

**A REPORT for WNYC to the REVSON FOUNDATION
2010-2013**

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INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to examine and document with qualitative and quantitative information

- the results of *WNYC*'s collaborations and partnerships over the past three years -- the lessons learned, what worked and what didn't;
- the changes, transitions, challenges and opportunities that *WNYC*'s integration of broadcast and digital have brought, especially with an eye to the station's increased capacity for local public affairs reporting; and
- the impact of these changes, along with the newsroom's recent reorganization, on *WNYC*'s ability to expand and deepen its local coverage and to increase engagement from users and listeners, especially in under-reported and underserved areas of the city and beyond.

The report is based on Internet research and interviews with some 30 individuals who work at *WNYC*, have been directly involved with *WNYC* in projects and initiatives or are expert observers of the transformation. *WNYC* provided statistics and some of the graphs. Peter D'Amato created others from data already public or that he culled from information that *WNYC* selectively provided.

SECTION ONE

PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIONS AND EXTENDING REACH

- *WNYC targets in this arena called for 45 new bloggers/contributors to the website with a focus on the outer boroughs and New Jersey, 30 in Year One and 15 more in Year Two; 20 new contributors from ethnic media, 10 in Year One and 10 more in Year Two; and six formal editorial partnerships with public media institutions: three in Year One and three more in Year Two.*
- *WNYC has experimented widely with forming partnerships and collaborations across media of all types and sizes, including ethnic media, and has added significantly to its range in New Jersey. Some of these arrangements have been hugely successful; others less so, but even those have provided valuable lessons that have informed subsequent collaborative efforts and the planning for future ones. By WNYC's count, 31 diverse new voices have been added as contributors and bloggers or as permanent staff members.*

In these three years, WNYC has experimented with new collaborations of all types, from ongoing formal and informal news- and data-sharing arrangements to shorter-term ties built around specific kinds of coverage, news events or tech-digital-data news expansion. In most of these, WNYC has been the driver; in others, it has been along for the ride. All have contributed to a better understanding of what is valuable and necessary to make the collaborations work, what the unanticipated benefits or issues are, and what to privilege or avoid in future ties. In some cases, it turns out that expanding expertise internally would have been the more effective, less cumbersome choice.



[New Jersey Spotlight](#) is the partnership everyone points to as the most successful of all these efforts, most notably in how it has enabled WNYC to deepen and broaden coverage of New Jersey, especially as both organizations chronicled the

[impact of Superstorm Sandy](#). New Jersey, more generally, has been a WNYC priority since its acquisition of New Jersey Public Radio in July 2011. Two events prompted the purchase: Gov. Chris Christie's decision to sell off these state-held properties and the way the decade-old newspaper crisis has precipitated such a sharp decline in the amount and depth of local news coverage by the *Star-Ledger* and local Gannett papers. WNYC then also became a founding member of the [New Jersey News Commons](#), a Montclair State University project that connects the state's various news outlets. It is [a joint initiative](#) to deepen New Jersey coverage, funded by the Dodge Foundation.



[ProPublica](#) has partnered with WNYC's John Keefe on numerous high-profile data digitization projects, starting with a very early [joint effort](#) announced with much fanfare in 2009 that evolved into *ProPublica's* "[Eye on the Stimulus](#)" project and its "[Recovery Tracker](#)." It has led to [any number](#) of felicitous collaborations since then, plus *ProPublica's* ready guidance and support on WNYC's subsequent news-apps coding and mapping projects.

"I will say this about the data news team, the data news effort," Keefe said. "It's actually conducive to partnering, because the data journalism community is small, vibrant and open to sharing and supporting each other."

Most recently, the two organizations partnered to map [government lending](#) for rebuilding in the Sandy flood zones, a co-branded project based on FOIA'd data that WNYC obtained and a map that *ProPublica* built.



Among collaborations in the data-digitization realm, it's impossible not to mention [Balance Media](#), which served as John Keefe's "proto-team" before WNYC had a data journalism team of its own.

Keefe hired Balance to enhance his own self-styled ability to develop seminal data-mining projects under the *WNYC* banner.

[*SchoolBook*](#), a “news, data and conversation site” about public and private schools in the five New York boroughs, began in partnership with *The New York Times* – with the *Times* in the lead role -- in September 2011. Eight months into the project, the *Times* backed out, but *SchoolBook* has continued without interruption under *WNYC*’s sole auspices.

**The
New York
Times**

WNYC has obtained a grant that will sustain *SchoolBook* for a year and added a data journalist to its staff. Meanwhile, the possibility of a new big media partnership is under review, and other external and internal avenues are being pursued, first to stabilize the site and then to reinvigorate it. Nonetheless, a year later, the loss of the *Times*’ involvement, especially the reach its traffic made possible, is still being sorely felt.

Transportation reporters from eight public radio affiliates across the country have been heavily involved with

TRANSPORTATION NATION



[*Transportation Nation*](#), a Rockefeller-funded project with some Revson crossover. Through it and *WNYC*’s coordination of the project, transportation reporters at *WNYC*, *WAMU*, *KUHF*, *YPR*,

KALW, *WMFE*, and from “*Marketplace*” and “*The Takeaway*” pool efforts to examine “the way we build, rebuild and get around the nation.” In addition, there are a number of informal partners in the group, such as Derek Wang of [*KUOW*](#) Seattle.

The idea for this effort came from Andrea Bernstein, now *WNYC*’s metro editor, on her return from a fellowship at Stanford. “We’ve taken leadership,” Bernstein said. *Transportation Nation* is a national reporting project, and much of the funding went to hire reporters at public radio stations across the

country. The reporters “do lots of information-sharing,” Bernstein said, and join a monthly conference call to share sources and best practices.

Bernstein explained that the idea behind the project was to improve the level of intelligence in transportation reporting. As part of the project, *WNYC* ran a “school” for transportation reporters to “come to New York and learn our tricks of the trade, have meetings with sources, see transportation and transit innovations in the New York City area.” She cited one great collaborative project that grew out of the consortium, an audio documentary produced by a number of the partners, called “[Back of the Bus](#).” It looked at mass transit, race, and inequality across the breadth of their coverage areas. In *WNYC*’s Greene Space, Bernstein also moderated a [live event](#) with major national transportation figures to further examine the issues the documentary had highlighted.

