

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency supervising all US government-funded non-military international broadcasting whose mission is:

To promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multimedia communication of accurate, objective and balanced news, information and other programming about America and the world to audiences overseas.

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BBG HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Goals, Challenges, and Accomplishments Around the BBG

December 2008

Note: This monthly newsletter highlights selected Implementation Strategies of the BBG Strategic Plan, new programming and transmission initiatives, market trends, successes, best practices and other items of interest in fulfilling our mission.

Implementation Strategies 2008-2013

From the BBG Strategic Plan

1. Enhance Program Delivery Across All Relevant Platforms
2. Build on BBG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World
3. Help Audiences In Authoritarian Countries Understand the Principles and Practices of Democratic, Free, and Just Societies
4. Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies
5. Facilitate Citizen Discourse
6. Engage the World In Conversation About America
7. Develop And Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of U.S. International Broadcasting
8. Optimize Broadcasting Operations
9. Preserve Credibility and Ensure Overall Programming Excellence
10. Broaden Cooperation Within U.S. Public Diplomacy

Implementation Strategies at Work

Help Audiences in Authoritarian Countries Understand the Principles and Practices of a Democratic Society

Radio Farda Publicizes Student Arrests

RFE/RL's Radio Farda [reported](#) on the plight of four university students in Iran who were imprisoned after staging a sit-in. When the students were eventually released, one thanked Radio Farda for helping them by publicizing the arrest.

Employ Modern Communications Techniques and Technologies

VOA and RFA Offer Headlines on Twitter

Both VOA and RFA now publish headlines on the microblogging site *Twitter*. RFA's [Twitter account](#) gathered 180 followers over the weeks of its launch, without even being advertised. VOA plans to eventually expand its [Twitter presence](#), now English only, to add headlines in other languages.

VOA Russian Site Shows Fast Growth

VOA Russian's [website](#) is improving customer satisfaction as it continues to add new features. Its blogs are growing in popularity at a fast rate compared to similar sites, with some postings collecting more than 250 comments.

OCB Launches New, Enhanced Website

The Office of Cuba Broadcasting launched a newly redesigned [website](#) with live

streaming, a 24-hour news ticker and RSS feeds. The new homepage will also feature news stories with attached audio and video reports.



The homepage of OCB's newly redesigned website, Martinoticias.com

Facilitate Citizen Discourse

Targeted VOA Programs Help East Asia Understand Economic Crisis

In response to the global economic crisis, VOA's East Asia and Pacific Division services have developed new programming, including an eight-part series of backgrounders by VOA Mandarin and VOA Indonesian's new twice-daily reports on U.S. government actions.

Briefs

Presidential Transition

The agency review team assigned to the BBG arrived on Dec. 5 and has been conducting meetings and visiting the broadcast entities since then. The team consists of USC Annenberg School for Communication Dean Ernest Wilson and VOA/USIA veteran Sherwood “Woody” Demitz.

New Broadcast Initiatives

- In Moldova, RFE/RL’s two Transnistrian affiliates agreed to broadcast the new weekly Romanian-language program “Dialogues,” which is produced specifically for Transnistrian audiences.
- Alhurra launched “Inside Tunisia,” a three-week series including interviews with Tunisian politicians, experts and social activists to discuss topics such as terrorism, the rights of women and the direction of Tunisian foreign affairs.
- VOA Turkish has expanded its programming on Turkey’s TGRT News TV—a 24-hour nationwide news network that claims a weekly audience share of more than 15 million regular viewers—by launching a third day of live broadcasts to air weekly on the network.
- VOA’s Albanian Service introduced a 3-5 minute weekly interactive program with News 24, a leading all-news TV station in Albania. The program focuses on the top news story in Washington.

RFA Reporting Helps Uyghur Woman Escape Forced Abortion

China granted reprieve to a Uyghur woman being forced to undergo a second term abortion after an [RFA report](#) on her plight brought the situation to wide attention. Two U.S. Members of Congress and the U.S. Ambassador called Chinese authorities to plead her case.

Optimize Broadcast Operations

VOA Debuts New Division to Improve Worldwide English Programming

Following months of planning and Congressional approval, VOA has established a new English Division, combining the staffs of English-language elements throughout VOA. It will offer regionalized programming for radio, TV and Internet, and will focus on developing VOA’s English portal site, [VOANews.com](#).

RFE/RL Tajik Positioned for Future Online Audience Growth

New research shows that RFE/RL’s Tajik Service’s website is one of the top websites in Tajikistan. Although Internet use is relatively low there, the research indicates that RFE/RL’s website will be favorably positioned as web access grows.

