



## RESOLUTION

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### **RESOLUTION ON U.S. INTERNATIONAL MEDIA STRATEGY IN IRAN April 11, 2014**

WHEREAS, broadcasting to Iran is a strategic priority of the United States and of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG);

WHEREAS, the BBG currently broadcasts to Iran Persian-language news and information programming through the Voice of America's (VOA) Persian Service and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Radio Farda;

WHEREAS, the Board finds that current internal challenges necessitate that the BBG develop a more nimble and streamlined organization for Persian-language broadcasting, continue to reduce unnecessary language service overlap, optimize information technology and program delivery, and seek every avenue to enhance operational efficiencies in creating, producing and distributing BBG-funded programming to Iran; and

WHEREAS, the allocation of funds among the federal and non-federal entities of United States international media (USIM) is a non-delegable authority of the Board under the International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (as amended).

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board decides as follows:

1. Harmonizing the Persian-language news and information programming of VOA and RFE/RL in accordance with the guidelines presented in the Final USIM Iran Strategy Report described in Attachment 1 (the "Iran Strategy Report") will contribute significantly to the achievement of the Board's strategic objectives for broadcasting to Iran. Such harmonization should include developing a clear, collaborative operational strategy for producing and distributing news and information for Iran that identifies new efficiencies in collaborative plans, and new opportunities to refocus scarce resources to higher impact activities and channels.
2. The Director of Global Strategy is directed to work in close cooperation with VOA and RFE/RL senior management in order to prepare a detailed written implementation plan to give effect to the objectives outlined in the Iran Strategy Report. The implementation plan should include recommendations on (i) reprogramming operational line item budgets and grant amendments, as necessary; (ii) a management structure to oversee programming activities and an operational management plan; (iii) a distribution plan and distribution channel programming plan; (iv) an implementation timeline; (v) a description of the country-level goals and performance indicators for Persian-language broadcasting by VOA and RFE/RL; and (vi) a communication plan directed at both internal and external stakeholders. The implementation plan should be presented to the Advisory Committee at its next meeting in May 2014.
3. The Director of Global Strategy is further directed to modify the implementation plan based on the results of the Advisory Committee's deliberations and to present recommendations to the Board on implementation at the next meeting of the plenary Board.



To: Board of Governors  
From: Jeff Trimble  
Robert Bole  
Date: April 2, 2014  
Subject: **Final USIM Iran Strategy Report**

In January, the Board authorized a comprehensive review of USIM broadcasting to Iran to produce recommendations about a new strategy, including content and delivery tactics and organizational structure, to reach audiences in Iran.

We have gathered and evaluated a wide variety of input and perspectives on USIM programming to Iran. We recommend Board consideration of the following charter:

***U.S. International Media will make a powerful contribution to Iran's intellectual struggle for modernity and openness by informing, engaging and connecting Iranian audiences in support of a free, open, democratic society that is based on rule of law and fully integrated into the global community.***

USIM will leverage the assets of VOA, RFE/RL, and IBB to create and sustain an innovative, agile, fully modern media enterprise, dedicated to reaching the rising generation and news-seekers of all ages in Iran in support of freedom, democracy and civil society.

This strategy will entail:

- A single vision and unified set of strategic country-level goals, adopted by the Board, for VOA Persian and Radio Farda that also guide TSI and IBB activities;
- A new management structure that clearly differentiates functions and roles; lead executive managers with individual responsibility for fulfilling the Congressionally-mandated content requirements of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act: high-quality news; representing America in all its diversity; and presenting and discussing U.S. policy.<sup>1</sup> These executive managers will have the authority to oversee strategy, resource allocations, major management decisions, and will be responsible for outcomes in their respected area;
- Fully coordinated editorial strategies and programmatic activities; and
- Clearly identified target audiences and measurable performance indicators to help gauge success.

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<sup>1</sup> From Section 303(b) of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act :

(b) BROADCASTING PRINCIPLES.-United States international broadcasting shall include

(1) news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate; objective, and comprehensive;

(2) a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of United States culture and society;

(3) clear and effective presentation of the policies, including editorials, broadcast by the Voice of America, which present the views of the United States Government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies;"

Under the management structure:

- 1) RFE/RL will direct news-related programming on all platforms. This includes news about Iranian domestic issues (consistent with RFE/RL's historic "surrogate" role) and regional and international news.
- 2) VOA will direct programming on all platforms that "tells America's story," providing a balanced and comprehensive projection of U.S. thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of American culture and society.
- 3) VOA will direct programming on all platforms that clearly and effectively presents the policies of the U.S. Government and responsible discussion and opinion on these policies. This will include editorials that are produced by the IBB.

This structure will require close working relationships and collaboration among the executive managers, one from RFE/RL (for news) and one from VOA (for representing American thought and institutions, and presenting and discussing U.S. policy).

The new Persian-language multi-platform network will offer:

**Single Television & Radio Streams:** A single satellite television stream featuring a mix of VOA and RFE/RL content, and acquired video content; a single radio and audio stream featuring a mix of RFE/RL and VOA content.

**Single Digital Strategy:** A single digital strategy on the web, mobile and social platforms, managed by RFE/RL and staffed by VOA and RFE/RL digital producers featuring branded VOA and RFE/RL content.

**Reduced Radio Distribution:** RFE/RL will reassess resource allocation among its products to emphasize video and digital, and reduce radio to address shifting audience platform priorities. This will require upgraded television production facilities in Prague to produce original video content.

**Improved Breaking News Capabilities:** USIM television to Iran will expand capabilities to go live 24/7 as dictated by breaking news and other events, with production responsibilities shared between VOA in Washington and RFE/RL in Prague.

**Editorial Coordination & Content Sharing:** RFE/RL and VOA will establish technical and organizational mechanisms to seamlessly share Persian-language news and features; pending assignments (for coordination); and other programming activities and planning functions.

**Opportunity for New Brands:** While retaining existing VOA and RFE/RL brands – each of which has strong equities in Iran and among stakeholders – the new structure will include flexibility to launch additional brands and content targeted at niche audiences, particularly youth audiences, with special emphasis on engagement.

**Expanded Regional Reporting:** VOA and RFE/RL will work together to expand reporting and program production from the region, and to the extent possible, within Iran. They will expand collaboration with MBN to cover MENA.