Wang of *KUOW* has found the collaboration useful, both for providing a wider audience for his own reporting through *Transportation Nation* – “Usually they say, ‘Love to have it’” – or if he is stuck on a transportation story and needs a source, he can email the group to set up contacts from elsewhere. Once, when an Orlando reporter mentioned during a conference call that he was doing a story on pedestrian safety, Wang said he was able to connect with him about his own work on the same theme.

“When my stories are shared with *TN*, they typically get more re-tweets,” he said, usually about 20 and once as many as 80. He added that the metric might be a little spurious since he hardly gets any when *KUOW* posts his work.

Matthew Peddie of *WMFE* in Orlando was hired in February 2012 with money coming from the Rockefeller grant. *WNYC*’s prowess with maps and graphics has been a great attraction for him, and at the conference-cum-school he attended at *WNYC*, he was able to meet with the data news team and bring some ideas back south. “It’s a good partnership,” he said, “and helpful for smaller stations.”



Other collaborations of the period include those with The New School's [Feet In Two Worlds](#) and CUNY's [Voices of NY](#), which were forged to expand ethnic coverage; with [Gotham Schools](#) (pre-SchoolBook), to deepen education coverage; with [Farai Chideya](#) and [Patchwork Nation](#), an open data project of the [Jefferson Institute](#) that "delivers national data with a local context," during election periods. For other public affairs reporting, [City Limits](#) and the [geography department at CUNY](#) with its extraordinary mapping capabilities, also have partnered with WNYC.



[NY-1](#) "are very good partners with us on all kinds of things," Jim Schachter said, including past candidate debates during election cycles and on-air interviews with its reporters.

Schachter became WNYC's Vice President for News in the summer of 2012. He said there are also joint efforts in development with [WABC-TV](#) "Eyewitness News" to sponsor future campaign-related debates. Schachter said to be able to collaborate with WABC is especially interesting. It is not only the biggest local television station in the country, but it also has the biggest Spanish-language television partner for debates in [Univision](#).



As for bloggers recruited to WNYC's expanding website, one big example of this is "[It's a Free Country](#)," which invited users to post their responses to a range of topics from legalizing pot to post-Sandy rebuilding. The opinion pieces moved in a

slow ribbon across the “Free Country” page, which closed after the January 2013 Presidential inauguration. Opinion bloggers posted at length, others commented, and others still rated the comments with an up-or-down vote.

WNYC has enlisted other new voices across its sites, 31 in all by WNYC’s count. [John Mooney of New Jersey Spotlight](#) doubles as one, and Sarah Kate Kramer, who did a short series called “[Niche Market](#),” focused on the city’s less obvious merchant economy. Taneesha Crawford, a parent coordinator from the South Bronx, contributed a series of four [posts](#) to *SchoolBook* in its first year.

From all this experimentation, WNYC has gleaned a number of “learnings,” in the phrase of Laura Walker, its President and CEO. Her hindsight list: “That both parties really want to do it; that it fits with their strategy; that they have the bandwidth to do it, and that they have somebody to support it,” both financially and in staff resources. Also, someone on both sides needs to be responsible for running the project.

The specifics from each partnership offer others. The starting point in almost every case seems to be strong pre-existing personal relationships. For example, John Mooney of *New Jersey Spotlight* was a human trifecta: He was already acquainted with a number of WNYC staff members, he knew Schachter from Schachter’s *New York Times* days, and Mooney went to school with Walker. Chideya was a natural choice for a series of programs during the 2012 election season on *The Takeaway* because of her prior political work for both WNYC and NPR. *SchoolBook* emerged from the brainstorm at a hackathon of two of the country’s five leading journalism digerati, Aron Pilhofer of the *Times* and Keefe of WNYC, thinking about how they might partner to mine schools data. As Mooney said, “A lot of what makes a good partnership is personalities, getting along.”

Mutual admiration clearly matters but mutual benefit matters even more. As the abortive collaboration with the *Times* makes clear, common long-term strategic objectives are *sine qua non*. From conversations with editors and staff at one or both of several of the most visible of these arrangements, it is clear that success requires dedicated, designated project leadership with

sustained high-level management backing. It also requires adequate staff for reporting and editing, as well as responsive back-end support. It's important that assigned personnel not be pulled off to deal with other priorities.

There also needs to be a clear set of agreed-upon expectations and a delineated distribution of workload and responsibility between or among the partners. It's best if there is more "complement" than "overlap" in audience and skills sets and a shared sense of the project's priority within the workflow of both organizations. It takes a common understanding by both sides of what meets publishable or on-air standards, and the willingness and ability of each to deliver on its promises in a timely way.

Also, at bottom, all partners have to see the project as worth the investment of time and money. The perceived benefit has to be fully mutual.

Here is how *New Jersey Spotlight*, which Revson money helped to fund, exemplifies the ideal. Both outlets share in the benefits of in-depth enterprise reporting – *WNYC* by featuring *Spotlight's* work on its site and in its on-air programming and *Spotlight* by gaining *WNYC's* audience and users. For *Spotlight*, the relationship has other direct and indirect benefits. Mooney explained that "an increasing slice" of *Spotlight's* funding – a third comes from sponsorship -- now derives from arrangements such as the one with *WNYC*.

In addition, *WNYC* has jointly applied with *Spotlight* for funding to chronicle post-Sandy recovery over the coming year. *Spotlight* is expected to take the reporting lead in this case. Interestingly, the funding request asked the Dodge and Knight foundations to offer *Spotlight* the greater share of any funds received with the understanding that *Spotlight* would hire an experienced radio reporter to translate some of its more in-the-weeds coverage for *WNYC's* broader audience.

Still, *WNYC's* participation is essential, Mooney said. "We couldn't have gained credibility without them." Informally, *WNYC's* own well-recognized expertise in data graphics has greatly helped the New Jersey group's own efforts at

mining data, and *WNYC*'s journalism coders have provided entree to their counterparts on the data team at *ProPublica*, who have lent further expertise.

