



Broadcasting
Board of
Governors



BBG Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Information Matters: Impact and Agility in U.S. International Media



Executive Summary

Above all, we value the dignity of every human life, protect the rights of every person, and share the hope of every soul to live in freedom. That is who we are.

– President Donald J. Trump; July 2017; as quoted in the National Security Strategy

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) is America’s civilian international media agency, encompassing the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), and Radio and TV Martí (under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting – OCB). BBG is a networked global media enterprise that provides content in 58 languages to more than 100 countries on a wide range of broadcast and digital media platforms.

The BBG networks advance U.S. national interests and universal values of freedom by providing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, with consistently accurate and compelling journalism and other content that opens minds and stimulates debate. U.S. international media demonstrate to the world values that reflect our society: freedom, openness, democracy, and hope. Societies that embrace these values support U.S. interests because they enjoy greater stability and prosperity, live in peace with their neighbors, reject terrorism and extremism, and make better political allies and trade partners for the United States. As the National Security Strategy explains, “Stable, prosperous, and friendly states enhance American security and boost U.S. economic opportunities.” In covering the United States, BBG networks open a window onto democracy in action, in all its richness and complexity, through which global audiences can see reflected their own struggles to build sustainable democratic systems.

A Global Information Challenge

BBG pursues its mission in an increasingly challenging global environment. In a world awash in media and interconnected as never before, governments and non-state actors, including extremist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram, have weaponized information to generate a relentless, sophisticated stream of false narratives that too often go unchallenged. As detailed in the National Security Strategy (NSS), “Rival actors use propaganda and other means to try to discredit democracy. They advance anti-Western views and spread false information to create divisions among ourselves, our allies, and our partners.” Well-funded government broadcasters including

China's CCTV and Russia's RT inundate audiences with disinformation about global events and depict the United States on an irreversible downward social spiral, its institutions failing and global strength on the wane. Global media freedom has deteriorated steadily during the past decade and internet freedom is declining as more governments censor information and expand surveillance.

In addition to these geopolitical challenges, our strategy has been shaped by limited resource availability and new calls for institutional agility as reflected in the Administration's management priorities, which emphasize **effectiveness**, **efficiency** and **accountability**. These imperatives are driving the formulation and execution of BBG's strategic framework of Impact and Agility.

Mission

Any strategic plan starts with a mission. As BBG CEO John Lansing has said: "We are committed to our mission, impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world by providing accurate, objective, and uncensored news and information."

We capture this sentiment in the BBG's mission statement: *To inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.*

The mission affirms the BBG's role as a modern multi-platform journalistic organization that **informs** audiences that lack access to fact-based, verifiable news; **engages** them through our online content and on-air programs, including support for independent local journalism and social media; and **connects** them peer-to-peer through our media platforms and to the wider world with technologies that circumvent Internet censorship.

Overarching Strategic Goals

The BBG's mission is supported by two overarching strategic goals: (1) expanding freedom of information and expression and (2) communicating America's democratic experience and values.

These Strategic Goals support the third and fourth pillars of the National Security Strategy, "Preserving Peace through Strength" and "Advancing American Influence," by using accurate, objective information to foster the American values of democracy and free expression and, as the NSS directs, "expose adversary propaganda and disinformation."

Free press and free expression are universally acknowledged as key to free, open,

democratic societies, which in turn support American interests through stability, peace, alliances, and trade. Communicating America’s democratic experience and values serves the same purpose. In covering the United States, we open a window onto democracy in action.

As the NSS recognizes, “Governments that respect the rights of their citizens remain the best vehicle for prosperity, human happiness, and peace.” The NSS also pledges, “For much of the world, America’s liberties are inspirational, and the United States will always stand with those who seek freedom. We will remain a beacon of liberty and opportunity around the world.”

Impact and Agility Objectives

The BBG’s mission and two strategic goals serve as first principles, guiding the entire BBG strategy. To support these goals, we have developed two sets of objectives to underscore key themes – Impact and Agility – which in turn support the Administration’s priorities of **effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability**.

“Impact” is the concrete change that happens in the world as a result of our work. It reflects our effectiveness in planning, execution of our mission, and measuring our results. BBG’s Impact Objectives are to:

- Produce and curate journalism and other content of exceptional value that informs and engages audiences and expands the media marketplace
- Reach and engage audiences in key strategic areas, including the information-denied, underserved, and targets of disinformation and extremist rhetoric
- Overcome censorship to connect audiences in closed societies
- Optimize program delivery by market and expand engagement on digital platforms
- Serve as an authoritative source of information on U.S. news, policy, and society
- Serve as a surrogate news operation, delivering information otherwise not available in local markets
- Engage local media and empower citizen information-gathering and exchange.

“Agility” means being structured, organized and equipped to do our work in the most efficient, flexible way possible, able to adapt to fast-changing media markets and short-notice global developments, and to hold ourselves accountable for success. Agility begins with our mindset and encompasses our content production, technology, and support services. BBG’s Agility Objectives are to:

- Run the BBG as a nimble, resilient, cost-effective, and state-of-the-art media enterprise
- Enhance strategic cooperation among the BBG networks and with support elements

- Enable greater impact and accountability through rigorous assessment and evaluation
- Foster employee engagement, development, and productivity.

Both sets of objectives are detailed in the full text that follows. Corresponding performance goals and targets supporting each of these objectives are noted in the Performance Budget section of the Congressional Budget Justification. These objectives are also accomplished through country-level strategic planning that ensures that the agency objectives propagate down to all operational levels.