**Improved U.S. Policy Presentation:** While strictly respecting the journalistic firewall, USIM will communicate more effectively with U.S. policymakers, Congress and other stakeholders to ensure appropriate cooperation in support of broad U.S. foreign policy interests – and thereby build greater credibility and support for USIM programming to Iran.

**Expanded Anti-Censorship Support:** USIM will continue to work to defeat Iranian government censorship, including satellite and radio jamming and blocking of online content.

As a result, USIM will:

- 1) Retain and improve high-quality reporting and analysis – the key to credibility and mission success among influential change agents across Iranian society.
- 2) Instill greater agility and creative energy into the journalism, programming, production and delivery of content.
- 3) Leverage assets much more effectively in an environment of shrinking budgets and increasing competition.
- 4) Decisively rectify long-standing management and operational issues at VOA that have contributed to strongly held perceptions among outside stakeholders that USIM programming to Iran is a failure.

An accompanying strategy map (see Appendix 4) to this memo supports this strategy with initial implementation tactics, as well as contextual information about the Iranian political and media environment, U.S. foreign policy goals, and the respective roles of RFE/RL's Radio Farda and VOA's Persian Service.

**We do not recommend shifting the assets and overall responsibility for Iran programming to a single USIM network at this time.** Among reasons for this:

VOA, under new leadership, has begun to put in place reforms and programming and production improvements. The Service has been restructured and now includes dedicated news and planning and research units. Staff training has been enhanced; some moderators and other staff members have been reassigned; programs are monitored daily for quality and other factors; and production values and graphics have been improved. The Service’s webpage has been redesigned and now is staffed 24/7. A variety of new programs is planned for introduction in coming months.

The Service recently was given the first opportunity to interview Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman at a crucial moment in ongoing nuclear talks with Iran; and was granted an exclusive interview with Secretary of State John Kerry for the Persian Nowruz holiday – possible indications that the State Department is taking a more positive view of VOA. Much more work needs to be done – and VOA acknowledges this – but these improvements are significant.



Old VOA Persian Studio Set



New VOA Persian Studio Set

New research shows that VOA is in a statistical tie with BBC as the leading international broadcaster in Iran. VOA’s weekly audience on television is 24 percent, up from 21 percent in 2012. BBC weekly viewership is 21.4 percent, slightly down since 2012. While there are causes for concern that require further consideration (please see Appendix 2 for more about latest research), these audiences are among the largest for USIM anywhere in the world.

VOA has made progress toward reducing employees and contractors. Full-time staff is down to 71 at the end of 2013, from 85 in 2010. The enactment of the FY 2014 budget and recent buyouts will further reduce full-time staff to around 65. The number of contractors is down from 124 in 2011 to 107, and also set to go lower by the end of the fiscal year.

Content analysis of translated programming shows overall good to high quality of VOA programming, with content and presentation for the most part on par with the BBC’s Persian Service (please see Appendix 3).

Removing Persian broadcasting from VOA would be expensive and take well over a year to achieve. It would require approval from the Administration and Congress. The costs of eliminating VOA's Persian Service likely would be between \$3 and \$7.5 million in personnel and other expenses. This figure does not include – if the center of gravity of the service was moved to RFE/RL in Prague – the costs of relocation and other support for any current VOA employees who could be hired by RFE/RL and would move to the Czech Republic.

This process also would disrupt Iranian programming at a complex and unpredictable stage of U.S.-Iranian relations, including the fate of Iran's nuclear program. This study did not systematically consider the consequences of such a move on VOA employee morale, or its effect on perceptions of outside stakeholders. There likely would be implications in both areas.

There is considerable support from outside stakeholders, including State Department officials and Iran experts, to retain a distinct brand – VOA or something else – that is clearly understood by audiences to be associated with the United States, as well as for a strong surrogate brand.

Our observations revealed that VOA relies heavily on the resources of the Persian Service to provide coverage for all VOA language services. Removing these assets from VOA would therefore have wider consequences for content creation throughout VOA.

**However, there still remains important work to be done to ensure that VOA meets its full potential as a high-quality, television and digital news service for Iran.**

There remains much work to be done to bring VOA's Persian Service to the level of professionalism, agility and creativity that is needed to fully succeed in the increasingly competitive Iranian media market. We believe that the proposed harmonization plan under a clearly defined executive management structure and backed by strong and continued commitment from VOA management and IBB support offices offers the best opportunity to strengthen VOA's contribution to USIM broadcasting to Iran.

RFE/RL's Radio Farda generally draws praise from experts and outside stakeholders. While its audiences are much smaller than VOA's – in part at least because its main delivery platform is radio, which is much less popular than satellite television or the Internet as a source for news – Radio Farda clearly has established itself as an authoritative, trustworthy source of news and information in Iran. In the latest BBG-commissioned research, 89 percent of Radio Farda's audience rated programming as “very” or “somewhat” trustworthy.

There is room for improvement at RFE/RL as well. Research clearly indicates that RFE/RL must build on the success of its lone television program by adding more original television content for inclusion in the VOA shared stream and/or other streams. This will require upgraded and new television production facilities in Prague. RFE/RL must therefore reassess resource allocation among its radio, web and television products to address shifting audience platform priorities. The optimal structure at RFE/RL – and VOA – should be a more integrated news operation producing content for all platforms.



**RFE/RL's Radio Farda "Breakfast With News" program**

Finally, content analysis of VOA and RFE/RL programming revealed that, while their roles are distinct and each network emphasizes different stories, there is overlap in news coverage and other content – which presents potential for efficiencies in content creation and production that could produce savings (please see detailed analysis in Appendix 3).

We are confident that the strength and success of a restructured, better coordinated USIM effort for Iran, operating against a unified strategy, will be greater than the sum of its current parts.

## Proposed BBG Country-Level Goals & Performance Indicators

**Strategic Goal #1** – USIM will play a key role in expanding the freedom of speech and press in Iran using our broadcast and digital platforms that enable Iranians to receive and discuss censored local, regional and international news within the country. (U.S. State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor, Human Rights Practices for 2013, Iran, Section 2, Respect for Civil Liberties.) We will engage young people (ages 15-24) and young professionals (ages 25-34) in accessing our content via traditional broadcast, digital and Internet anti-censorship platforms and enabling them to comment, discuss and contribute news and information

**Performance Indicator(s)** – Relevant and engaging streams of original and user-generated content provided on multiple platforms, including video, audio, mobile and social media, will attract young audiences. Performance targets will be set for weekly audiences of young people (ages 15-24) and young professionals (ages 25-34). Our content will engage the target audiences by encouraging them to share, comment and contribute content on digital, as well as in offline conversations. Performance targets will be set for social engagement scores, sharing of news on the part of the USIM audience, and percentage of the weekly target audiences that rank USIM content entities as one of their three most important sources for news and information.