Both *WNYC* and *Spotlight* also have found ways to exploit each organization's unique gifts to maximize story exposure. Mooney cited a recent example that had particularly elegant synergy, a three-way collaboration among *New Jersey Public Radio*, *Spotlight* and the *Hechinger Report*. It was a [series](#) of six "deep dive stories that had a local impact" about Newark's Quitman Street School, which launched in June 2012. The "[Brian Lehrer Show](#)" furthered discussion of the series with a [panel](#) Lehrer personally hosted at the NJPAC in Newark. It included Mayor Cory Booker. Mooney described the program as "a really important event - very lively with lots of engagement." This kind of attention on local urban schools matters especially since the *Star-Ledger* began focusing almost exclusively on the suburbs. There is almost no coverage of Newark now, Mooney said, beyond what *Spotlight*, which was started by a team of former *Star-Ledger* reporters and editors, and a few others provide.

Again, just as the collaboration encourages *WNYC* and *New Jersey Public Radio* to play megaphone to some of *Spotlight*'s strongest reportorial enterprise, so *Spotlight* enables *WNYC* and *New Jersey Public Radio* to expand and deepen the enterprising New Jersey coverage they are able to offer to their own users. This megaphone effect came up repeatedly in the interviews with *WNYC* and partner personnel, a recurrent theme in descriptions of the changes brought to the station by the concerted move into partnerships and digital presentation.

SchoolBook As for *SchoolBook*, beyond the interest in finding more effective ways to mine the reams of public school data now available, Pilhofer of the *Times* and Keefe of *WNYC* shared the wish to develop an "organic, iterative" news site, Schachter explained, that coder-journalists could use to test new ideas. They sought to create a site that could be of value beyond the specific focus of its subject matter. They wanted to experiment with a "post-moderation" of comments, instead of the current "pre-moderation" model.

This desire to encourage civil discourse birthed the idea to oblige all *SchoolBook* users who wished to comment to [log in via Facebook](#), thus disclosing their identities. As Keefe explained, especially when the subject is schools, there tends to be “a lot of emotion that is not really constructive,” legions of people who hate the teachers or principals or are upset with the Board of Ed. Both *WYNC* and the *Times* wanted buy-in from the schools for the project. The Facebook interface plan helped secure it.

Schachter described this part of the animating idea as a means of addressing the ongoing evolution of the “community-as-author ideal.” He has the ultimate dual perspective on *SchoolBook*. He was involved with the project from the start as the *Times*’ associate managing editor and, just at the point at which the *Times* disengaged, he was becoming *WNYC*’s vice president for news.

At *WNYC*, *SchoolBook* made sense because it fits so perfectly under one of the station’s major current objectives: a strong focus on education alongside finance and the economy, New York tech, breaking news, and now health. From *WNYC*’s New York market perspective, *SchoolBook* had the potential to act “as 2,100 hyperlocal sites,” Schachter said, “a community site for every school in the city.”

And for both the *Times* and *WNYC*, and for their data journalists and education reporters, *SchoolBook* opened a way to provide better analysis, context and visuals from the available data. Well before this, Mary Ann Giordano, who was the *Times* editor on the project, said there had been discussions at the paper about ways to surface schools data. “And our data folks felt very strongly that numbers alone are not what people want,” she said. “They want analysis and they want context next to them.”

The collaboration started with great energy, intentions and allocation of resources. *WNYC* was the decidedly junior partner. “The *New York Times* built it, the *New York Times* ran it and *WNYC* contributed to it,” Schachter explained. But for the journalism coming out of *WNYC*, it offered the appeal of *NYTimes.com*’s huge reach, the megaphone again, “gigantic by *WNYC*

standards,” he said. “If the *Times* put a *SchoolBook* article on the homepage of *NYTimes.com*, it had a reach that *WNYC*’s web apparatus never has otherwise,” except during the crisis surrounding Superstorm Sandy. As to how the *Times* benefitted, he said, *SchoolBook* at its peak put a special focus on citywide education coverage and ranked among the top 10 of the many *NYTimes.com* blogs.

But very soon after the launch, there was change in both the *Times* masthead and its metro desk leadership and with that came changes in strategic editorial priorities. The education editor, who was one of *SchoolBook*’s key backers, got reassigned -- to Jerusalem. By as early as that first December, only three months after the launch, the *Times* already had begun re-evaluating its commitment. Why? “The perception of the cost overran the perception of the centrality of New York City education coverage to the mission of the *New York Times*,” Schachter said.

Word of the *Times* decision to pull out got to *WNYC* in March. *SchoolBook* again slipped further down the priority queue of the journalist-coders and by May, the *SchoolBook* team was reduced to a two-woman gang: Giordano at the *Times* and News Editor Patricia Willens for *WNYC*. By the end of the relationship in the summer of 2012, if it hadn’t been for *WNYC*, Giordano said, there would have been no copy.

Partnerless since then, *SchoolBook* has continued without interruption under Willens’s direction with the widely admired work of Beth Fertig, *SchoolBook*’s contributing editor, and education reporter Yasmeen Khan. But traffic plummeted. Willens said *SchoolBook* now operates at a tenth of the traffic level it had “with the *New York Times* blasting us everywhere. It was a dramatic drop-off.”

In Walker’s words, the pullout not only caused *SchoolBook* to lose a parent but “cemented a real loss to the city” in the newspaper’s broader strategic move away from a local emphasis. “Their strategy changed,” she said, “and we can’t do anything about that.”

All the same, Willens said that moving from *SchoolBook*'s junior partner to its sole proprietor has been liberating, "an opportunity for us to step in." One example is the way that having to take charge of engaging and re-engaging users reminded her not to neglect posting items regularly on Facebook, an original strategy of the site that got sidelined because "there just wasn't the bandwidth" at the *Times* to grow it.

Since Willens has been putting attention into *SchoolBook*'s Facebook presence, "likes" have surged to 10,079 as of May 24, 2013 (There were 9,937 on May 8, 2013). "We've established a presence there," she said. A daily post now attracts anywhere from 600 to 900 views, plus modest numbers per post of likes and comments. However, she said, "Our ability, in a significant way is limited."

Keefe still thinks the project is amazing, "and it's only going to get more amazing because we're taking full control of it. It's more responsibility for us, but we're in control. It's not about coordinating editorial coverage. We're just doing it."

A growth in resources is helping this happen. Funding from the New Venture Fund is enabling the addition to the staff of the data journalist noted above. Schachter added the second full-time reporter, Khan, as soon as he arrived at WNYC last summer. Dean Cappello, WNYC's chief content officer and senior vice president, said there was a plan to combine *Schoolbook*'s efforts with [Radio Rookies](#), which gives teenagers the tools and training to create radio stories about themselves and their worlds. The program involves students from all five boroughs, which dovetails with WNYC's continuing push into the outer boroughs.