Building Evidence and Measuring Success

The BBG has a strong commitment to building evidence and using that evidence to support informed decision-making throughout the agency. To build the evidence base, the BBG uses a consolidated contract vehicle to procure audience and local market research for all agency broadcast services. Moving forward, the BBG is working to ensure that its research archive is fed by fresh data from full surveys for all target countries and regions.

In order to promote the use of this evidence, the BBG has developed and fully operationalized a customized Impact Model. The Impact Model, which ties directly to the BBG mission, is a comprehensive tool for measuring impact in the varied and complicated media environments in which BBG networks operate. The model looks beyond sheer audience size to assess the concrete change that the news and information BBG networks provided has made in the lives of audience members, in the local media sector, and among governments. With a full assessment of impact of BBG programming, everyone from leadership to editorial and support staff can make better-informed decisions toward achieving the mission.

Focus for the Future

The focus of this Strategic Plan is achieving impact through agility, using the tools of professional journalism, with particular emphasis on effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. In charting this strategic direction, the BBG seeks to continue its record audience growth but to do so with demonstrated impact in supporting American interests and American national security around the world.

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Introduction

This Strategic Plan of the Broadcasting Board of Governors for 2018–2022, *Information Matters: Impact and Agility in U.S. International Media*, is the fifth strategic plan since the agency’s inception in 1998. It is the first plan developed since the BBG came under the leadership of a Chief Executive Officer, a position established by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 to make the BBG more effective and efficient. In consultation with the BBG Board and working closely with the International Media Coordinating Committee (ICC) made up of the heads of the five BBG networks, the CEO has provided clear strategic direction that is supported by a reorganized agency structure, capable as never before to implement change.

Global forces that shaped the previous BBG Strategic Plan have only intensified with the weaponization of information and deteriorating media freedom around the world. The prior BBG Strategic Plan addressed these challenges and U.S. international media has delivered on these goals. Signature accomplishments include launching a vibrant 24/7 Russian–language TV and digital channel with a specialized web and social media team that counters Kremlin disinformation and tells the truth about Russian, American, and global events; accelerating the migration from shortwave radio to satellite TV, FM, mobile, and social media; pioneering technologies to circumvent government–imposed Internet firewalls; reinvigorating the telling of America’s story by expanding a “U.S. bureau” approach for reporting to media outlets around the world; and fully operationalizing a sophisticated, dynamic Impact Model to demonstrate effectiveness and improve accountability.

While impact is not a matter of numbers alone, BBG audiences have grown to record levels, with a worldwide measured weekly audience of 278 million people in 2016, an unprecedented year–on–year increase of 52 million.

Yet key challenges and opportunities remain. The BBG has incorporated this Administration’s management priorities – focused on **effectiveness**, **efficiency**, and **accountability** – into this Strategic Plan, which outlines key Impact and Agility Objectives. In support of these objectives, we have developed an annual performance plan in the FY 2019 Budget submission. We continue to establish subordinate strategies for every BBG language service, setting clear goals and targets in over 100 countries, and driving and measuring performance with evolving forms of research – all pegged to our comprehensive Impact Model, which tracks performance through a basket of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The fast–shifting global environment requires that we focus on continually improving our operations in order to maximize our journalistic impact, thereby supporting

American interests, American national security, and universal values of freedom. Our growing audiences throughout the world are hungry for the exceptional news and information that we offer.

We must serve them, while reaching out to new audiences, with fresh vision, imagination, and innovation. This is the thrust of *Information Matters: Impact and Agility in U.S. International Media*, BBG's Strategic Plan for 2018–2022.

A Global Information Challenge

Today, more than ever, information is power, and the changing media landscape means that the power is shifting.

In some situations, the shift is beneficial. Social and digital media provide individuals with greater access to news and information as well as a novel, pliable mechanism for generating their own content. And, as markets expand, audiences increasingly are able to seek out and consume content that best meets their needs.

Yet, despite these positive trends, access to open and accurate information in many regions is backsliding. While the world grows ever more interconnected, the freedoms of expression and of the press, and the sanctity of objective truth, are under fire as states and groups hijack the trade of information itself to serve their ends. More media does not equate to more media freedom.

In 2014, scholars Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss coined the phrase “the weaponization of information” to describe how both state and non-state actors successfully appropriate modern media to sow confusion and distrust, weaken opposition to their policies, and suppress dissent. The goal? To defend the indefensible: tyranny, kleptocracy, religious and ethnic intolerance, and visions of society that deny fundamental human rights.

Each day, actors ranging from ISIS to Iran to China to Russia adopt the very tools of free society to serve their own ends. As detailed in the NSS, “America’s competitors weaponized information to attack the values and institutions that underpin free societies, while shielding themselves from outside information.” They employ their version of “journalism” and information technology not as a means to inform audiences but rather as tools to control expression, restrict freedom, obfuscate and pervert truth, or create the impression that there are no objective facts, all in the service of undermining global peace, stability, and democratic values. Our adversaries do this creatively, proactively, and with a keen eye toward production values.

This current context stands in stark contrast to the Cold War, when backward-looking global actors cut off the flow of information to the point of creating informational vacuums in key communities. The United States and its partners moved to fill these spaces through tools including the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Today, we see the opposite: bad actors flooding media markets with an abundance of false, doctored, or misleading information on a multitude of different platforms.

At the same time, even as they embrace media tools for their own ends, repressive regimes relentlessly attack the free press and stifle free expression. In 2016, Freedom House found that press freedom declined to its lowest point in 13 years, with

intimidation, digital censorship, extralegal harassment, abduction and imprisonment, impunity, and even murder on the rise. In certain places it has never been more dangerous to be a journalist.