**Strategic Goal #2** – USIM will utilize its content to help support the understanding of civil society and human rights. (U.S. State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor, Human Rights Practices for 2013, Iran, Section 1, Respect for the Integrity of the Person.) We will produce content that attracts and engages Iranians towards an increased understanding of American society, U.S. foreign policies and of democracy. We will engage the range of Iranian citizenry to support their ability to discuss and express their views on these issues.

**Performance Indicator(s)** – A performance target will be set for the percentage of the weekly audience that reports that USIM content increased their understanding of current events. The performance of USIM content will also be ascertained through collected credible impact stories. A performance target will also be set for the percentage of the weekly audience who “agree strongly” or “agree slightly” that public officials in Iran seem to pay attention to the broadcaster. Anecdotal evidence will also be collected showing that USIM content has an influence on media operators and government officials through their reactions.

**Strategic Goal #3** – USIM will provide the exceptional quality news and information in the Iranian media environment as compared to other domestic and international media entities.

**Performance Indicator(s)** – Performance targets will be set for the percentage of weekly audience that reports USIM presents news and information that they can’t get from other sources; percentage of the weekly audience that reports they trust USIM’s content “a great deal” or “somewhat;” and percentage of weekly audience that finds news and information provided by USIM to be “very” or “somewhat” interesting. Program quality will also be tracked and reported by the Office of Performance Review.

## **Appendix 1: Brief History of U.S. International Broadcasting to Iran**

VOA's radio broadcasts to Iran began in 1942 and were discontinued in 1960. VOA resumed Persian-language radio broadcasts in 1979 after the Iranian Revolution. In 1996, VOA launched "Roundtable With You," a weekly radio/satellite television simulcast call-in program. In 2002, VOA began dedicated satellite TV programming.

RFE/RL's Persian Service (radio and Internet streaming) went on the air in October 1998, following a mandate from Congress.

At the direction of the Board, RFE/RL and VOA created Radio Farda in 2002. The new service featured a youth-oriented mix of news, information and entertainment programming. Radio Farda subsumed RFE/RL's Persian Service, and utilized VOA personnel to staff one of three daily news shifts.

In July 2008, Radio Farda moved to RFE/RL exclusively. At that time, VOA was focused on expanding its television content, and RFE/RL management persuaded the Board that Radio Farda would be more successful if it was under RFE/RL's direction, which was focused solely on Radio Farda programming. Radio Farda broadcasts 24 hours a day to Iran from by AM, shortwave, digital audio satellite, and by Internet. In 2013, Radio Farda launched a one-hour daily television program that is carried on the VOA Persian satellite stream as well as on the Radio Farda satellite stream, and on the Internet.

BBG Persian programming expanded rapidly from FY 2006-2008 after Congress appropriated \$36.1 million to BBG in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery in 2006. Most of this funding went to VOA to greatly increase the amount of satellite television programming to Iran. In 2008, the number of VOA Persian staff jumped from about 30 full-time employees in 2007 to 83 full-time employees, plus over 120 contractors. Television programming was increased from one hour daily to six original hours daily, plus an hour daily of translated acquired programming. Programming was repeated to create a 24/7 channel. The expanded VOA operation was renamed Persian News Network (PNN), to acknowledge the breadth of the operation.

In 2009, Congress authorized RFE/RL to broadcast Azerbaijani-language programming to Iran, but due to resource constraints, these broadcasts never were realized.

A March 2009 Office of the Inspector General inspection (OIG Report No. ISP-IB-09-27) of VOA Persian broadcasting found that "PNN's extraordinary and unusually rapid growth represented a huge challenge to management. The FTE staff was greatly increased, and a large number of POVs were also brought on board; at present, there are more POVs working in PNN than FTEs. While VOA is to be commended for successfully meeting the expansion challenge, the scale and rapidity of growth have been accompanied by a number of problems inside PNN." These "problems," according to the OIG, included an "atmosphere of discontent... perceptions of unfairness, charges of political bias, the operation of cliques, and the hiring and rewarding of unqualified people. Some more experienced staff members associated with the service's

declining radio operations are critical of newer staff members hired for the expanding television programming. The issue of Persian-language competency is also a point of contention, as well as the issue of cultural norms and expectations. Some Persian-speaking and Iranian-born employees find American management insensitive to Iranian ways; conversely, some American managers believe that Iranian and Iranian-American employees have not adapted to the expectations and atmosphere of an American workplace.”

Since 2009, VOA management has changed PNN management a number of times and taken other steps to try to address these problems. A new team, headed by 20-year service veteran Setareh Derakhshesh, was put in place earlier this year. VOA has dropped the name Persian News Network and again refers to the service as the VOA Persian Service.

## Appendix 2: Recent BBG Research in Iran

### Background:

Several audience research projects have recently been carried out on behalf of BBG's Persian language services. These were:

- 1) A national telephone survey of 2000 Iranian adults conducted from December 2013 through January 2014, using an Istanbul-based contractor that specializes in such work and has conducted a number of similar projects for us in the past.
- 2) Qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews with Iranian travelers visiting Istanbul over the same time period. Two qualitative projects were conducted for VOA:
  - (a) a study of overall media consumption patterns, the role of satellite TV, attitudes towards international TV stations in general, and reactions to specific VOA TV products;
  - (b) an explicit comparative study of VOA and BBC TV services.
- 3) A qualitative study on behalf of Radio Farda, again using in-depth interviews with Iranian travelers, carried out by the same firm as the other projects in November, 2013.

### Main findings:

The survey indicates that VOA's weekly audience has at least been steady and possibly increased since the last research in 2012. The past week audience for PNN (VOA's Persian television programs) stands at 24 percent, vs. 21.4 percent in 2012.<sup>2</sup> Virtually all of VOA's audience is attributable to television; its "all-platform" audience is 24.2 percent.