In addition, the search is on for a possible new media partner with enough reach to revive the lost attention. Further, in another useful "learning" that came courtesy of working with the *Times*, Schachter noted how helpful it would be if the reader/user base of any new partner would complement WNYC's rather than overlap with it in the way that *Times* local readers and users do. "I think that's a significant part of the logic," Schachter said. "In an

interesting way, *WNYC* would be the senior partner and own the technology but be able to expand the amount of journalism that we do.”

So caution, getting a clear sense of the firmness of the commitment of both partners, is another clear take-away from the experience with the *Times*. So is seeking partners who can “expand your reach” in sheer numbers but, even better, who can do so with a whole new sets of users. Another is making sure the collaboration design takes full advantage of the real gifts each partner brings. Again, complement trumps overlap.

On the issue of overlapping skills, Cappello said this is a hard one in designing collaborations and shows up often in cases where two radio-legacy outlets are involved. We’re producers, one side will say; we’re producers, too, will be the rejoinder. “And *WNYC*,” he said, “wants to be in the lead position editorially for anything that we create.”

Schachter pressed the point about *WNYC*’s singular ability to engage the public in conversation, a key theme of the digital push across all media now. “This is a talk station, so the idea of leading the conversation is in our blood,” he said. It’s something singular that *WNYC* brought to the partnership with the *Times*, however under-utilized, and that it can bring to any text-dominant environment.

“Right now,” Schachter said, “what *WNYC* has to position itself to do on *SchoolBook* is own and maintain the technology platform, update it for the modern age, and lead in the conception of crowd-sourcing, community-oriented projects. Because that’s something that is in *WNYC*’s DNA in way that it isn’t in any publishing, any newspaper DNA.”

Throughout the *SchoolBook* partnership, Giordano was also keenly aware of *WNYC*’s “talk” advantage, but wasn’t able to capitalize on it. With the *Times* leadership losing interest in the project so soon after it started, she said, all of those moments of, “We gotta fix this; we gotta do this differently; how do we telegraph this message” were left hanging. This was especially true of the

community conversation component, she said, “where we wanted *WNYC* to shine, and they did. But any new development just stopped.”

Keefe, too, said growing the engagement piece of the project is a big part of what *WNYC* plans for the future of *SchoolBook*. “We really have the data down,” he said. “We really have the story – the journalism. And it always has been from the get-go how do we design meaningful engagement, so that this isn’t just about people posting stuff.”

Giordano at the *Times*, looking back on the experience with *SchoolBook* and with the *NYTimes.com* [Locals](#), which she also shepherded, offered these reflections: “I think the biggest problem with partnerships is you really, really have to give people time to work on the partnership, work on the common goals.

“If I were to do this over, I would establish some baseline of staffing, baseline of goals, make sure that we understood – If there had been an opportunity – I think if I had understood what *WNYC*’s strengths were, they weren’t necessarily in written reports, I would have been able to adjust,” she said. “I’d figure out a way to use audio better. I’d figure out a way to get them to work on copy. But because we were in limbo for most of it, none of these steps got done. It was all about maintaining, just keeping it going.”

She said if she had to grade the relationship, it would get a C+ “and the reason is a lot on our [the *Times*’] end, with our weaknesses, the mixed messages, the failure to dedicate the resources.”

“We found early on that we loved their data visualization stuff, we loved their interaction,” she said. But once the site launched and then needed new iterations to fix the kinds of issues that inevitably emerge with digital projects, both sides “fell down not maintaining it, not improving it. That was a big problem for me.”

She said the weakness on the *WNYC* end manifested itself in the effort to translate radio into text. “Really,” she said, “go back and read some of the

posts. They were great on radio but not great in print. And our standard was very different.”

Giordano explained: “It’s not so much us imposing that standard but our readers imposing that standard. I’d get emails, like, ‘The *New York Times* should do better than this’ -- that kind of thing. The reports, if you listened to them, they were great, but when you read the print version -- it’s just different.”

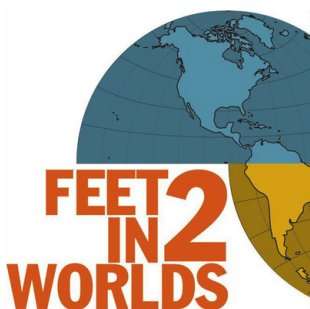
Interestingly, Willens had a similar assessment of the uneven match in some of *WNYC*’s other partnerships, the ones she has managed, between the expectations of *WNYC* listeners and users and what the smaller community partners provided.

Not only that, but translating and re-doing material that came from other outlets so that it met *WNYC*’s print-to-air needs and standards often turned out to be too much work to warrant the investment of time. Sometimes, editors reported, there was a sense of collaboration for collaboration’s sake rather than the original impetus -- of being a better way to serve and further diversify the listening and using public.

Besides that, with what *WNYC* now can accomplish on its own, given the dramatic ramp-up in staffing – for instance, there is a staff reporter now assigned full time just to cover immigration -- that need for a deeper ethnic reach can be fulfilled with less stress from inside the newsroom. The increase in staff also has brought the side benefit of significantly more in-house diversity. That means, Willens said, there is “less need for others to fill our holes.”

And yet even at the time when the need was more acute to seek a greater range of voices from outside, often, once partnered, too little material would arrive. For instance, pre-*SchoolBook*, *Gotham Schools* and *WNYC* joined forces in October 2010 to introduce “[The Big Fix](#)”, an examination from every perspective of what it would take to transform three New York City high schools. *WNYC* staffers reported personality clashes between the two

organizations and some resentment at *WNYC* that *Gotham's* reporters couldn't or wouldn't deliver audio. Indeed, *WNYC* did the far heavier lifting: Beth Fertig for *WNYC* produced 18 audio pieces with web text for the project. *Gotham's* two reporters wrote a total of six pieces between them, only in text.



A similar situation arose with *Feet in Two Worlds*. Cappello said in that case, the issue was less about unmet expectations or having to reconstitute its work to meet *WNYC's* ethos and standards, as in other cases. The problem in his view was how little material *Feet in Two Worlds* produced. "It's just a very low-volume project that we helped to create and helped to pay for," Cappello said. "But over time, it starts to feel like it's less and less – it's not less valuable, but we actually can't create enough impact with it because we don't have enough of it."

