

## ***Momentum Alignment and Vision***

Mark Vogelzang, President & CEO

For Maine Public Strategic Planning Steering Committee March 2018

---

**MOMENTUM:** We stand here together in early 2018, taking a moment to catch our breath, looking back at the last several years that have seen so much change at Maine Public, and so many achievements and successes. From the *Charting A Bold Future Campaign*, raising nearly \$6 million in new money, to the long-planned format change, to a re-branding of our name and look, to the growth of content on TV and Radio, with an even better Digital team, to a new classical radio service, and the largest audiences we've ever witnessed in our history, there is simply an abundance of large and small victories that you all have made possible. There have been failures as well over the last several years which took our eye off the path we needed to walk. But in spite of those challenges, we can look back right now with some appreciation, some joy, and some deep satisfaction in the work we've done, knowing it has made a difference here at MPBN, now Maine Public.

Looking ahead from our vantage point, now that we've taken a deeper breath, we also have a glimpse of some big mountainous decisions, and some challenging terrain down in the valley over the next several years.

Five years ago, we said that "MPBN needed to take a deliberate step to offer more and better news content (journalism), while investing in digital media". Our vision statement was ambitious, and we followed through. We made "strategic investments in content we produced and the platforms through which we engaged audiences". We grew our signature new radio show, Maine Calling to five days a week. We added more reporting staff and partnerships. We made investments in digital media, finding better platforms on the web and for mobile, and built a focused digital team. We found a new channel for classical music and emphasized news and public affairs on radio and digital. And in television, we made investments in distinctive, original content like High School Quiz Show. And we pursued "opportunities for efficiencies in our operations", and became "a more nimble, flexible, and people-centered organization".

The campaign that followed this Strategic Plan of 2012 ultimately became our Charting a Bold Future Campaign, as a way to pay for the ambitious goals we laid out. The Plan turned into the four simple to remember planks: Inform (news), Inspire (music), Connect (digital) and Strengthen (financial). And like many other bigger fundraising campaigns, it took longer than expected, with changes in staffing and the volunteer board, we received a game-changer leadership gift, surprises both large and small, fierce disagreements, unexpected turns, but ultimately, we found success!

Now we have come off this most substantial philanthropic campaign in our institutional memory, raising nearly \$35 million, with a lead gift of \$2.4 million -

again, the largest single gift we've had. It has supported a trajectory of increased journalism, expanded our radio service into two discrete networks, and added more digital offerings on new platforms.

The cultural and political divisions in America today have many feeling like we are at a low point, and we can see first-hand the huge and growing distrust of what we do. It's troubling at many levels, and yet we know that our role at Maine Public is essential. We must establish the facts. We must be independent. And we must have civil dialogue. These are the cornerstones of journalism, and NPR and PBS and Maine Public will continue to set the standards for independent journalism in the twenty-first century. The good news is that because of our journalism and our quality content, our audience is the largest in our history. Nearly 250,000 listeners tune in to Maine Public Radio stations each week. 200,000 households turn on our TV channels each week. And over 20,000 digital online smart phone and computer users stream and page view our sites each week. each.

Not only is listening and viewing up, but our financial donors are out in force with over 50,000 households provide annual contributions for the first time in our history. And those supporters want us to succeed. They are proud of Maine's public television and radio stations. They are proud of their NPR and PBS content. They continue saying that with their ongoing Evergreen contributions. They say it with small, but steady annual memberships. They say it with larger charitable gifts that are starting to match what they give other nonprofits here in Maine. And what unifies them most of all? They love Maine Public!

**ALIGNMENT:** Our conversations with stakeholders - staff, board, donors, friends - in the past months have clear themes and preferences for what the strategic plan should look like. Yes, it's about news. Yes, it's still about digital. Yes, it's about younger audiences. And yes, it's being relevant to our larger Maine community. They want us to do more and grow more. But how do we proceed? Here are some thoughts on alignment.

Because of our past success, there is no question that we want to stay on a trajectory of growth and progress that we've created and enjoyed. Who wouldn't want to continue the success Maine Public has had? And we know that in our initial conversations with our stakeholders - they are telling us that our content is valued, and our emphasis on news and journalism is critically important to continue. The connection with NPR and PBS national journalism and national content, plus the new regional content we've created over the past 6 years, in a time when our country and world has so many problems, is critically important. They also want us, and expect us, to continue to invest in digital, with streaming, online, on-demand, mobile, and new ways to get our programming. And they also understand that the towers and broadcast signals we spend so much on are mission-critical to connect a rural, non-digital parts of Maine with the urban (and fully digital) larger cities of Maine.

But we also know that our stakeholders have suggested that we are not in real alignment as an organization - essentially our internal culture is not alignment. Here are a few areas:

- 1) Programming: The staff has different expectations than the Board and donors. In content, the staff places much more emphasis on television and local Maine content than the Board. The board had more emphasis on radio and NPR journalism, and had more questions about television, its future and its costs. Some voices remind us not to forget the older audiences while chasing a younger audience, and other voices are saying it's all about younger audiences.
- 2) Employees: Staff comments are not aligned with themes of managers. Employees largely value the multiple locations and managers broadly see the value in creating an efficient single location.
- 3) Tax-based funding: What role does the State of Maine funding play in the future? Wishful thinking aside, the Maine Legislature will very likely play a less important role in our future but that's ok. We have a good relationship, and we successfully worked with this current administration to become more independent and less reliant on Augusta than we've ever been. The percentage of funding from tax-based sources out of a total budget is likely smaller today than it probably ever has been in our history. And that trend will likely continue.
- 4) Department alignment: If we look at geography, and our building infrastructure, in our major departments we find nearly that every Director or Manager has employees located in at least two different facilities, and often three.