Radio Farda's Persian language weekly audience on radio is 4.7 percent, almost identical to their 2012 figure of 4.5 percent. However, some additional audience to RFE/RL Azerbaijani, plus – more important – Radio Farda's new "Breakfast with News" TV program on the BBG satellite channel, has boosted their weekly audience to 9 percent.

BBC's Persian audience (all-platform) is 21.4 percent weekly, close to the 23 percent found in 2012.

Weekly audiences for each service expressed a significant degree of confidence in the broadcasts: 71 percent of VOA's weekly viewers considered the news to be "very" or "somewhat" trustworthy, while comparable figures for Radio Farda and BBC were 89 percent and 73 percent, respectively.

These large audiences for international broadcasting are occurring in spite of what appears to be the ongoing jamming by the Iranian government. Despite reports from some quarters that jamming has ceased or diminished, almost all of the interviewees in the qualitative research reported at least occasional "noise" problems while trying to watch both VOA and BBC.

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<sup>2</sup> The margin of error around these estimates is just under +/- 2%, so a difference of less than 4 percentage points is not statistically significant.

### **Some cautionary notes:**

While all the findings to date suggest that VOA has a large and loyal audience in Iran, there are indications of potential problems that may affect VOA's position in the future if they are not quickly addressed. Survey respondents were more willing to explicitly admit watching BBC than VOA and overall awareness of BBC was considerably higher; in addition, respondents were more likely to cite BBC as a top news source than VOA.

Moreover, findings from both the qualitative and the survey research suggest that VOA's audience is older than that of BBC, that some viewers have concerns about the credibility and impartiality of VOA's broadcasts (and especially about the propensity of certain on-air personalities to telegraph their views), and that VOA's production values are lower than those of BBC. Finally, BBC wins praise for the comparatively greater variety of its programming, with many viewers citing the Farsi-versioned shows from the BBC archives like *Sherlock* and *Dr. Who*. VOA in contrast is widely perceived (whether positively or negatively) as essentially a news-oriented station.

On the other hand, the qualitative research findings also show very positive views of a number of individual VOA programs and personalities, suggesting that the station may be in a transitional phase: if VOA can shed those aspects of the broadcasts that threaten to turn it into a "legacy" station and capitalize on those with more appeal to younger audiences, the future may be bright.

### **Media environment:**

Reported ownership of satellite dishes and usage of satellite TV continues to grow. Twenty nine percent of survey respondents said they had a satellite dish in their household (vs. 26 percent in 2012); 37 percent said they had watched satellite TV, whether at home or elsewhere, in the previous week (vs 32 percent in 2012). A full 61 percent of respondents admitted to having watched satellite TV at least once in the previous year, suggesting that discussion of this topic is no longer taboo.

Internet usage continues to expand as well. In spite of all the obstacles the authorities have imposed, Internet is now the second most important source of news in Iran: 27 percent of survey respondents said they use the Internet daily for news (vs. 96 percent for TV, 25 percent for radio, and 15 percent for the printed press). Among younger Iranians, the trend is much more dramatic: 46 percent of those between the ages of 15 and 24 use Internet daily for news, vs. 18 percent who use radio. Shortwave radio use is uncommon: only 6 percent of adults (and 3 percent of those under age 25) report using shortwave radio in the previous week.

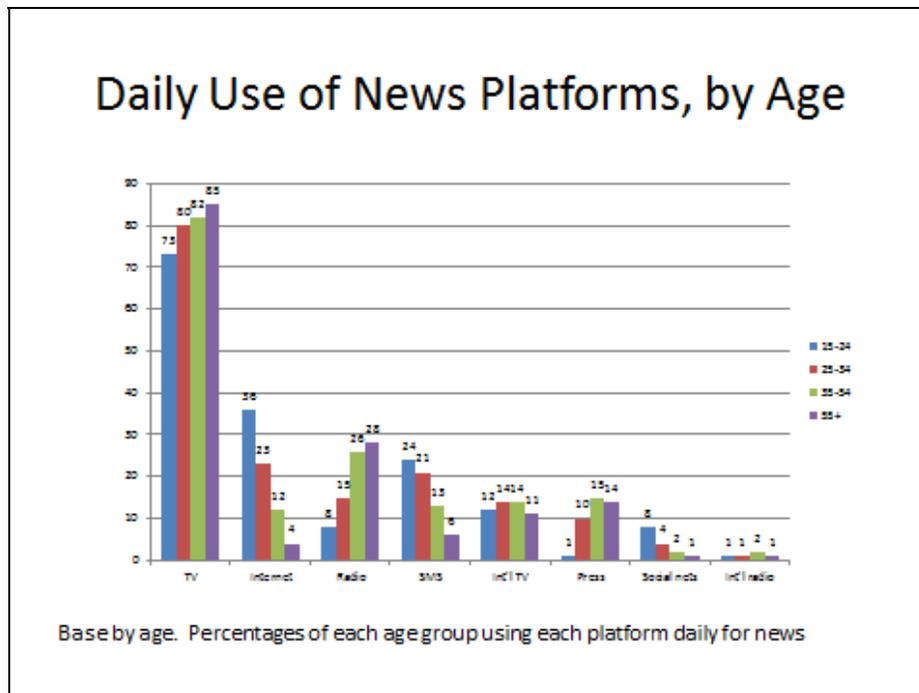
It's also important to note that VOA is no longer broadcasting in a vacuum; nor is BBC the only competition. Several commercial Persian-language broadcasters are aggressively competing for audiences with a wide range of mostly entertainment-oriented programming: Manoto 1 TV with a weekly audience of 21 percent, GEM TV with 15 percent, and Farsi 1 with 5 percent. While more sophisticated, news-oriented viewers will undoubtedly continue to use VOA and BBC, the growth of other networks with sophisticated entertainment products (and pressure from other

family members in what is still largely a communal TV-watching environment) may cut into the time available for more news-oriented fare.