However uneven the various experiences with other media outlets large and small have been, the "learnings" from all have been vital. The frustrating experience with *Gotham Schools* led to a better understanding generally of the importance of a designated point-person at each partner to manage any such relationship; hence, Willens' appointment to focus exclusively on *SchoolBook*. It also helped *WNYC* figure out how to structure its relationship with *New Jersey Spotlight* to maximum mutual benefit, and that has been a clear success.

And however disappointing *Feet in Two Worlds* may have been in output, it brought [Arun Venugopal](#) to *WNYC*. He, in turn, created [Micropolis](#), a popular "multi-platform series that examines race, sexuality, religion, street life and other issues," a remarkable vehicle for delving deeply into life in the boroughs.

And despite the numerous issues detailed above, Schachter thinks that [SchoolBook's great "last gasp"](#) of the *Times* era provides the perfect illustration of what a powerful collaboration can do. At the end of the 2011-12 school year, *SchoolBook* posted a project tracking how much money public school parents were donating to help their children's schools, a story that ran as the

cover to the [Times' Sunday Metropolitan section](#), as a [segment on Brian Lehrer's show](#) and on a round dozen blog posts.

Schachter recalled, "By having Brian Lehrer segments inviting people to contribute their stories, I think that's a significant part of how we ended up with 500 people filling out Google Docs, giving us the detailed information. As you can see, it had *SchoolBook* all over it," he said.

"WNYC saw value both in the volume of journalism that a local newspaper does about education and the reach that a newspaper website has," he said. "And that the complement – that the virtuous circle of newspaper website and the megaphone of the Brian Lehrer program -- is the perfect combination to engage community on a local news topic."

SECTION TWO

DATA, DIGITAL THRUST and the VEXATION OVER METRICS

- *WNYC targeted an increase in unique visitors to its news sites, an increase in monthly page views and an increase in social media following.*
- *WNYC has exceeded these targets, catapulting the station to a position of national prominence in hyperlocal-to-national data mining and most recently by incorporating sensors into a digital product. The power and potential of embeddable open source news products to extend WNYC's reputation and reach is vast. The staff ramp-up in the arena of digital, data and developers represents 14 of 38 new hires since 2010. Creating new apps, especially those that serve the growing population of mobile users, is a high priority with innovative new products now in beta testing. The focus is on reconstituting the traditional radio program for the mobile era and finding ways to tap new members from this growing user base. Finding ways to measure engagement effectively remains a big conundrum, especially since radio audiences and digital users continue to be measured separately.*

“The poster child for data journalism” is how Josh Benton of *Niemanlab* described *WNYC* in a recent email exchange.

ProPublica's president, Dick Tofel, placed *WNYC's* senior editor for data among the top five U.S.-based leaders in the field.

Ben Welsh of the data desk at the *Los Angeles Times* said *WNYC* is “pushing the envelope on mapping” as well as in its embrace of new frontiers like the [use of sensors](#) in its Cicada project. He also wishes the *L.A. Times'* maps looked as good as *WNYC's* on mobile, an area where *WNYC* itself is seeking to look and do even better.

Tracing the story of how a radio station in less than two years shot to national prominence in the soundless, highly visual world of data mapping is a synecdoche for the newsroom's wider – it is fair to say exuberant -- digital embrace since 2010.

A strategic plan that in 2005 self-described *WNYC*'s mission as "radio first," by 2011 had replaced that phrase with the words "radio and digital destination." What then was called "radio producer" became "multi-platform content creator." [See *WNYC strategic plans 2005, 2011*]

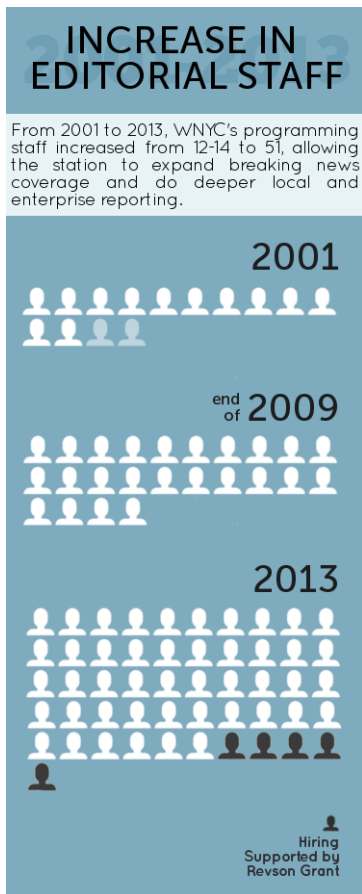
The post-Revson grant goals called on the staff to combine content and technology, to deliver content to people where they are and to engage audiences in its creation. It envisioned a three-way split between original material, curated or aggregated material and user-generated material. It made developing mobile a priority, from delivery of news and news graphics to innovating in ways that facilitate a user's ability and inclination to sign up for membership. *WNYC* reports that in just one year, 2012, the share of *NYPR*'s digital audience that accesses its content via smartphone or tablet increased from 7 percent to 24 percent.

A total of 14 of the newsroom's 38 new hires since 2010 fill positions in the categories of digital, data or developer. Reporters are expected to cross platforms. Jim Schachter, the new vice president for news, was brought aboard to help bring about this digital transformation and to reorganize the newsroom to support *WNYC*'s broader, more "nimble" – a word we heard used more than once -- all-platform approach.

Many of the new hires, including Schachter, have only been at *WNYC* about a year or even less and most are intentionally not radio natives, explained Dean Cappello, *WNYC*'s chief content officer and senior vice president of programming. (He offered as a total aside how enamored of producing radio even those hired with purely digital backgrounds seem to become after they arrive.)

"... The irony is in the reorganization of editorial resources," he said, "we've just put people with very good experience in positions of leadership." Xana O'Neill was hired from *NBC Digital* as online news editor. Schachter named her executive editor of *WNYC* News, to be in charge of the newsroom's "day-of" report across all platforms. That is, both radio and digital are her

responsibility. The animating ideas are: Is there the needed range of experience? Is the journalism across platforms at the level it needs to be?