Broaden Cooperation Within U.S. Public Diplomacy

Deep Dive Provides New Insight Into Afghan Market

On Oct. 17 the BBG hosted the Afghanistan Deep Dive, a seminar that brought together the public and private sectors to share research on the Afghan media market. The unique forum provided insight into the growing use of cell phones by key Afghan demographics and their use by the Taliban as a propaganda tool, and will serve as a resource for attendees VOA and RFE/RL in designing new delivery strategies for Afghanistan.

Election Coverage Generates Worldwide Response

Broadcasters highlight opportunity inherent in democratic process

“I am the same age and color of Barack Obama. Yet look at how far he has risen, and I am here in Cuba unable to enjoy the opportunities of a free society.”

These words, said by Cuban independent journalist Jorge Olivera on Radio Martí, capture the worldwide reaction to the election of Barack Obama, which has been pouring in to BBG broadcasters in response to their extensive coverage of the election process.

Last month’s newsletter highlighted the creative ways in which VOA, RFA, RFE/RL, the Martí and MBN stretched their ability to highlight the American democratic process through collaboration with each other, affiliation with local broadcasters and use of new technologies.

This coverage has led to an unprecedented reaction to the election.

RFA’s Vietnamese Service drew record traffic with its *Road to the White House* reporter’s diary and VOA Mandarin’s posting of President-elect Obama’s victory speech, which accrued more than 100,000 reads in the first six hours.



Siamak Dehghanpour of VOA’s Persian News Network during election night coverage

Stories about how in American anyone can be elected president regardless of race or religion, as highlighted in Alhurra and Radio Sawa’s coverage, resonated with audiences. One e-mailer wrote to Alhurra, “We hear so much about Republicans and Democrats but I have not understood before how ordinary people got engaged in the democratic process.”

RFE/RL listeners in Kazakhstan called in to convey their excitement over the fact that an African-American had been elected and to

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Alhurra TV's Ahmed Sanad explains the election process to anchor Sayed Hussein and to Alhurra viewers.

express their admiration for (and envy of) the integrity of the American democratic process.

VOA was flooded with calls and e-mails from Africa congratulating President-elect Obama on his victory, and its Persian News Network received hundreds of messages after it invited audiences to write to the President-elect at a special [website](#).

One message read, "I wish there were at least one media outlet in Iran that could express the joy of Iranians for you. We love America and we respect this great democracy." ■

Broadcasts Threatened in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan

Two governments find excuses to pull VOA and RFE/RL programming

On October 31, the government of Azerbaijan announced that it planned to revoke the licenses of all foreign broadcasters, including RFE/RL and VOA, who currently hold a joint 24/7 Baku FM license.

"The matter is that no foreign television or radio channel can be transmitted in Azerbaijan. The law contains a special item that only Azerbaijani citizens can own television and radio channel," Chairman of the National Television and Radio Council Nushiramli Maharramli told the Azeri Press Agency.

In November of 2006, the government of Azerbaijan shut down BBG's affiliate station, ANS. As a compromise solution, RFE/RL and VOA received their current license in order to continue broadcasting.

The BBG is working to preserve its license,

and the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Anne Derse, voiced her support in a live interview from RFE/RL's Baku bureau. On December 3, a joint BBG and US embassy team met with Maharramli to discuss the future of RFE/RL and VOA broadcasting in Azerbaijan.

The decision to revoke foreign licenses was not discussed with the BBG in advance, but Maharramli told the opposition daily *Yeni Musavat* that the current licenses held by international broadcasters in Azerbaijan were explicitly temporary and part of a process to phase out international broadcasts. Russian, Turkish and French channels have already been shut down.

The National Television and Radio Council will make a final decision on foreign licenses at their December 25 meeting. The Council may choose to extend the term of transmission for foreign stations, which would defer the problem for a period of time. Maharramli has also indicated that the problem could be resolved with an inter-government agreement on the continuation of broadcasts

Azerbaijan is not the only place where the government has recently taken steps to limit access for BBG broadcasters. In Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz National Television and Radio Broadcasting Corporation took RFE/RL's Radio Azattyk Kyrgyz programming off its airwaves in October.

The original reason cited for the shutdown of RFE/RL was a payment dispute. That issue has been resolved. However, State Broadcasting Director Melis Eshimkanov now claims that even if the financial issues are settled, RFE/RL will have to clear all content with the government in advance or guarantee that it is "not offensive."

"Unless we can hear the programs in advance, we cannot have them on the air." - Melis Eshimkanov, Kyrgyz State Broadcasting Director

The suspension of RFE/RL programming coincided with local elections on October 5 that exposed political turmoil in the country and galvanized public criticism against President Kurmanbek Bakiyev for concentrating power. When RFE/RL was pulled from the air, it was advertising a special program on the election results.