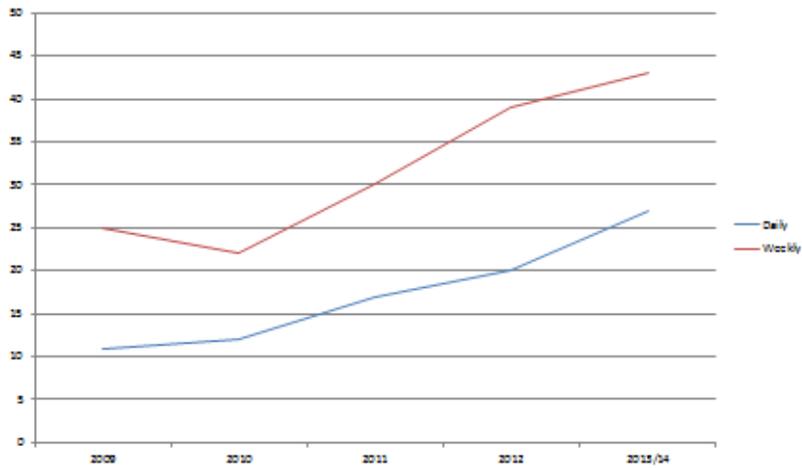
BBC Persian went on the air in January, 2009, and broadcasts from London eight hours daily (3.5 hours of news and information programming, and 4.5 hours of dubbed documentaries and entertainment programs). The eight-hour block is repeated once, and during the other eight hours of the day there is an informational programming loop giving frequencies and programming schedules. The annual service budget is about \$25 million. In addition to satellite television, the service broadcasts one hour daily via shortwave radio and maintains a robust web/digital presence.

Manoto 1 TV is a private broadcaster operating from London. Manoto 1 broadcasts 24/7 via satellite. Daily offerings include 1.5 hours of original news and information programming, which is repeated three times with updates as needed. The rest of the schedule consists of original documentaries, entertainment (such as a talent show and cooking program), and dubbed acquired entertainment and feature programming. The overall quality and standards of news content are not as professional as USIM or BBC, but the station draws similar-sized audiences to BBC and VOA.

### Key Data Points from the 2013/2014 National Telephone Survey of Iranians

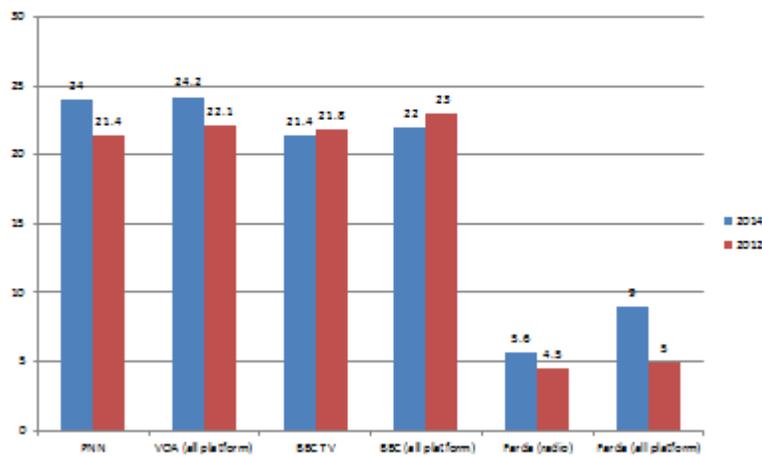


## Trends in Internet Use



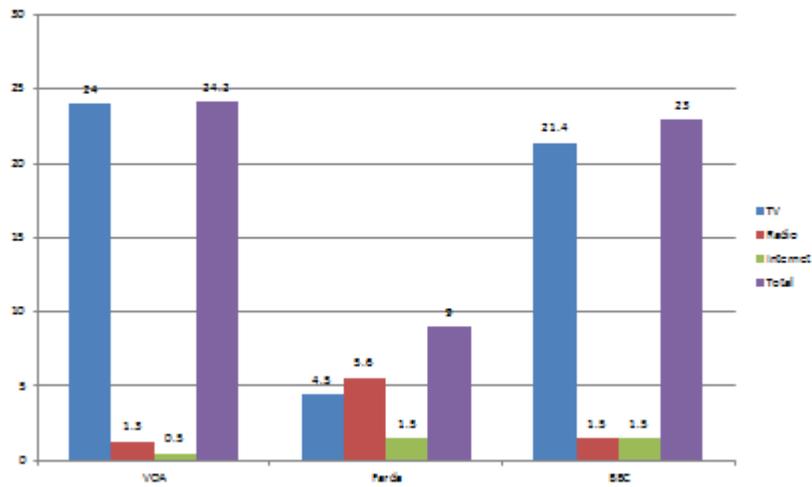
Percent of adults (15+) using Internet daily and weekly

## Past Week Audiences: VOA, Farda, BBC



Base: All respondents; percentages reached by each station in past week

## Audiences by Platform

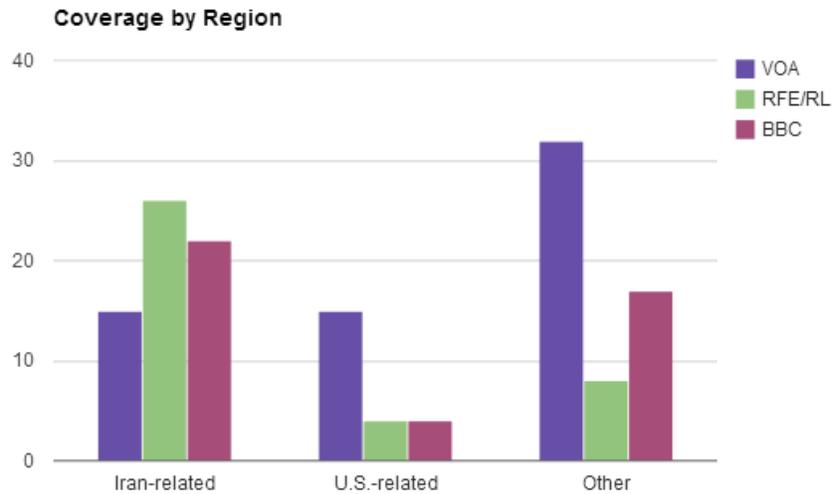


Base: All respondents. Percentages accessing each station by each platform

### Appendix 3: Content Analysis

This analysis looks at programs from VOA Persian, RFE/RL Radio Farda, and BBC Persian on February 15, February 18, and February 19 (2014), and breaks down the news coverage in terms of regional focus, topical focus, and uniqueness of stories from each of the three networks studied.