Information itself – who has access to it, its veracity and timeliness, the platforms on which it is presented, and the safety of those who report and consume it – is now, and for the foreseeable future, a key currency of the global order.

As a result, responding to the global explosion of information must no longer be considered to be a “value added” function in support of broader strategic ends. Rather it must be understood as a key focus of U.S. foreign policy in its own right.

Today’s media has the power to reach audiences through visual means, enticing and motivating them to action – or suppressing them. It can provide communities with accurate, objective truths and hold governments and institutions accountable – or it can be used by oppressive actors to legitimize their own ideologies and actions. BBG’s agenda in support of freedom and democracy will not be effective if we fail to appreciate these facts.

Mission and Support for U.S. Interests

The BBG is uniquely placed – both in terms of its mission and global capacity – to combat misinformation and propaganda by using its global reach and network of local media affiliates to provide accurate and fact-based information, innovative programming and content, enhanced fact-checking, and media tools to increase connectivity and circumvent censorship.

The BBG is the U.S. government’s civilian international media agency, encompassing the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN, which includes Alhurra and Radio Sawa), and Radio and TV Martí (under the Office of Cuba Broadcasting – OCB). One of the largest media organizations in the world, the BBG provides content in 58 languages to 278 million people in more than 100 countries on a wide range of broadcast and digital media platforms with some 4,000 employees, 1,500 stringer reporters, and 50 news bureaus.

As BBG CEO John Lansing has said: “We are committed to our mission, impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people around the world by providing accurate, objective, and uncensored news and information.”

We capture this mission in our official mission statement: To inform, engage, and connect people around the world in support of freedom and democracy.

The mission upholds the BBG’s role as a modern multi-platform journalistic organization that informs audiences who lack access to fact-based, verifiable news; engages them through our online content and on-air programs, including support for citizen journalism; and connects them peer-to-peer through our media platforms and to the wider world with technologies that circumvent Internet censorship.

The BBG is not a propaganda outfit and our networks do not “message” or proselytize. Rather, consistent with the American values of free speech and free expression, they advance U.S. national interests by providing audiences in closed societies, or where free media is not yet fully established, with consistently accurate reporting and other content that opens minds and stimulates debate. Even as repressive actors around the world work to keep information from their citizens and propagate false realities through disinformation, BBG networks inform, engage, and connect these very populations in support of freedom and democracy – every day. U.S. international media’s journalistic independence is protected by the “firewall” enshrined in the BBG’s enabling legislation, which prohibits editorial interference by U.S. government officials.

Professional journalism and related support for sustainable independent media have enduring value in helping to foster free, open, democratic societies. Such societies

tend to be more peaceful and prosperous than non-democratic societies and seldom threaten their neighbors or harbor extremists. That is why they are critical to U.S. national interests and foreign policy, and why BBG's role in supporting their development matters.

Both the BBG's mission and global presence are unique. No other U.S. government agency shares BBG's credibility, reach, and impact with audiences around the world.

BBG's measured weekly audiences have grown by 103 million since 2012 to a record 278 million. But we know that our impact is more than just reaching audiences. The BBG has developed and implemented an Impact Model rooted in the BBG mission statement, which tracks progress in the areas of **informing, engaging and connecting, and being influential** across three sectors – audiences, local media, and governments. Our networks are reaching people in strategically important countries and regions with impactful content that helps them make more informed decisions for themselves and their societies.

Overarching Strategic Goals

The BBG's mission of supporting freedom and democracy is supported by two overarching, long-term strategic goals: (1) expanding freedom of information and expression and (2) communicating America's democratic experience and values.

The goals flow directly from the U.S. International Broadcasting Act, the BBG's enabling legislation. Congress mandates the BBG to do accurate, credible, and comprehensive news; to represent American society; and to present and discuss U.S. policy – all consistent with the standards of professional journalism. Doing so, as the Broadcasting Act establishes, “contributes to international peace and stability” and serves “to support freedom and democracy – in a rapidly changing international environment.”

These Strategic Goals support the third and fourth pillars of the National Security Strategy, “Preserving Peace through Strength” and “Advancing American Influence,” by using accurate, objective information to foster the American values of democracy and free expression and, as the NSS directs, “expose adversary propaganda and disinformation.”

Both of these goals serve to further the BBG mission of supporting freedom and democracy. Free press and free expression are universally acknowledged as key to free, open, democratic societies. Expanding the number of free, open, democratic societies supports U.S. interests because democratic countries enjoy greater stability and prosperity, live in peace with their neighbors, reject terrorism and extremism, and make better political allies and trade partners for the United States.

As the NSS recognizes, “Governments that respect the rights of their citizens remain the best vehicle for prosperity, human happiness, and peace.” The NSS also pledges, “For much of the world, America's liberties are inspirational, and the United States will always stand with those who seek freedom. We will remain a beacon of liberty and opportunity around the world.”

We see the role of journalism in supporting free, democratic, and peaceful societies in the daily work of BBG networks around the world:

- **IN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA**, where challenges to stability and democracy have wracked the region, BBG networks provide breaking news coverage, analysis, and diverse perspectives, featuring U.S. and European views in the face of heightened Russian propaganda.
- **IN WAR-TORN SYRIA**, we aid the besieged citizenry with reports on life-and-death developments, including the progress of the campaign to defeat ISIS.
- **IN SOMALIA AND IRAQ**, we counter violent extremist propaganda targeted to youth with frank on-air and online discussion of extremism and its causes.

