



Broadcasting  
Board of  
Governors

# Impact through Innovation and Integration

BBG Strategic Plan 2012-2016

*Narrative*



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### Our Impact in the World

At the historic junction of global political and economic upheaval and a sweeping revolution in communications, U.S. international broadcasting faces exciting opportunities and critical challenges in its core mission to promote freedom and democracy. The global need for objective news, analysis and free debate has never been more timely or relevant:

- In the Middle East and North Africa, vibrant but uneven democratic transformation is being fueled by vital, instant news and information.
- Extremist propaganda – within or from Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, and elsewhere – stokes threats to U.S. national security by inciting violence against America and its allies.
- Country after country, from Belarus to Burma to Russia, represses human rights and restricts free flows of information.
- Governments that censor the news and seek to control the media act with increasing impunity. From China to Cuba, countries have declared war against the Internet and traditional media, including increased jamming of radio and satellite broadcasts.
- Millions in Africa, Haiti, and elsewhere who suffer the ravages of famine, natural disasters and disease desperately need humanitarian information lifelines.

Our nation's overseas media outlets – Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, Radio Free Asia, and Radio and TV Marti – are vital, cost-effective national security assets whose impact is felt by some 165 million people weekly everywhere on the globe where critical U.S. interests are at stake. U.S. international broadcasting has evolved over six decades as broadcasting initiatives were created to meet national security challenges. To provide resources to increase our impact and meet future challenges, consolidation and rationalization are necessary.

U.S. international broadcasting supports societies in transition and in crisis. It provides an antidote to censored news; technologies to break through government information firewalls; and timely, life-saving information critical during humanitarian emergencies.

With global press freedom at a two-decade low, our value-added is to support freedom of press and expression, essential to fostering and sustaining free societies. Promoting the development of healthy, stable, democratic societies through credible, accurate journalism supports U.S. national interests.

Unconstrained by the demands of a commercial model – but fully independent editorially – BBG is responsive to U.S. foreign policy priorities. We reach people in their languages of choice; in countries where advertising revenue to support independent journalism is limited or not available; where there are severe obstacles to developing relevant programming and hiring and training journalists; and where governments jam broadcasts and censor the Internet. In short, we go where other media outlets are reluctant to go, and we leave when the media environment provides the population what they need.

## **The New Global Information Environment**

As vital as our mission is, retaining and increasing our audiences and our impact will not be easy in the face of intense competition from traditional media outlets and expanding digital and social media alternatives.

Across the world, commercial, cable and satellite TV and FM radio stations continue to proliferate. TV remains the world's dominant medium for news and entertainment. Use of shortwave and AM radio continues to decline worldwide (although shortwave remains important to the BBG to reach critical audiences in a number of priority countries). The Internet continues to grow. Social media usage is increasing exponentially. Ownership of mobile phones has reached near saturation levels in even the poorest countries.

It is crucially important that we reach audiences on their preferred media platforms. Almost always, this means using multiple platforms simultaneously. Yet we do not have unfettered access to these platforms or unlimited resources. Governments routinely deny access to local TV and radio broadcasting, or local media laws restrict the type of content foreign sources can distribute. Some countries – including Iran, China, North Korea, Cuba and Ethiopia – jam our broadcasts and block our Internet sites.

Information technology and access has empowered citizens to develop their own news and stories independently of traditional channels. Information and ideas now flow largely through networks, not hierarchies. Online communities and conversations abound amid growing information chaos and clutter. Going forward, it will be increasingly difficult for any one organization to drive the news or discussion agenda. Just getting heard will be hard.

Yet while the world is awash in media, press freedom stands at a two-decade low, according to Freedom House. More media does not necessarily mean better journalism. In many countries, the Internet is under wholesale assault. Reporters Without Borders cites China, Cuba, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkmenistan, and another half-dozen countries as “enemies of the Internet.” The absence of free flows of credible information in many of our markets, despite the proliferation of media, further points up our relevance and opportunity.

Against this backdrop are the activities of other government-sponsored international media. Western government-supported media are experiencing severe budgetary pressures leading them to eliminate language services, terminate distribution networks, and lay off journalists. At the same time, China, Russia, Iran, Qatar, and other countries are well-financed and expanding their international media efforts. China has a multi-billion dollar global information campaign underway, strengthening the Xinhua News Agency as well as China Radio International and CCTV. Qatar, building on the Al Jazeera brand in Arabic and English, is soon to launch services in Serbo-Croatian, Swahili, and Turkish.

Non-state actors, most notably those who support violent extremism, are also active in global media. Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their affiliates carry out aggressive campaigns of disinformation and propaganda, not only in the Middle East and South Asia but in East and West Africa and around the world via the Internet.