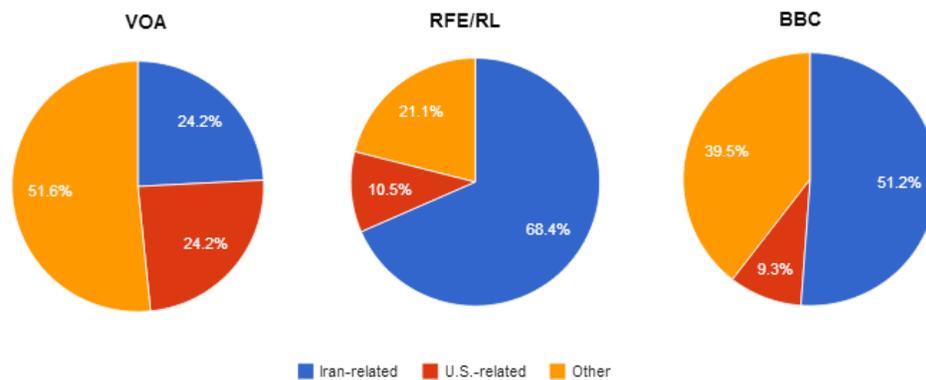
#### Is there a difference in regional focus within the coverage?



The majority of VOA’s coverage was focused on world news (51.6 percent), followed by an even split of focus on the U.S. (24.2 percent) and on Iran (24.2 percent).

The majority of RFE/RL’s coverage was focused on Iran (68.4 percent), followed by world news (21.1 percent) and then news about the U.S. (10.5 percent).

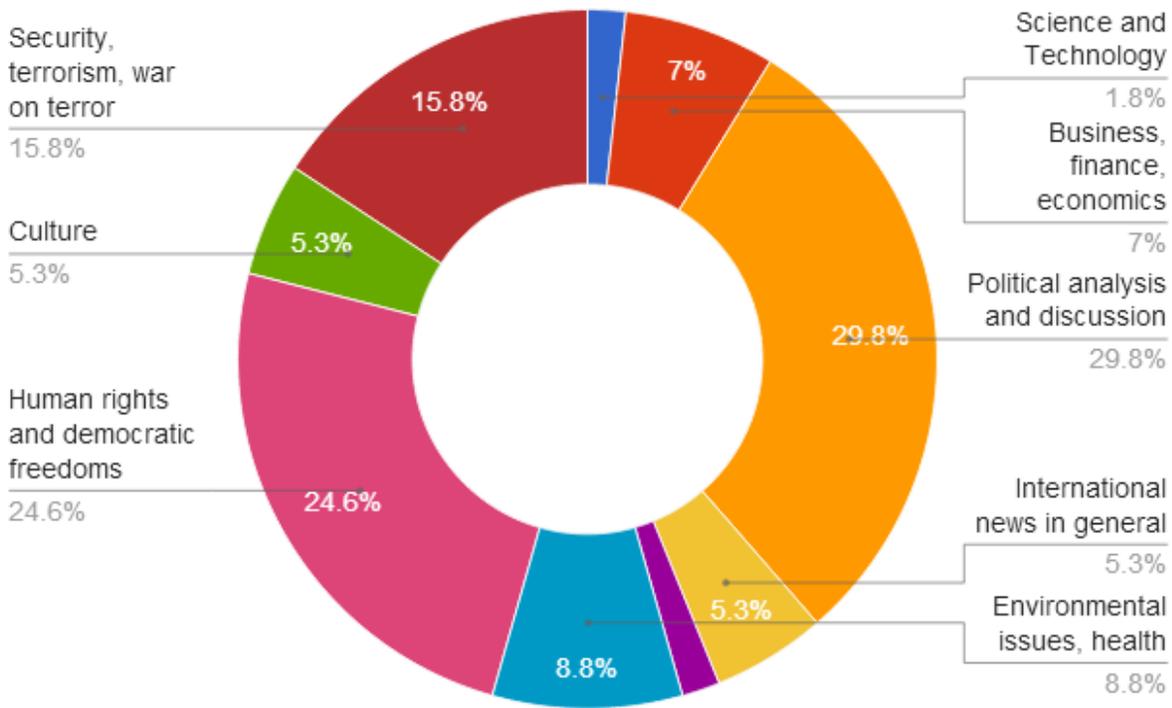
The majority of the BBC’s coverage was on Iran (51.2 percent), followed by world news (39.5 percent). 9.3 percent of BBC broadcasts mentioned the U.S., but those mentions were only in the context of U.S.-Iran in relation to each other.



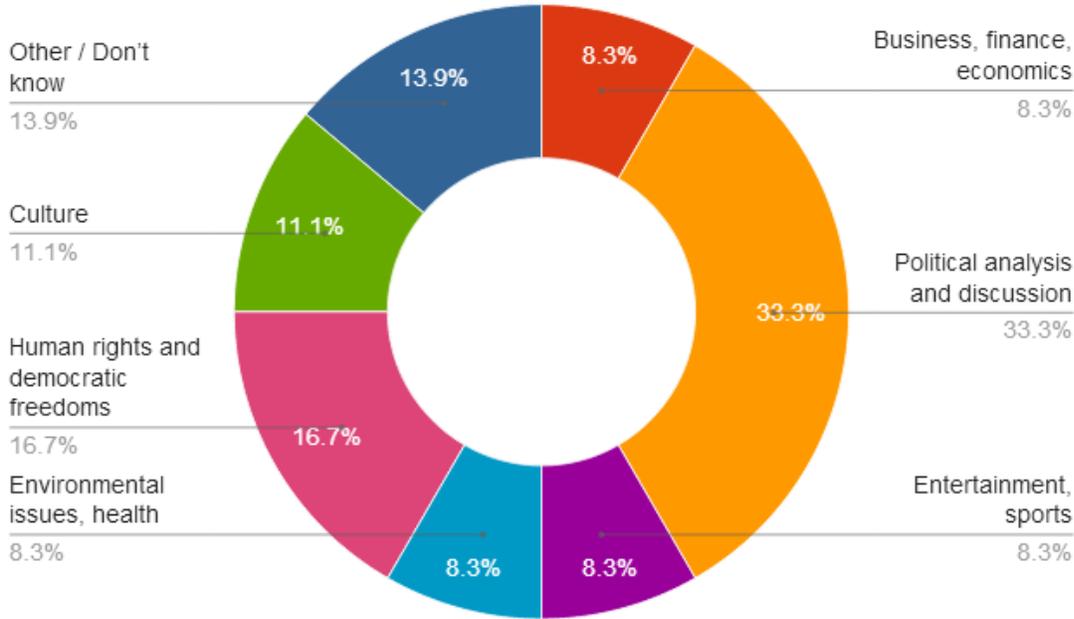
### Is there a difference in topical focus within the coverage?