- **THROUGHOUT THE ARABIC-SPEAKING MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**, we challenge through news and opinion the ideological dimensions of violent extremism and its support network.
- **IN CHINA**, we combat censorship by tapping into internal viral networks with coverage of taboo subjects, including high-level government corruption, Tibet, and the repression of Uyghur identity.
- **IN NORTH KOREA**, we offer hard news, but also share life stories of defectors in South Korea and the Korean diaspora in the U.S., as an antidote to the DPRK's propaganda.
- **IN A HOST OF COUNTRIES, FROM BURMA TO BURUNDI**, we ease inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife with roundtable discussions that bring diverse parties together to bridge differences and model civil discourse.
- **In lands that have suffered natural as well as man-made disasters, FROM HAITI TO AFGHANISTAN**, we provide a humanitarian lifeline to people in extreme distress.

Communicating America's democratic experience and values serves the same purpose. In covering the United States, the BBG networks open a window onto democracy in action in our society. BBG networks – particularly the Voice of America (VOA) and MBN's Alhurra and Radio Sawa – cover the fullness of the American experience in all its diversity and complexity. BBG networks share our nation's democratic journey so that audiences struggling to establish, nurture, or sustain their own democratic systems might see their stories reflected in ours. This role is more important than ever due to the distortion of U.S. policy and society by adversarial media outlets of foreign state- and non-state actors.

Conveying and critically assessing official U.S. policy – what it is, which parts of our government make and articulate it, and how there are at times sharp policy differences – is a key component of America's story. U.S. leadership in the world depends in part on global audiences knowing where the United States stands on the issues of the day.

The five BBG networks pursue the BBG mission and strategic goals through complementary, reinforcing roles. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting emphasize domestic news for their geographically-defined audiences. Covering developments specific to defined target markets is their specialty, most notably in countries without a free press or in transition. At the same time, each also covers limited regional and international issues and events (including those in the United States, as warranted) to ensure comprehensive news coverage. VOA emphasizes international and regional news and in-depth coverage of the United States. VOA also covers significant domestic events to ensure comprehensive news coverage, especially in areas where it is the only BBG presence, such as sub-Saharan Africa. Middle East Broadcasting Networks provides a full range of international, regional, and local news in Arabic as well as thorough coverage of the United States and American society, culture, and politics.

Impact and Agility Objectives

The BBG’s mission and two strategic goals serve as strategic first principles, guiding everything else in the strategy. To support these goals, we have developed two sets of objectives to underscore two key themes – Impact and Agility.

“Impact” is the concrete change that happens in the world as a result of our work. It reflects our effectiveness in planning, execution of our mission, and measuring our results. “Agility” means being structured, organized and equipped to do our work in the most efficient, flexible way possible, able to adapt to fast-changing media markets and short-notice global developments, and to hold ourselves accountable for success. Agility begins with our mindset and encompasses our content production, technology, and support services.

What follows are seven impact objectives and four agility objectives that drill down into the specific work of the agency in support of the goals and the mission. These objectives will be pursued at the agency level through the strategies listed below and assessed by annual measurable performance goals. For simplicity of presentation, examples of these performance goals for each objectives are given below. The full performance goals, with measurable targets, can be found in the Performance Budget section of the Congressional Budget Justification. In addition, these objectives are carried out through the annual development of strategic audiences, goals, tactics, and targets by each BBG language service – ensuring connection between the overall strategy and what is implemented on the ground.

Impact Objective 1: Produce and curate journalism and other content of exceptional value that informs and engages audiences and expands the media marketplace

Journalism is the daily work of BBG broadcasters, and producing fact-based, verifiable news and information must be preeminent in agency strategy. To have impact, BBG journalism must reach audiences, meet their interests along the breadth of subjects that matter to their lives and, at the same time, add value in expanding the media marketplace. BBG’s aim is not just to follow the 24-hour news cycle but to drive the news agenda through original stories, investigative reporting, in-depth analysis, and a unique cross-cultural perspective that helps audiences become sophisticated consumers of news and media.

BBG will:

- As mandated by Congress, provide news and other programming that is accurate, objective, and comprehensive and in accordance with the highest professional standards of journalism.
- Produce news and information, consistent with audience preferences and mission requirements, on issues which are not addressed adequately by media in the target area, e.g., human rights and good governance.
- Offer non-news content that research, web analytics, and audience and affiliate feedback show are of vital interest to audiences, such as health, science, and technology.
- Produce enterprise reporting through deep and lasting exploration of critical issues in the countries BBG targets.
- Curate content from and co-create content with reputable partners, as appropriate and consistent with broadcasting standards and editorial guidelines.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Reach significant audiences (measured weekly audiences)
- Provide programming that audiences find trustworthy (program credibility)

Impact Objective 2: Reach and engage audiences in key strategic areas, including the information-denied, underserved, and targets of disinformation and extremist rhetoric

In deciding where to target, BBG considers the local media situation, along with U.S. strategic interests, and prioritizes countries that lack a free or developed press. Special consideration is given to populations at risk due to extremist rhetoric and disinformation. BBG prioritizes reaching audiences in areas plagued by extremism, where extremist forces espouse a violent ideology and execute campaigns of terror that threaten U.S. and regional security and stymie free, open, democratic societies. Another key focus area is audiences subjected to state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, which seek to undermine democratic norms and the very idea of objective truth. In all target countries, BBG networks seek to grow their audience base and reach those traditionally underserved by BBG broadcasts. Populations in the target countries are overwhelmingly young – a challenge, but also a chance for us to connect with a demographic that in many cases has never even heard of us. BBG’s current audiences are approximately 58 percent male and 42 percent female – an imbalance ripe for correcting. BBG understands that to reach and be relevant with these audiences, it needs to provide them with content that not only informs them of international and local news, but assists them in building and participating in a civil society.