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Briefs

Transmission Updates

- IBB signed an agreement permitting VOA Korean programming to be broadcast 90 minutes daily to North Korea from a medium wave transmitter at Incheon, a first in South Korea. The new transmissions will replace less effective transmissions currently broadcast from leased facilities in Mongolia.
- VOA's Hindi-Language television service began producing programming for Zee News, one of India's top-rated news channels. The Hindi Service launched its *America Live* program for the network, and produces other TV reports for inclusion into the network's programming.
- In October, VOA began streaming on [Kompas.com](#), the largest news website in Indonesia. Indonesians can view VOA programs live on the site as they are fed from AsiaSat3 and can comment via a live chat box.
- VOA Tibetan television programming is now available to watch and discuss on Facebook. Nearly 300 Tibetans, including some from inside Tibet, signed up within the first week of the launch.

Threats to Journalists

On November 26, RFE/RL Radio Free Afghanistan correspondent Dawa Khan Menapal was kidnapped by local Taliban members while driving on the main Kandahar-Kabul highway. Thanks to efforts by many parties, he was released safely and without condition after three days.

Briefs

Press Clips

- “To those who tune in, that disembodied voice from afar can be a literal lifeline -- or a path to justice,” according to a Nov. 21 Kathleen Parker column profiling RFE/RL, which ran in the [Washington Post](#) and other newspapers. Parker added that RFE/RL gets “significant bang for the buck.”
- Radio Farda Chief Editor Golnaz Esfandiari is a “pint-sized workaholic” and an “Iranian autocrat’s nightmare” according to a Dec. 5 profile by the [Prague Wanderer](#).
- [Broadcasting and Cable](#) wrote up VOA’s Dec. 3 event, “Covering the Congo,” focusing on the challenges of reporting from the Congo and the dearth of international attention on the conflict.
- “The Power Vertical,” a Russia-focused blog by RFE/RL’s Brian Whitmore and Robert Coalson, was cited by [Foreign Policy](#) magazine’s “Passport” blog as a source for “exhaustive analysis of Russian politics.”
- In an interview with [World Politics Review](#) published Dec. 12, RFE/RL President Jeff Gedmin discussed the continuing importance of RFE/RL to its audiences and the premium he places on credibility.

BBC programs were also dropped from the state-run frequencies in December, supposedly because the broadcaster failed to install required radio equipment. They were restored two weeks later.

RFE/RL programming is still available on several small FM stations, although these signals are occasionally unavailable or weak due to what one affiliate has termed technical difficulties. Shortwave broadcasts have also resumed through IBB Engineering.

IBB and RFE/RL staff are meeting with authorities in an attempt to resolve the situation. ■

Citizen Reporting Vital to Future of International News, Says Panel

BBG panel discussion commemorates Human Rights Day



(l to r) Panelists D. Jeffrey Hirschberg, Loren Jenkins, Sherry Ricchiardi, Patrick Meier, Bob Dietz and moderator Steve Roberts at the BBG Human Rights Day panel discussion.

Reporters can use citizen journalism such as blogs to enhance their own coverage, according to panelists at a discussion commemorating Human Rights Day.

The panel discussion, co-hosted by the BBG and George Washington University’s Institute for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications, focused on how freedom of information, guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, can be protected as traditional media reduce foreign reporting to cut costs.

“Media coverage can sound the alarm on human rights violations and make them hard to ignore” said BBG Governor D. Jeffrey Hirschberg, underlining the global need for free, accurate and reliable information.

According to Patrick Meier of the Harvard

Humanitarian Initiative, citizen journalism can fill some of the gaps in international coverage. Meier described a project in which he tracked coverage of Kenya’s post-election violence by citizen journalists and mainstream media, and found they did not overlap.

“The citizen journalists were covering increasing tensions before the mainstream media was covering anything,” said Meier. “The mainstream media needs body counts.”

Loren Jenkins, foreign editor of National Public Radio, noted that bloggers can also be a useful resource in places that are too dangerous for reporters to travel.

“Some of the best reporting that came out of Iraq at one time,” Jenkins said, was from “Iraqi bloggers in neighborhoods we couldn’t get to.”

The difficulty of using citizen journalism to supplement traditional reporting, according to Bob Dietz of the Committee to Protect

Journalists, is that there is so much information available in the blogosphere it becomes difficult to harvest.

Dietz also noted that online journalists tend to “straddle a line of activism,” whereas traditional journalists pursue objectivity.

According to Jenkins, the job of the journalist will be to sift through all the information available online to find the truthful, reliable sources.

Sherry Ricchiardi of the American Journalism Review agreed that traditional journalists will have to learn to use the new masses of information to enhance their coverage.

“It’s going to be our job to create those new networks of sources that some of us are just beginning to think about,” said Ricchiardi. ■