Although the newsroom staff is now four times the size it was in 2001, *Appendix A: Staff growth list* when there were only a dozen or so reporters, producers and editors combined, it still is not large enough to do everything. Schachter has put his emphasis on making sure breaking news and “day-of” stories are extremely well-covered but in a way that frees the beat reporters to focus on original enterprise, deeper features and investigations. His stated principle is to always ask how the newsroom can add value. Sometimes, he said, that is best accomplished simply by aggregating - attributing solid reporting to another news outlet. Sometimes it involves sending a general assignment reporter out on a story, or having a producer arrange an interview. Sometimes it means decisions to pass on a story, or to pass on producing a story for every platform.

Cappello said it often may just not be worth it, for example, to spend the time it takes to turn spot news stories into Web posts “because such stories come and go and do not do much for us.” For major stories in other locales, WNYC will curate or turn to *NPR* for its coverage. For the Boston Marathon explosion, for example, WNYC relied on the feed from Boston’s *WBUR*. Those kinds of battlefield decisions also serve to free up staff for more in-depth local reporting.

One overarching goal for WNYC, Cappello said, is figuring out how the station can help lead other local stations “and what does collaboration look like?” He mentioned an app in development and being beta tested that will offer a variety of content options and the prospect of opening new ways to encourage

new membership. The huge online following for [Radiolab](#), he said, represents another opportunity: to tap new members from those downloading its podcasts at a current rate of five to eight million times a month.

Across the leadership, there is recognition of the great value of data journalism and the importance *WNYC* has attached to making these news apps and graphics fully embeddable on other sites, thus extending reach. All of these products are open source and easily shared, so much so that other organizations do the “work of propagating us out into the universe,” as Cappello put it. At the same time as these products serve to elevate *WNYC*’s stature as an innovator, the station’s imprimatur enhances the value of the information being imparted and thus also builds *WNYC*’s reputation. This, in turn, attracts new users.

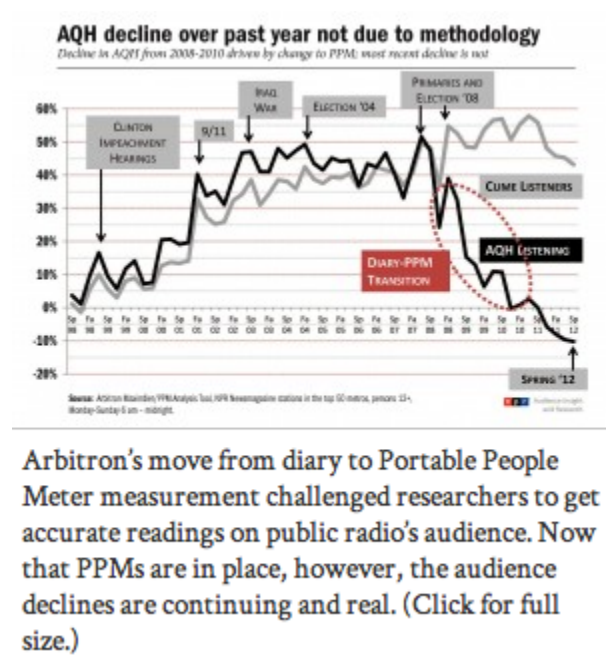
Several local media sites with major traffic, including *New York Magazine*, the *New York Daily News* and *Gawker*, have been among the most instrumental in disseminating *WNYC*’s work, Cappello said.

Measuring traffic and measuring engagement in a meaningful way represent the same challenge at *WNYC* as they do for every other journalism outlet. For a radio station, however, there is a further complication: Arbitron data, which measures radio listening, is not integrated with Web streaming data. Currently, streaming numbers are climbing at *WNYC*, but radio numbers are “essentially flat,” Cappello said.

He explained one aspect of the problem: “How do I conclude whether that streaming audience is migrated from radio or are they all new? It’s sort of impossible to know. So you just have to say, ‘I’m going to get out there in as many places as I can.’ And for the sake of the business of *WNYC*, we want to tie it back to us in some way.” The embeddable maps, for instance, direct traffic back to *WNYC.org*, as do the embeddable players *WNYC* offers for its “Freakonomics” or “Here’s the Thing” programs.

In terms of the Arbitron data, “flat,” however, may be the new radio “good.” Other public radio stations have reported a ratings slide during this period,