This objective aligns with the BBG priority **to focus on key issues and audiences**: The BBG is prioritizing resources to ensure that its activities advance the broad foreign policy priorities of the United States, including the universal values of freedom and democracy. To this end, the BBG is targeting its resources strategically to provide accurate and credible news and information for audiences most impacted by state-sponsored disinformation and violent extremism, particularly by campaigns of terror. These audiences are located, among other places, in Russia and its periphery, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, and Cuba and nations threatened by extremist attacks.

BBG will:

- Prioritize countries lacking freedom and democracy or faced with disinformation or extremism, where accurate, credible news and information are lacking. Boost service to these areas, where feasible.
- Introduce service in selected new languages to reach sizeable new audiences in countries where BBG products are urgently needed.
- Reach out to women and youth with programming that addresses issues of concern and relevance to their lives.
- Sharpen audience segmentation and targeting to drive content strategies and better address gender and age demographics, as well as psychographic segments.
- Serve as a conduit for the transmission of reporting from inside closed societies lacking press freedom to outside audiences.
- Ensure strong local news coverage, as warranted by events, to meet urgent audience needs in areas of crisis.
- Draw on the experiences of the world's many models of free societies, in particular the U.S., to present a broad array of political views and debates.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Achieve significant audience reach in environments subject to extremist rhetoric and violence, including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. (measured weekly audience in target countries)
- Reach audiences in information-denied environments, including China, Iran, and Cuba (measured weekly audience in target countries).
- Reach audiences in environments targeted by state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, including Russia and Ukraine (measured weekly audience in target countries).

Impact Objective 3: Overcome censorship to connect audiences in closed societies

For almost 70 years U.S. international broadcasting has fought censorship in all its forms. Today, as the global media environment undergoes a dynamic revolution, access to a truly free press is actually in decline. Jamming of radio and TV broadcasts, including the BBG's, continues in a number of countries. Journalists suffer harassment and violence daily. Media laws often restrict free flows of information, limiting the ability of international news organizations to distribute their content. The Internet in particular is under assault, even as audiences increasingly access and share our content on digital platforms and via social media. The agency upholds the universal right of citizens everywhere to receive and impart information without restriction. BBG works on many fronts to make news and information accessible to its global audiences with the aim of enabling not only unfettered access to agency products but also the full spectrum of independent news sources on the Internet.

BBG will:

- Lead in assisting the world's citizens to gain access to information on all platforms, advocating on the international stage and coordinating within the U.S. government and with international broadcasters and other allies.
- Help audiences understand through journalistic reports the practices and policies of Internet censorship and circumvention.
- Fund technologies that counter Internet censorship and Internet blocking and allow citizens and journalists to operate securely online.
- Increase effective use of social media and digital platforms to combat censorship.
- Provide in-house digital expertise to address real-time censorship and jamming issues in targeted regions.
- Cultivate information-sharing relationships on Internet freedom matters with other federal agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector.

Example of performance goal (and measures):

- Increase usage of internet freedom products (weekly unique users of proxy tools, weekly visits to BBG sites through proxy tools)

Impact Objective 4: Optimize program delivery by market and expand engagement on digital platforms

It is essential that BBG networks reach audiences on their preferred media platforms. Yet the agency's distribution methods and means have historically lagged shifts in media use. BBG must therefore align how it delivers content with how consumers access it now and in the future. The BBG must continue growing and enhancing new distribution methods, with specific attention to social and mobile platforms. On traditional media, BBG must continually migrate to the most effective broadcast channels, including satellite and broadcast television and FM radio. The agency must aggressively expand and improve on its successful model of affiliations and syndication of content on all platforms. Ultimately, the agency is platform-agnostic. The BBG seeks to do what works best for the market at hand to get content to as many users as possible.

This objective aligns with the BBG priority to **maximize program delivery agility**: Maximizing platform agility allows our networks to seamlessly adapt to the fast-changing content consumption preferences of their audiences. By streamlining operations and leveraging aggressive research we will rapidly evolve our market-by-market distribution strategy, ensuring continuously growing relevance.

BBG will:

- Increase distribution on platforms that BBG knows audiences are using – FM, satellite and broadcast television, and mobile devices – continuing our migration away from legacy platforms where they do not reach audiences.
- Expand reach and engagement on digital platforms, including new streaming and over-the-top platforms.
- Find creative ways to penetrate closed societies, through flash drives, DVDs, and other alternative delivery means.
- Expand distribution through affiliation with strong local television and FM radio stations and digital platforms and, where possible, installation of FM transmitters.
- Draw on research and other inputs to tailor format and presentation styles to audience needs and media usage habits, creating content that can break through ever-increasing clutter.
- Exploit the falling cost of video production by updating BBG broadcasting facilities to support growing audience appetite for TV and video.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Increase web traffic (weekly visits to websites)
- Increase audience interaction via social media (weekly digital engagement actions)

Impact Objective 5: Serve as an authoritative source of information on U.S. news, policy, and society

Representing American society and presenting and discussing U.S. policy are legislated mandates for the agency and thus constitute mission imperatives. BBG's coverage of the U.S. is comprehensive across all elements of society, but aims overall to convey the practice of democracy in all of its complexity. It is not about persuading audiences to admire the U.S.; it is about helping them see how the U.S. manages the challenges of a democratic society – from economic growth to fiscal crises to race relations to educating youth to addressing environmental change. These topic areas find ready comparisons in BBG's target countries and resonate with the agency's audiences in practical, meaningful ways. Carrying out this element of our mission requires sensitivity and creativity. Currents of anti-Americanism still run strong in some parts of the world, necessitating deft outreach that stresses dialogue, not monologue. The way people interact with media today, with emphasis on interaction, further affirms this approach. At the same time, America's still dominant role on the global stage makes it a focal point of international attention, and its national language is the one that tens of millions of people around the world seek to learn. VOA, in particular, is uniquely mandated and positioned to leverage these advantages to connect with diverse international audiences, serving as a U.S. news bureau for affiliate partners and providing English-learning programming.