Compounding the challenge is the burgeoning global youth population. In nearly every one of our markets, the median age of the population is between 18 and 30. New audiences have to come from among the hundreds of millions in this cohort. For the most part these people have never heard of our traditional radio and TV stations, or our Web sites. Their media use strongly favors digital platforms. Their interest in news, our traditional strength, is very limited.

### **The Urgency of Innovation**

We have to innovate as never before to remain strategically relevant in the current geopolitical context and to compete effectively in the new global information space. The innovation we need is not just about new content or products; it's about creating altogether new ways of doing business to accomplish the agency's mission.

Innovation means, for example, harnessing our original reporting now spread across 59 different language services to power an unprecedented Web-based global news network. It means developing automated translation that will allow users anywhere in the world to tap into this new network and consume our products in their native language. It means exploiting delivery technologies newly prominent in key markets, such as satellite-delivered video for China, Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

It means launching a prototype TV channel in Latin America that features crowd-sourced content targeted to youth. It means working with other elements of the U.S. Government, such as placing FM antennas at U.S. embassies in Africa as a low-cost, high-impact solution for badly needed additional distribution. And it means partnering with other Western international broadcasters in global research efforts to share research techniques and costs in ways that will expand our audience and market knowledge base to inform strategies.

### **A Leader in Internet Censorship Circumvention and Anti-Jamming**

For over 60 years U.S. international broadcasting has fought censorship in all its forms. Today, a key strategic priority for the BBG is to assist the world's citizens to gain access to information on all platforms, and in every place where governments routinely censor information for political purposes. BBG's efforts to counter Internet censorship have grown exponentially in the past few years, with significant results for the millions of users who now have unfettered access to the Internet. BBG also seeks to raise a strong voice on the international stage in order to expose the issues of satellite jamming, censorship and Internet blocking. BBG's efforts are complemented through close coordination with the State Department.

## The Need for Integration

Today's economic realities argue for correcting our organizational inefficiencies. The agency must be restructured and repositioned to provide a leaner, more streamlined and efficient entity to meet today's challenges and those that lie ahead.

The BBG is a complex amalgam of broadcast entities created by Congress at different points in time over the last 70 years in response to specific foreign policy challenges. It encompasses multiple media properties, some Federal and some non-Federal, with different legal and administrative frameworks; 59 languages but 83 language services with 40 percent overlap; nearly 4,000 employees; 50+ overseas bureaus; and 1,500 stringer reporters – all in organizational silos with little cross-cutting coordination.

The current structure complicates managing resources for highest impact as well as the integration and projection of core talents and capabilities. It obstructs efforts to transform the agency's assets into an integrated network that can take advantage of the wide-ranging, highly professional newsgathering activities done by each BBG entity. It also restricts our ability to merge our high-quality journalism with user engagement and peer-to-peer information sharing.

Integration must therefore accompany innovation as an operational imperative. We must break down a stove-piped bureaucracy of separate, semi-autonomous entities, and shape a robust, integrated, international media network with multiple brands targeted to markets where they still strongly resonate.

The BBG's year-long strategic review identifies a new organization through which a more effective broadcast organization can be built:

- The agency's part-time board of directors will attend to broad strategic issues, maintenance of the firewall to protect the independence and integrity of the agency's journalism, as well as oversight of the BBG mission; a CEO selected by the Board and subject to the Board's supervision will manage the agency's day-to-day affairs.
- All senior administrative and management functions including strategy, development, distribution, marketing, legal, communications, social media innovation, research and evaluation, will consolidate into one, integrated network management operation.
- The Agency has begun a study to explore the feasibility of consolidating the three grantee organizations (RFE/RL, RFA, and MBN), pending due diligence, into a single corporate structure sharing a unified administrative and legal framework, while retaining their journalistic missions. The due diligence will include a preliminary look at the short- and long-term financial ramifications and the other benefits and costs of consolidation.
- We will explore de-federalization of the federal agency components, beginning with a feasibility study to assess key legal and administrative issues. Optimally, all BBG components will share the same legal and administrative framework to maximize operational flexibility and integration.