All three networks provided comprehensive news and information on a wide variety of topics. Political analysis and coverage of human rights and democratic freedoms were most prevalent in news coverage by each network.

**VOA News Coverage by Topic**

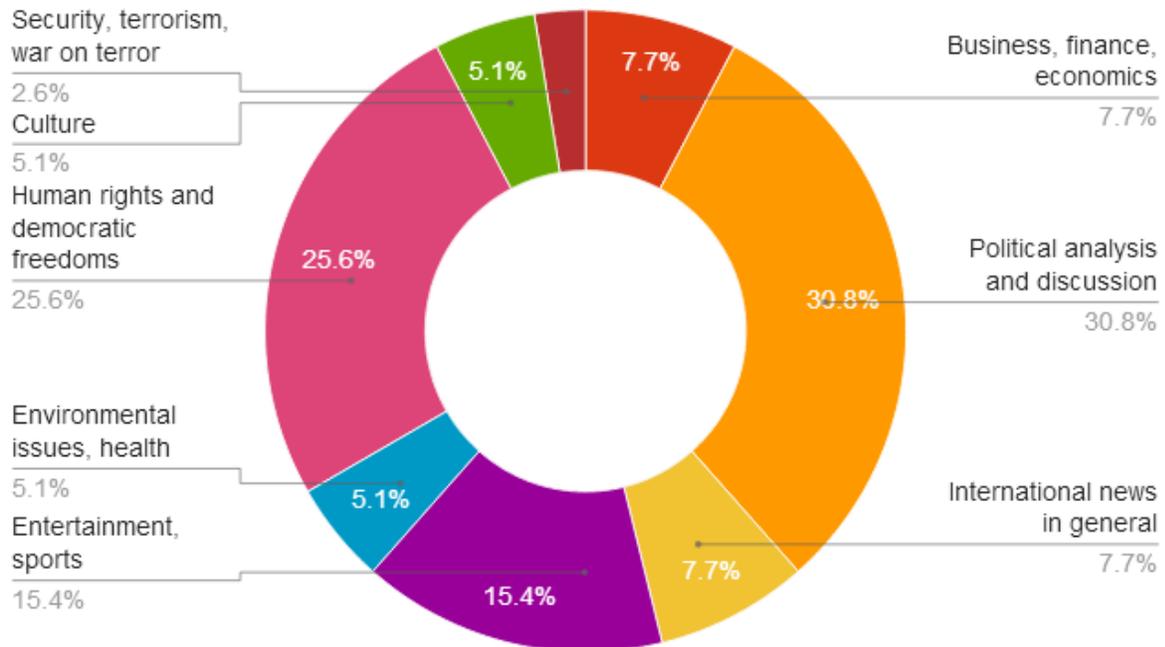


**RFE/RL News Coverage by Topic**



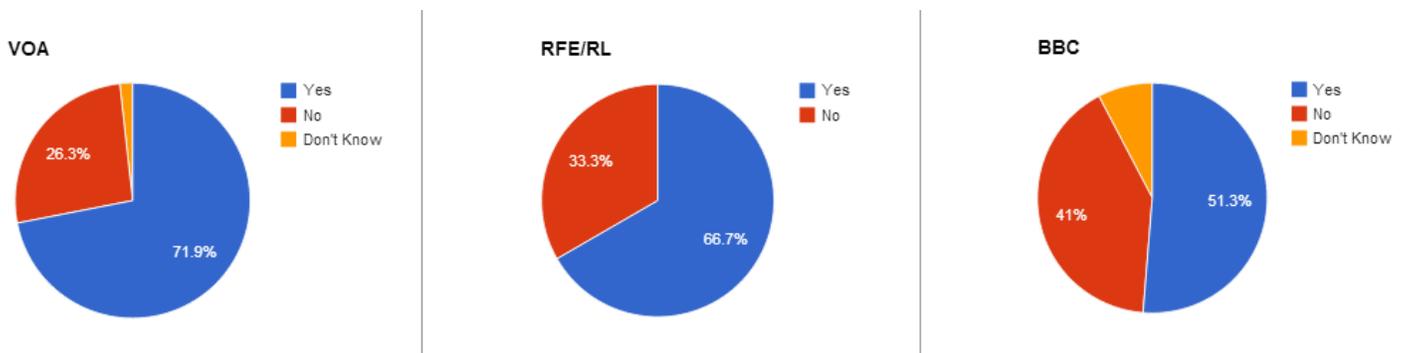
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**BBC News Coverage by Topic**



<sup>3</sup> The stories that fell into the “Other / Don’t know” category for RFE/RL Radio Farda, were reviews of front-page and inside-page news stories on Iranian newspaper stands and a call-in show. These stories covered a wide range of Iran-related topics, but were not long enough individually to count as stand-alone stories.

## What percentage of each broadcaster's programming is unique?



A content analysis of three days of VOA, RFE/RL, and BBC broadcasting shows that though there is overlap, the majority of VOA and RFE/RL programming is relatively unique across the time period studied.

VOA had the most unique programming (71.9 percent), presumably due to the network's role as a global news agency. RFE/RL had a significant amount (66.7 percent) of unique programming as well. BBC was the least unique, with only 51.3 percent of topics covered being unique to the broadcaster when compared to VOA and RFE/RL.