And because it has been this way for nearly 25 years or more, the stakeholder responses are not in alignment. Some see the divergent staff layout as a positive way to serve "all of Maine", others see an inefficient and unattractive workplace that impedes, rather than enhances our staff's ability to work to full potential. Which brings us to facilities!

#### 5) Facilities alignment:

We have been creating public media and working for the past 30 years in studios and buildings and newsrooms and transmitter sites that were created in a different era. We work from the Lewiston building, which WCBB built with pride for its own single public television station serving southern Maine. We work in Bangor, where the University of Maine, after starting on campus in Orono, moved MPBN to a former Air Force mess hall and dormitory building near the airport. We work in Portland, where a small news outpost in rented storefront studios on Marginal way, and a scrappy news team delivered Maine Things Considered every night for over 27 years, largely out of sight and away from the power structure of the two TV-centric institutions. And when the merger happened in 1992, there were no plans or resources to bringing the staff together in one locale. Over the years, each administration has wanted to address the need for improved workplace for the employees. Some progress has been made, like the new radio studios on Marginal Way, and the improvements in Lewiston and

Bangor. But the fundamental issue of 3 different headquarters for a staff of 100 professionals has not been resolved.

Isn't it time that our leadership and the community invest in bringing our disparate staff together? Could we envision a facility for the next 30 years of Maine Public? One that is purpose-built for a new generation of public radio news listeners, classical music performance space, digital content consumers, social media, visual production, and media that responds to the community? Studios where the obstacles are removed so that professional staffers can produce our own content, news and programming? A real broadcast home that reflects the pride and importance of Maine Public in the central community of Bangor, as well as with a state of the art facility that anchors Maine in the bustling and booming southern Maine?

As one of our trustees stated: "We need to be much more strategic about facilities than the ones we inherited. We need to align strategy and facilities - not where we have been, but about where we are going."

**VISION:** So, where are we going? And what will Maine Public look like in 3 years? Where will we be in 2022? What kind of programming will we offer? And how will our audiences use us?

First of all, much will be the same as we are today. Strong local journalism in our radio drive time and mid-day hours, from a team of reporters, producers, and hosts that are recognizable with names like Maine Calling and Maine Public News. A tight bond with NPR journalism, and PBS content which has been our hallmark for 50+ years, as the exclusive place where Mainers connect with the very best of public media - our storefront brands of BBC, Nova and Nature, and Masterpiece, and All Things Considered, as well as new shows that are dynamic and help bridge the gap between generations and races and economic equality.

But more too! We will embrace the notion of having 'a culture of journalism' inside Maine Public. More journalism on the weekend, 24/7 presence for our reporters and hosts, and better representation from parts of Maine that we can't cover today. Deeper enterprise reporting. Broader reach for our reporters - we could have a correspondent in Aroostook County, or hear from a Downeast reporter offering a feature story from Machias. A larger team of independent contributors may join us in filing news stories, vox-pop sound, digital essays, photos, and video pieces from dozens of locations in Maine, New England, and across the border into Maritime Canada that expands our reach and depth.

Our classical and cultural network will have not just a single host, but two or three recognizable daily on-air voices, who will also be out in the communities we serve. That new team will partner more fully with our best musical organizations - the Bangor Symphony, the PSO, the summer festivals, from Blue Hill to Bach - where listeners find out what's happening, and we embrace the music discovery and joy of live performance with our supporters and neighbors. And on the digital side, we'll reach new audiences via specific classical web content such as music-related podcasts, or videos of exclusive station studio performances, and Facebook live conversations that our hosts and musicians curate together.

Our contributor base will grow - radio, tv, online - with continued best practices. The Underwriting team also will continue its growth in the number of new businesses - and with improved metrics from categories, we can literally earn more revenue as our audience grows. Philanthropy will also not slow down, but move ahead as we engage our larger, energized base of major givers and foundations in a purposeful way.

Three years from now we may be actively fundraising for better, newer facilities for our staff and public. Those facilities will likely be focused in two primary locations, one north, and one south. We will take some of the best facilities ideas from our colleagues in public broadcasting, and design our spaces with the public in mind, and offices and studios that remove the obstacles to produce the programming that Mainer's need. Our locations will have purpose-built centers of excellence which reflect the sense of place and are healthy, productive centers for creative staff.

These new locations and facilities will have a clear focus and bias to be outward focused toward the community, perhaps with studios or space where we can invite audiences to see us in person, to watch radio shows, be a participant in a live music concert, or see the production of a TV debate, or creation of content for digital. A place where conversations happen, podcasts are made, new technologies are displayed and examined, and where we throw open the doors to have that exchange of energy between the donors and the creators of television, radio and every new media consumer in our region.

Through this work, we can bring context to a complex world; we can inspire and reward curiosity; we can create and enable conversations between and across users, journalists, and stations; and we can strengthen the connection that individuals and communities have with Maine Public. So, let's step out in confidence in our programming, our people, in our public, and in our passion for the next phase of public media in Maine, and see what we can do over these next years. Together.

---

---

###