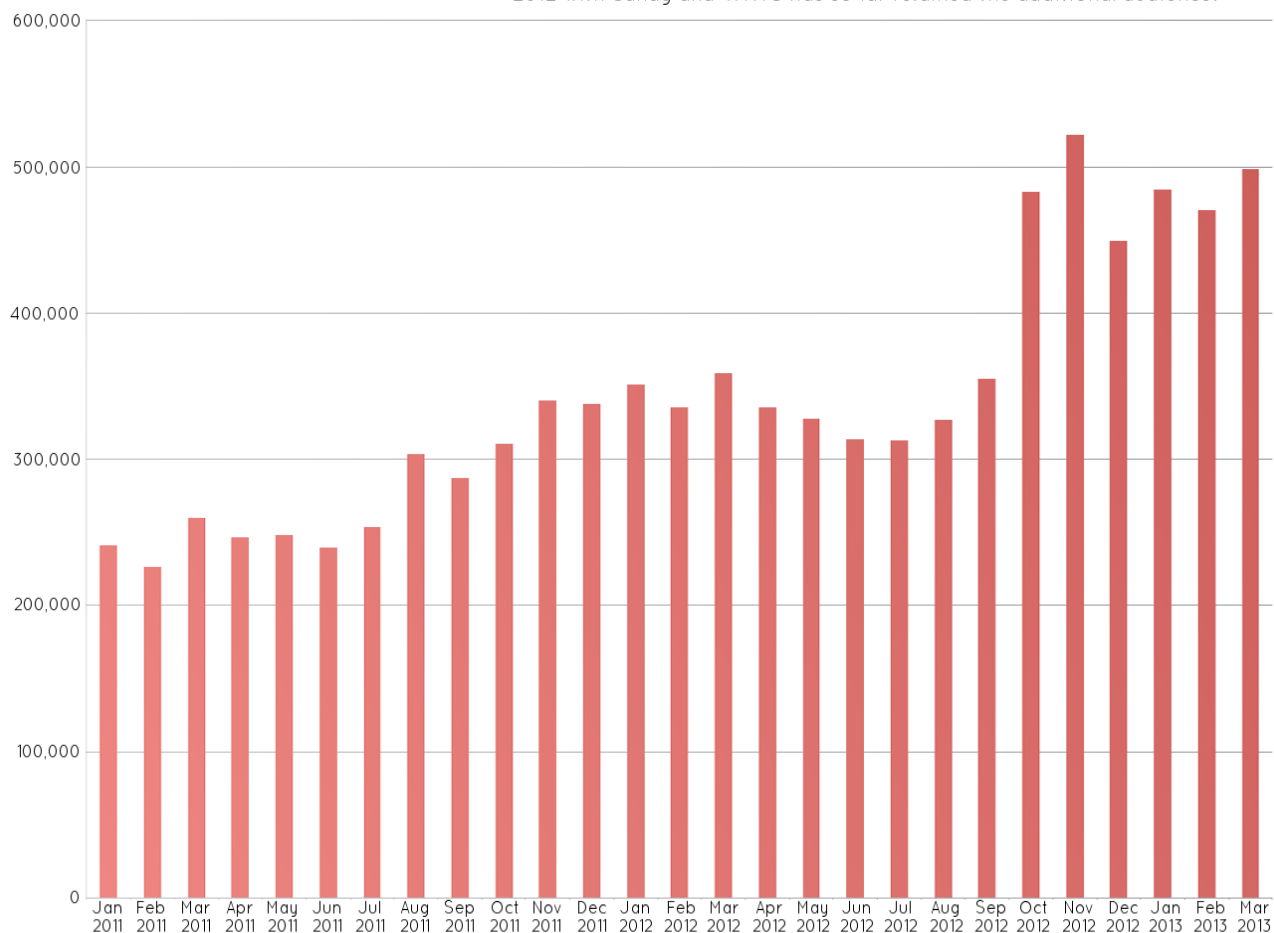
according to a 2012 issue of American University's *Current* that was accompanied by this chart and legend:



Charts of WNYC Streaming Cume and Sessions figures follow:

STREAM CUME

While WNYC's terrestrial radio numbers stayed nearly flat in 2011 to 2013, strong growth is seen in their FM and AM Internet streams. The monthly cume (the number of cumulative audience members) spiked in October 2012 with Sandy and WNYC has so far retained the additional audience.

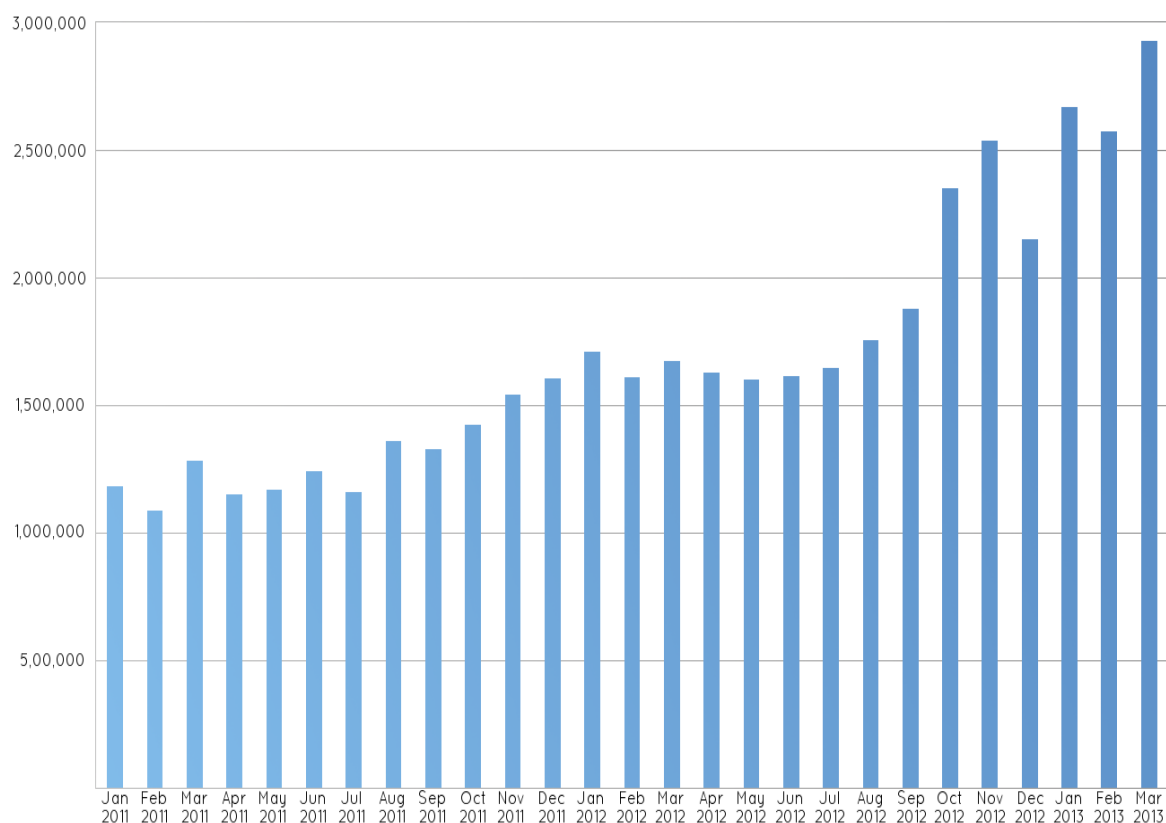


Online audience growth

WNYC's monthly cume (which measures the number of unique audience members who have streamed online content for five minutes or more) for its AM and FM feeds grew in fits and starts in 2011 and 2012. The numbers spiked with Superstorm Sandy, and so far WNYC has maintained these higher cume levels.

STREAMING SESSIONS

Streaming sessions follow the same pattern as cume. The number of sessions spiked in October 2012. After a low in December 2012, post-Sandy growth was even stronger for streaming sessions.



Online usage growth

Monthly streaming sessions follow a similar pattern as monthly cume. Streaming sessions measure how many times streamed content has been listened to through the *WNYC.org* feed, *WNYC*'s mobile app, embedded audiostreams or third-party online radio apps.