- We will end language services in countries with more developed, independent media, and that are no longer strategic priorities. Where we have two U.S.-funded media properties operating in a given country, now largely working in isolation of one another, they will cooperate, with shared bureaus, stringers, and distribution networks where feasible. Each will provide complementary, not duplicative, content.
- We will make wholesale changes to the way we distribute our content. We are currently configured largely as we were in the 1980s, with substantial resources devoted to shortwave broadcasting. Global media use now strongly favors TV, the Internet, and FM radio as well as social media. Shortwave is vital in a half-dozen countries. But elsewhere we will sharply draw down our shortwave capacity to reallocate the resources to the new platforms our audiences are using.
- We will forward deploy substantial news-gathering and reporting as well as program production assets away from Washington and towards the target markets, establishing strategic, efficient regional hubs and expanding overseas bureaus. This will enable more comprehensive and timely coverage of local issues and events which matter most to our audiences and will drive the planned global news network.
- We will seek the repeal of a decades-long ban on domestic dissemination contained in the 1948 U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (“Smith-Mundt” Act). Adopted in the age of cross-border communication via radio, this Act did not envision either the Internet or satellite broadcasting, which do not honor national boundaries. With all of the BBG’s 59 languages available via the web, the agency cannot comply with this outdated statute. In addition, to the extent that BBG-sponsored programming should be available to significant expatriate communities in the United States, we are unable to do so without acting counter to the limitation. To remedy this disconnect, the BBG has proposed, and the Administration approved, draft legislation to repeal the Smith-Mundt domestic dissemination ban as it applies to the BBG.

## **Our New Identity, Mission Statement, and Principal Goals**

By fundamentally restructuring and repositioning the agency we will create a new organizational identity with a new name - “Broadcasting Board of Governors” dates to our establishment as part of the now-defunct U.S. Information Agency in the mid-1990s. It is confusing, and fails to convey the diverse media operation we represent. The new identity will be corporate in nature. Our current brands will remain the public faces for our audiences, who have come to know and trust them.

None of the proposed restructuring and new identity changes our mission. It remains solidly to support freedom of press and freedom of expression. Yet, as our new direction makes clear, in today’s global information environment we can’t simply focus on generating great content, as important as it is. We must also embrace our audiences’ content and the conversations they want to have.

We capture this in the following revised mission statement:

*To inform, engage and connect people around the world  
in support of freedom and democracy.*

We will aggressively pursue this mission across the Middle East and North Africa and elsewhere as democracy movements evolve and emerge; in China, Iran, North Korea and Cuba and all the places that deny their citizens access to independent news and information; in Africa and elsewhere not only to provide humanitarian relief but also to aid democracy formation and development; and in the face of extremist propaganda and hate speech from wherever they emanate.

Despite budgetary pressures, we will not accept that our audiences and our impact will shrink. Through the steps outlined here we intend to prepare and position the new agency for smart growth. Our strategic review of all agency broadcast operations over the last year has identified more than a dozen new media initiatives that will enable us to substantially expand global audience reach and impact at current resource levels.

Consistent with our review and future direction, we have set the following as our over-arching strategic objective:

*To become the world's leading international news agency by 2016,  
focused on the agency's mission and impact.*

In support of this objective, and as a principal measure of its accomplishment, we have also set the following performance goal:

*To reach 216 million in global weekly audience by 2016.*

## **Implementation Challenges**

The goals we have set are ambitious given the intensely competitive global information environment, real-world limitations on our ability to report and disseminate the news from countries that deny our journalists visas and jam our broadcasts, and the difficult federal government budget environment.

While much of the world's media is not free, its sheer abundance clutters the marketplace and makes breaking through to new audiences difficult. And other media organizations, public and private, are just as determined as we are to succeed. Many of them enjoy competitive advantages due to funding, ideological and cultural affinities with target audiences, and other factors.

Change on the order we propose is inherently unsettling. There will be resistance within and outside the organization. Employees will naturally worry about their jobs; stakeholders will want to know about possible loss or diminution of service for specific countries. There will also be legitimate differences over strategies and tactics.

What would most keep us from achieving our goals, however, would be to perpetuate a system that traps resources in inefficiency and duplication, keeps people and programs stove-piped, and fails to leverage our collective strengths.

## **Gauging Success**

We will measure success in new as well as traditional ways. Audience reach, reflected in the 216 million goal, will remain a key success measure, as will audience perceptions of the reliability of our news and the degree to which we enhance our audiences' understanding of current events. However, impact can seldom be reduced to a single quantitative factor. Impact is ultimately about whether we make a difference in the lives of our audiences in ways that correspond to the larger aims of our efforts. With a new global research program to be in place in FY 2012, we will begin an assertive effort to measure performance using a robust set of new performance indicators, including whether we are driving news and discussion agendas in key markets.

## **Call to Action**

The Board, in setting forth the above actions and goals, is expressing its fundamental belief that the agency is up to the challenges. We believe we have the people and creativity and, if we restructure and reallocate resources strategically, the material resources to be what we aim to be: the world's leading international news agency by 2016 with 216 million global audience, focused on the agency's mission and impact.

The BBG, in the size and scope of our news-gathering and reporting, the daily broadcast hours, the number of language services, and many other criteria, is already a leading international news agency. Yet, due to inefficiency, redundancy, and lack of coordination, we have not lived up to our potential. It is time to do so.





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