BBG will:

- **Serve as a U.S. bureau for media outlets across the world that wish to engage with us for news, analysis, and perspectives from the United States – on the model that has succeeded in Ukraine, Latin America, Nigeria, Indonesia, and elsewhere.**
- **Portray the breadth and diversity of the American experience, with particular attention to diaspora communities and Americans outside of big cities.**
- **Emphasize English learning as a vehicle for positive audience engagement and interaction as well as information on American society and culture.**
- **Meet the global interest in American politics with in-depth coverage and analysis of national elections and coverage of other political events to impart the news and to elucidate the democratic process, with stories localized to make them interesting to specific target regions.**
- **Satisfy the world's growing appetite for learning English through TV and radio programs, online instruction, printed instructional materials, and innovative short-form videos designed for social media.**

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- **Provide programming that increases audiences' understanding of the U. S. (understanding of American society, understanding of U.S. foreign policy)**
- **Provide exceptional news and information (uniqueness)**

Impact Objective 6: Serve as a surrogate news operation, delivering information otherwise not available in local markets

In environments where state-run media are dominant and independent media are either not allowed or not fully established, the BBG networks, particularly RFE/RL, RFA, and OCB, often play a surrogate role, acting as local media would if they were free to operate. In this role, the networks emphasize domestic news for their geographically-defined audiences and cover developments specific to defined target markets, especially in countries without a free press or in transition. They focus on local news events not covered in state-controlled domestic media, as well as other sensitive topics, including religion, science, and locally-banned literature and music. They give voice to dissidents and opposition movements, while maintaining balanced coverage, and serve as platforms for a range of opinions and voices from these countries.

BBG will:

- Build strong networks of local stringers across target regions.
- Where possible, maintain an on-the-ground bureau presence, to report local news from a local perspective.
- Where in-country access is limited, cultivate networks of trusted contributors and closely monitor official and alternative media.
- Use social media and other interactive tools to gather information from closed societies, amplifying voices of those struggling for free expression.
- Provide platforms for free expression of various viewpoints and work to help people bridge traditional divides, including class, ethnicity, religion, etc.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Provide programming that increases audiences' understanding of current events in target countries (understanding of current events in target country)
- Provide exceptional news and information (uniqueness)

Impact Objective 7: Engage local media and empower citizen information gathering and exchange

Local media affiliates are the primary means through which BBG networks now reach their target audiences in most markets. However, the relationship with these media partners is about much more than just content delivery. By developing these media networks and connecting our affiliates to one another, the BBG fosters rich, open media ecosystems. The BBG leads by example in its journalistic practices, but it also increasingly partners with affiliates on content co-creation, sometimes even

participating in daily editorial meetings. The BBG also provides training to indigenous media on topics ranging from journalism principles to business practices. In a similar way, the BBG works to connect audiences to one another, and to foster the free flow of information, often through a wide array of web, mobile, and social media tools. These tools have made media personal, moving the power from centralized broadcasters to a new class of bloggers, activists, videographers, and a content-generating public. They are using media not only to tell their stories on a digital world stage but also to connect with one another to chart the future of their communities and build new forms of civil society.

BBG will:

- Deepen relationships with key local media affiliates, providing editorial guidance, training and technical assistance, and other resources to strengthen local, independent media sectors.
- Nurture citizen journalism and channel user-generated content from inside repressive states.
- Link citizens within repressive societies to one another and to external audiences through social media networks.
- Facilitate dialogue across religious, national and ethnic groups.
- Enter into a “global conversation” with BBG audiences by using social media tools to identify, source, and distribute news content into the channels where people are having conversations about their community and the world.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Increase engagement with local media outlets (number of affiliates that air custom or interactive segments, weekly downloads from affiliate content distribution portal)
- Increase sharing of BBG programming (percent of weekly audience that share content)

Agility Objective 1: Run the BBG as a nimble, resilient, cost-effective, and state-of-the-art media enterprise

By virtue of historical circumstance, today’s BBG is a complex amalgam of diverse media outlets and respective support organizations, operating under different legal and administrative frameworks. The result is an organization that has sometimes lacked the agility to operate in a rapidly evolving global media environment and the standardization that enables rational resource allocations. However, in recent years, the agency has begun a fundamental transformation in order to fulfill its charter and meet the challenges of growing geo-political instability and substantial budgetary constraints.

BBG will:

- Pursue an efficient and effective organizational structure.
- Enhance the agency's technological platforms and workflows, enabling it to continually adapt to global standards in content acquisition, manipulation, and distribution, as well as audience consumption behaviors.
- Automate and streamline business processes and workflows.
- Employ cloud-based technology to achieve nimbleness, resilience, and cost-savings
- Protect the BBG from persistent threats from state and non-state actors through enhancements to its cybersecurity posture.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Streamline program delivery (milestones related to shifting to more efficient delivery pathways)
- Automate and streamline key business processes (milestones related to business system automation)

Agility Objective 2: Enhance strategic cooperation among the BBG networks and with support elements

The BBG is one of the world's largest news-gathering and reporting enterprises with more than 50 overseas news bureaus, 4,000 employees, and 1,500 stringer reporters. Each of the agency's five networks generates original reporting every day from and around the world's hotspots – the Sahel and Central Africa, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, Burma, China, Egypt, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria, Yemen, et al – primarily in vernacular languages for target audiences in these areas. Too little of this rich content is translated and shared across BBG networks to augment international news coverage for other vernacular services or made available to other global audiences in English. BBG is remedying this by facilitating coordination among broadcast entities and with support elements through the International Media Coordinating Council (ICC), comprised of the heads of each of our five networks, and reinforcing their unique and respective mission-driven legislated roles in areas served by multiple broadcasters. BBG will also continue to collaborate with other U.S. government entities on areas of mutual concern, and will reach out to forge new partnerships with other governmental and private-sector organizations.