### Notes and Analysis

A cautionary note is that only nine programs were analyzed – three per broadcasting network – and at most provide a snapshot of news coverage from the time period studied. It is likely that news focus shifts depending on the news agenda and geopolitics of any given week. With that in mind, the following observations can be made:

- Overall, USIM networks provide a lively blend of news spanning a wide range of topics. VOA provides a comprehensive look at global news, while RFE/RL successfully focuses on more local and regional news about Iran.
- Within USIM, RFE/RL's Radio Farda is successfully acting as a surrogate broadcaster for Iranians, with 68.4 percent of its coverage being focused on Iran. Radio Farda covers a broad range of topics from culture to politics to human rights. Further, Radio Farda successfully engages its audience with call-in components to its shows. What Radio Farda could do better is to give more context in some of its reporting. For example, in its round-up on front-page news in local Iranian papers, Radio Farda could provide additional balance/analysis rather than just listing the top stories of each paper.
- Voice of America's Persian Service is successful at reporting a comprehensive mix of unique world news and information with 71.9 percent of programs being unique from those covered by RFE/RL or BBC. VOA coverage is to a large extent in line with U.S. foreign policy goals, in that the Service provided the most coverage of all three networks on security, terrorism, and the war on terror (15.8 percent of all stories analyzed), included a high level of coverage on issues of human rights and democratic freedoms (24.6 percent), and across the programs analyzed had seven stories focused on Iran

nuclear issues.<sup>4</sup> However, in the content studied, VOA did not focus heavily on news about the United States. Also, though VOA had the greatest number of stories in the coverage studied (57, while RFE/RL had 37, and BBC had 39), the reporting at times did not go sufficiently in-depth on issues of importance and the programming decisions occasionally seemed disjointed.

- The BBC provides news coverage spanning a range of topics, but emphasizing political discussion, and news on human rights and democratic freedoms. The network's coverage is almost evenly divided between news about Iran and world news. Notable about BBC news coverage is the level to which the BBC goes in-depth on some stories. For example, on February 18, both VOA and BBC covered news of a passenger bus in Iran falling off cliff. The VOA coverage of the incident was the equivalent of a paragraph, stating just the facts. The BBC coverage was the equivalent of 1.5 pages, and included commentary and analysis of the broader subject of road accidents in Iran.
- In some stories during the time period analyzed, there is room for concern about how USIM is doing at reporting on U.S. values. On February 18, Radio Farda reported on a form of satirical comedy in Iran called "black plays," but did not mention the possible racist nature of this form of entertainment. Similarly, on February 15, VOA cited a report by Chinese state media, Xinhua News, which referred to Uyghurs as terrorists, but did not give the background on the human rights situation in China's Xinjiang province. Due to the fact that this content analysis was done from translated materials, it is possible that something got lost in translation.

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<sup>4</sup> Not reflected in these charts, but noted.

## Appendix 4: Future Strategy and Implementation Tactics

With Board guidance, the USIM will formulate and propose a plan to restructure and harmonize VOA and RFE/RL Persian media. This plan will greatly enhance and improve collaboration in editorial operations, eliminate needless overlap, and achieve other efficiencies where possible – while respecting the distinct, established and valued brands and roles of each network. The result will be an innovative, agile, fully modern media enterprise, dedicated to reaching the rising generation and news-seekers of all ages in Iran in support of freedom, democracy and civil society.

### **This plan will feature:**

- A single vision and unified set of strategic goals, determined by the Board, for both VOA Persian and RFE/RL Radio Farda that also will guide distribution and support services from TSI and IBB;
- A new management structure that clearly differentiates functions and roles; lead executive managers with individual responsibility for fulfilling the Congressionally-mandated content requirements of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act: high-quality news; representing America in all its diversity; and presenting and discussing U.S. policy. These executive managers will have the authority to oversee strategy, resource allocations, major management decisions, and will be responsible for outcomes in their respected area;
- Coordinated editorial strategies and programmatic activities; and
- Measurable performance indicators to help gauge success.

### **The harmonized Iran effort will:**

1. Retain and improve high-quality reporting and analysis, the key to credibility and mission success among influential change agents across Iranian society.
2. Instill greater agility and creative energy into the journalism, programming, production and delivery of content.
3. Leverage assets much more effectively in an environment of shrinking budgets and increasing competition.
4. Decisively rectify long-standing management and operational issues at VOA that have contributed to strongly held perceptions among outside stakeholders that USIM programming to Iran is a failure.
5. Successfully define a coordinated, but unique editorial focus for VOA Persian and Radio Farda.

### **Other implementation tactics:**

- **Single Television & Radio Streams:** A single satellite television stream featuring a mix of VOA and RFE/RL content, and acquired video content; a single radio and audio stream featuring a mix of RFE/RL and VOA content.
- **Single Digital Strategy:** A single digital strategy on the web, mobile and social platforms, managed by RFE/RL and staffed by VOA and RFE/RL digital producers featuring branded VOA and RFE/RL content.

- **Reduced Radio Distribution:** RFE/RL will reassess resource allocation among its products to emphasize video and digital, and reduce radio to address shifting audience platform priorities. This will require upgraded television production facilities in Prague to produce original video content.
- **Improved Breaking News Capabilities:** USIM television to Iran will expand capabilities to go live 24/7 as dictated by breaking news and other events, with production responsibilities shared between VOA in Washington and RFE/RL in Prague.
- **Editorial Coordination & Content Sharing:** RFE/RL and VOA will establish technical and organizational mechanisms to seamlessly share Persian-language news and features; pending assignments (for coordination); and other programming activities and planning functions.
- **Opportunity for New Brands:** While retaining existing VOA and RFE/RL brands – each of which has strong equities in Iran and among stakeholders – the new structure will include flexibility to launch additional brands and content targeted at niche audiences, particularly youth audiences, with special emphasis on engagement.
- **Expanded Regional Reporting:** VOA and RFE/RL will work together to expand reporting and program production from the region, and to the extent possible, within Iran. They will expand collaboration with MBN to cover MENA.
- **Improved U.S. Policy Presentation:** While strictly respecting the journalistic firewall, USIM will communicate more effectively with U.S. policymakers, Congress and other stakeholders to ensure appropriate cooperation in support of broad U.S. foreign policy interests – and thereby build greater credibility and support for USIM programming to Iran.
- **Expanded Anti-Censorship Support:** USIM will continue to work to defeat Iranian government censorship, including satellite and radio jamming and blocking of online content.
- Per its own action plan, VOA will: introduce relevant new programs and diversify program formats to respond to audience needs; expand coverage of U.S. culture, society, and institutions including from New York, Los Angeles, Houston and other cities; create a multimedia stream of programming with special emphasis on new media as well as the full integration of the web and TV; and encourage more active viewer engagement.