY* (formerly *Point Taken*), while *NOVA* produces a web-based science news magazine, *NOVA Next*.

All of these activities are characterized by a high degree of innovation and responsiveness to opportunity. And all are profoundly impacted by the cross-media reality that is 21st-century journalism. All of these, like everything at WGBH, are produced with the public interest in mind, of particular importance in journalism. They are the way of the digital century, and they are not aligned with traditional funding models.

## Community Building with Radio

Building out the WGBH news department from just 12 in 2010 to nearly 100 today, “WGBH has more than doubled the audience for public radio news in Boston,” says Phil Redo. In less than a decade, our expanded news coverage

has elevated WGBH to the position of most trusted and largest public news organization in New England “with the second largest market share in the country,” he adds.

“The world has changed,” he says. “It is no longer enough to be a presenter. We need to be the convener, especially at the local level. That’s why we invest so much in on-air conversation and engagement.”

Even as local news coverage is shrinking across the country, interest in locally connected communities continues to grow. “There’s a reason local foods and craft beer are so popular. We see a big opening for serious local journalism that connects the dots, brings communities together in civic dialogue, and speaks truth to power,” says Redo.

## Front and Center

Our flagship investigative journalism program, *FRONTLINE*, has been American television’s top long-form news and current affairs series since 1983, winning every major journalism and broadcasting award, including 82 Emmy® awards and 20 Peabody Awards.

As media habits have evolved, *FRONTLINE* has come into its own, a model of digital reporting and storytelling, providing an integrated journalistic experience across platforms. A growing audience streams *FRONTLINE* on computers, tablets, and smartphones. They also find the series through such new services as the PBS streaming app and platforms such as Apple TV and Amazon Prime.

*FRONTLINE*’s rapidly expanding digital and social media communities aggregate 2.4 million users and accounts. “The biggest shift for us is saying that digital video is not promotional. It is, in and of itself, a powerful form,” says Raney Aronson-Rath. Short videos produced natively for Facebook and YouTube generated over 70 million views in 2016. That same year, 17 million unique users visited *FRONTLINE* online, where they found even more independent reporting and some 200 free *FRONTLINE* films. These digital environments are critical to bringing *FRONTLINE*’s work to a new generation. They also are the pathways for developing new forms of storytelling while cultivating and deepening trust and engagement with the public.

For WGBH journalism to lead in the digital century, it will be necessary to invest not just in tools and technology, but also in training for existing personnel and new staff who will bring skills, knowledge, and experience appropriate to the new digital environments. Consider the extent to which most digital media sources aggregate and personalize news and information feeds based on audience behaviors. “We’re trying to bring together data and invest in systems that allow a personalization of your digital experience with WGBH,” says Bob Kempf, Vice President for Digital Services. Discretionary funds are what this kind of transformation calls for.

## Culture of Innovation

Digital media is nothing new to the journalists and storytellers at WGBH. After all, in 1994, we created the first audio-streaming server and the concept of the web as companion to a television program, first featured on *FRONTLINE*'s *Waco: The Inside Story*. “We were already digital when the disruption happened,” says Raney Aronson-Rath. “Culturally, we’re well-positioned in this new landscape to flourish.”

At *WGBH News*, all broadcast content is made available on the web. A digitally native news team is taking shape. As digital reporting develops, new content will be enriched by the media ecosystem in which it thrives, while existing content can be re-imagined for a new generation.

## The Urgency of Digital Transformation

“Journalism is such a precious and important asset for us,” says Chief Operating Officer Ben Godley. “Democracy only thrives when civil public discourse is vibrant and open.” Joining the Campaign represents a vote of confidence in WGBH as a leading voice in media integrity, fulfilling the promise of truthful, vetted, and trusted journalism for the digital century.