This objective aligns with the BBG priorities of **enhanced strategic cooperation between networks** and **targeted public-private partnerships on innovation and media reach**:

Enhanced strategic cooperation between networks: Simply put, we are going to continue and expand the good work that's being done in this area. BBG's five networks will deepen their coordination by extending the successful ICC model to mid-level working groups while remaining focused on the complementary missions of the BBG entities. At the center of this effort will be increasing the level of content sharing and curation among and within its five networks, leveraging resources where it makes sense to better report on the stories that matter to audiences worldwide.

Targeted public-private partnerships on innovation and media reach: BBG is focused on launching several new public-private partnerships with leading private-sector stakeholders. The goal of our public-private partnerships is to harness the power of BBG resources together with non- and for-profit organizations in order to combine networks, expertise, and resources to better serve citizens around the world.

BBG will:

- Ensure coordinated and complementary mission-driven operations and content in markets served by two BBG media entities.
- Build and sustain internal content-sharing mechanisms, aligning internal editorial support and coordination, as needed.
- Employ new bridge editors and other content-sharing mechanisms to channel original reporting from the language services to the central newsrooms and across BBG networks to get maximum mileage out of the content the agency currently produces.
- Better leverage news gathering, including stringer and correspondent networks or rotating correspondents, across BBG networks to ensure required editorial coordination and avoid redundancy.
- Align all support functions to BBG priorities, strategies, and goals.
- Participate in inter-agency meetings, committees, and strategies in support of U.S. government priorities to ensure that BBG capabilities, expertise, actions, and impact are fully and accurately shared with government entities.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Ensure complementary coverage in markets served by more than one BBG network (evaluations of BBG networks content)
- Enhance working-level coordination among networks and with support offices (milestones related to internal coordinating committees)

Agility Objective 3: Enable greater impact and accountability through rigorous assessment and evaluation

The BBG's mission is about more than just reaching audiences. The BBG has prioritized the development and implementation of a comprehensive Impact Model that assesses the extent to which we are accomplishing this mission and making a difference in people's lives. The Impact Model features a full suite of impact indicators, tied to the mission, which can be customized to different media and political environments. In order to successfully deploy the Impact Model across all BBG language services, we need fresh and full media research from across our broadcast regions. We also need to make this information available and accessible to decision-makers across the BBG and its networks. In the same way that we hold our networks responsible for accomplishing the BBG mission, we must also hold individuals responsible for carrying out their job duties in support of the mission. IBB has renewed its focus on personnel appraisals and is currently undertaking several initiatives that will strengthen this important accountability tool.

This objective aligns with the BBG priority of **improved accountability and impact measurement**: The BBG's has emphasized measuring the impact of its programs and activities by putting the audience first and holding itself accountable. The agency recently enhanced its comprehensive Impact Model to measure factors beyond audience reach and instead to assess and evaluate the impact that BBG programming actually has on the lives of each of its audiences and their communities. Master storytelling requires research to be integrated at the front-end, and BBG is committed to leapfrogging others in the media landscape to reach new audiences.

BBG will:

- Continue to implement and refine the BBG Impact Model with incremental improvements.
- Offer briefings to U.S. government groups, other international broadcasters, and other interested organizations to share lessons learned from the path-breaking Impact Model.
- Feed impact data into planning and decision-making at all levels of the agency.
- Within the federal workforce, shift to a five-tier personnel performance appraisal system, tied to performance awards, and hold managers accountable for completing performance appraisals.
- Initiate periodic 360 reviews for all managers in the federal workforce.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Strengthen research and evaluation program (number of target countries with full and recent BBG media surveys)
- Improve personnel evaluation process (percentage of federal employees with personnel evaluations completed on time)

Agility Objective 4: Foster employee engagement, development, and productivity

BBG's diverse, multi-cultural, and multi-talented workforce offers a rich range of experience and expertise to carry out the agency's mission. Key to success in a rapidly changing, highly competitive global media environment is flexibility to develop innovative products for the agency's target countries consistent with emerging priorities, programming formats, and advances in technology. Enhanced skill sets are required to program for and transmit via multiple media platforms – radio, TV, Internet, mobile, and through social media. BBG employees are most effective when they are well motivated, trained, and led. Continued efforts to equip and energize the entire BBG workforce are critical as the agency confronts mounting competitive pressures worldwide.

BBG will:

- Promote human capital planning and management as a top priority for senior executives, managers, and supervisors throughout the agency.
- Consistently communicate organizational goals, objectives, priorities, and performance expectations in a timely manner to staff at all levels in the agency.
- Ensure a safe and secure work environment for all employees.
- Implement manager training curriculum focusing on performance management, human capital planning and processes, communication, and financial and administrative management.
- Improve the consistency and credibility of agency performance management processes.
- Develop cross-training and internal development standards and procedures, as applicable.
- Foster employee participation in agency health and wellness programs.

Examples of performance goals (and measures):

- Strengthen internal communications (milestones related to internal communication improvements)
- Improve employee training and development (FEVS score on job-relevant knowledge and skills)

Stakeholder Engagement

In developing this 2018–2022 Strategic Plan, the BBG consulted a broad range of stakeholders at all levels, within the agency and outside. The development of this plan began with incorporating the CEO’s management priorities into the existing strategic framework, and then gathering input from all of the Board members through individual consultations, and from BBG network management.

During the annual Strategic Review process in 2017, the agency set up six deep dive regional discussions with outside experts, who shared their knowledge and strategic recommendations. In addition, the BBG solicited input from all of the language service directors on the draft strategic framework.

BBG staff held multiple briefings for employees at all five networks, as well as in the central support functions of IBB, and received numerous comments that reshaped the evolving strategic framework. Furthermore, there was a federal register notice posted for public input into both the BBG Strategic Plan and the Administration’s Reform Plan for BBG.

After consultation with OMB, BBG reached out to our Congressional committees, soliciting both majority and minority input from our authorizing and appropriations committees in the House and Senate and incorporating feedback received.

Building Evidence and Measuring Success

The BBG works to advance the use of evidence in decision-making by building a robust research program and implementing a customized Impact Model. The BBG uses a consolidated contract vehicle to procure audience and market research for all agency language services. The agency maintains an extensive database of audience and market data that consolidates research results. The archive covers more than 100 countries and contains socioeconomic and demographic data as well as strategically important information on local media, competition and audience preferences and needs. Looking beyond just audience size, this research covers an array of measures, such as:

- Whether audiences find BBG programming trustworthy
- Whether audiences find BBG content unique
- Whether audiences share information they receive from BBG networks
- Whether BBG programming helps audiences form opinions on important topics

The BBG integrates this research into its strategy and decision-making processes, including Language Service Review (the Board's annual assessment of broadcast languages) and Strategy Review (the process through which each network sets annual strategies for all of its language services). Moving forward, the BBG is working to ensure that this archive is fed by fresh data from full surveys for all target countries and regions.

One key factor in this integration is the development and deployment of the BBG Impact Model. The Impact Model, which ties directly to the BBG mission, is a comprehensive tool for measuring impact in the varied and complicated media environments in which BBG networks operate. The model looks beyond sheer audience size to assess the concrete change that the news and information BBG networks provided has made in the lives of audience members, in the local media sector, and among governments. The BBG has fully aligned all internal and external reporting with strategy and impact and has made evidence and impact central in BBG research and strategic planning. Moving forward, the BBG is looking to expand on the use of evidence in decision-making by raising awareness of the Impact Model among BBG staff and stakeholders and making evidence and impact central at every level of planning throughout the agency.

Appendix: Impact Model

The BBG has developed and now fully implemented a comprehensive Impact Model.

The Impact Model tracks the BBG mission statement and aims to capture impact across discrete sectors in our target markets, using a basket of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The indicators are flexibly applied, given the widely varying media and political environments in which we operate, to discern and describe BBG success. The Model is now central to country-level planning and performance assessment across the agency.

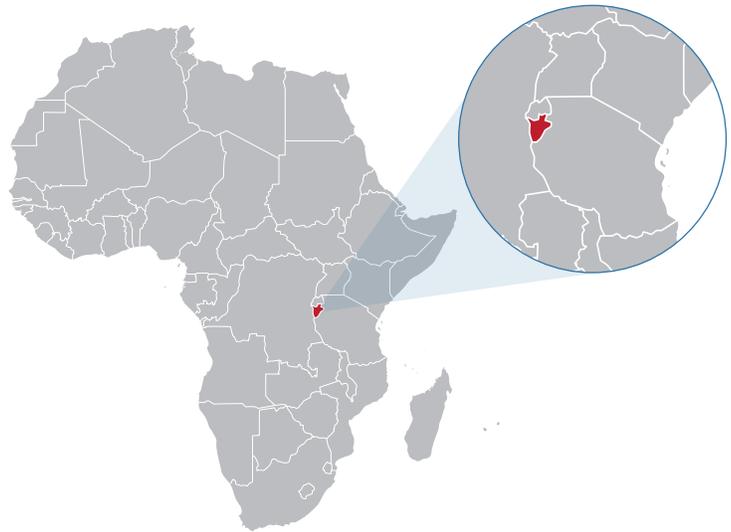
Below are the Impact Pillars, followed by an example of the Impact Model in use for VOA broadcasts to Burundi.

Impact Pillars



Impact Model Example: Burundi

Source: February 2016 survey



INFORM

- 1** Reach Target Audiences **57%**
of all adults have consumed VOA content in the past week.
- 2** Provide Value **9 in 10**
weekly VOA users find the content on VOA trustworthy.

ENGAGE/CONNECT

- 1** Engage Target Audiences **9 in 10**
weekly VOA users regularly share something they heard on VOA with others.
- 2** Engage/Connect Media Market **CAPACITY BUILDING**
The BBG held security training for journalists in November 2015, additional session forthcoming.
- 3** Create Loyalty **94%**
of weekly users plan to continue using VOA.

BE INFLUENTIAL

- WITH
- 1** People **95%** of weekly VOA users feel that their understanding of current events has increased thanks to VOA.
 - 2** Media
 - 3** Government
- “ I must say that Burundians were so lucky to have VOA at the very moment they needed balanced views on issues after several independent radio networks were destroyed. We cannot thank you enough for the excellent job you are doing. ”

Domitien Ndayizeye
former president of Burundi



Broadcasting
Board of
Governors



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