Besides the streaming figures, where are other early successes in this concerted thrust into digital? Laura Walker said *WNYC* leads public radio nationally in podcasts, and not just from "Radiolab." Other radio programs such as "Brian Lehrer," "Leonard Lopate," "On the Media," "Freakonomics," "Here's the Thing with Alec Baldwin" and "Studio 360" also have active download communities. Digitally, by presenting audio reports as brief text stories rather than in the traditional public radio mode of transcripts (stories are more easily searched and thus work better than transcripts in a search-driven world), *WNYC* is out in front of most stations and *NPR* as well.

Walker said *WNYC*'s push to reconstitute the traditional radio program for the digital world has paid off. Instead of turning hour-long shows into full-length podcasts, *WNYC* has re-thought the concept, offering the programs in segments of roughly 20 minutes. "[Please Explain](#)" on Leonard Lopate is one very popular example, she said, "just a short little podcast."

She affirmed that creating new apps for mobile is a high priority. As noted, the audience across NYPR properties that accesses its content via smartphone or tablet grew three times in size, according to *WNYC*'s figures. Walker also mentioned the customized mobile app in development that Cappello spoke about, further explaining that it will allow users to note the time it takes them to commute to and from work and also note their special interests before customizing a podcast for them. She said it was partly algorithm and partly hand-curated, adding, "That's one of the questions. Those are the kinds of things where we are trying to lead."

Taking leadership is a byword we heard repeatedly. In data mapping, this happened serendipitously but at warp speed. More importantly, it has provided whole new ways for *WNYC* to fulfill its mandate to do public affairs journalism.

John Keefe was still news director in 2009 when he became enchanted with the way the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune* all were coupling web technologies in brand new ways with "old school data journalism," once more commonly known as computer-assisted reporting of the Excel spreadsheet-Access-SQL database variety.

As news director at the time, he could not pursue this during working hours, so in his free time, he taught himself. He took one-day classes, attended conferences and workshops and tinkered. Late in 2010, a reporter came into the newsroom – data-mapping projects are almost always the outgrowth of a reporter's initial idea, he said – asking if *WNYC* might develop some brand new maps to explain the new census data when it became available early in 2011.

Keefe spoke to data journalists at [IRE](#), the Investigative Reporters and Editors organization, and at [NICAR](#), the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He taught himself how to use shapefiles, a widely used file format for data mapping, “and then lo and behold, when the Census hit, we were all ready to crunch the data and [spit it back out as maps](#).”

“And people were embedding them, using them,” Keefe recalled. “And we used them to tell stories. We could see right away the [drop in the African-American population in Harlem](#) and we sent a reporter up to Harlem. We could see it in [Spanish Harlem](#), too, [the drop] among Latinos. We told that story. And we were just kind of off and running.”

The census maps also grew *WNYC*’s audience. The live maps were released the day the embargo was lifted. Immediately, *WNYC* added [stop-and-frisk](#) data, maps that explained the ethnic composition of the city, information about [same-sex couples](#), the movement of people because of [redistricting](#). *WNYC* has been re-purposing this information ever since. What has set the work apart was Keefe’s discovery that by incorporating Google maps, he could enable a user to type in a personal address and zoom in on a given census block.

Other ideas emerged, some too sophisticated for Keefe’s nascent skills as a coder. That’s when he engaged the “proto-team” at [Balance Media](#), as noted in Section One. Initially they worked with Keefe on a [project on teacher evaluations](#) that got stuck in the courts when the teacher’s union sued to have the data withheld. It eventually ran on *SchoolBook*. They also did a project on abandoned dug or half-completed subway projects, titled “[Lost Subways](#).”

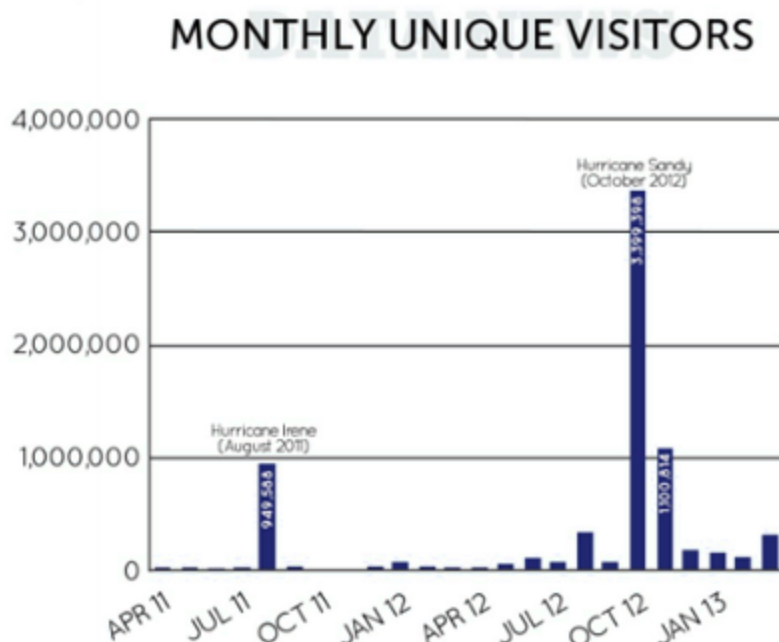
In June of 2011, Keefe noticed that the city had published a shapefile for New York’s hurricane evacuation zones and put a copy of the PDF in his desk drawer. He had *WNYC*’s engineering department print it out on a plotter, which it uses for big schematics. His thought was that in the event of a hurricane, it would be important to know where the flood zones are, both for the public’s information and also to be able to pinpoint where to send reporters.

When the map appeared on the city's Open Data site at nyc.gov, he figured it was the file the city had used to make its shapefiles. And from his experience with the census, he knew how to put that information on a Google map, again with an address-finder. He tucked it away in his computer.

By August of 2011, Keefe's role had shifted into full-time data news production. There was concern at the time that Hurricane Irene might hit New York. Would there be evacuations? "It was just in the air," Keefe recalled. He tweaked [the map](#) on his subway ride to work and gave it a legend. It started getting traffic as soon as it went up on the site. In fact, at that point, *WNYC* was the only news outlet in the city to publish the information.

"So then the next morning, the mayor ordered an evacuation of Zone A. At that point, nobody knew what zone they were in . . . and so our traffic went crazy. People were just googling for it. So our traffic spiked."

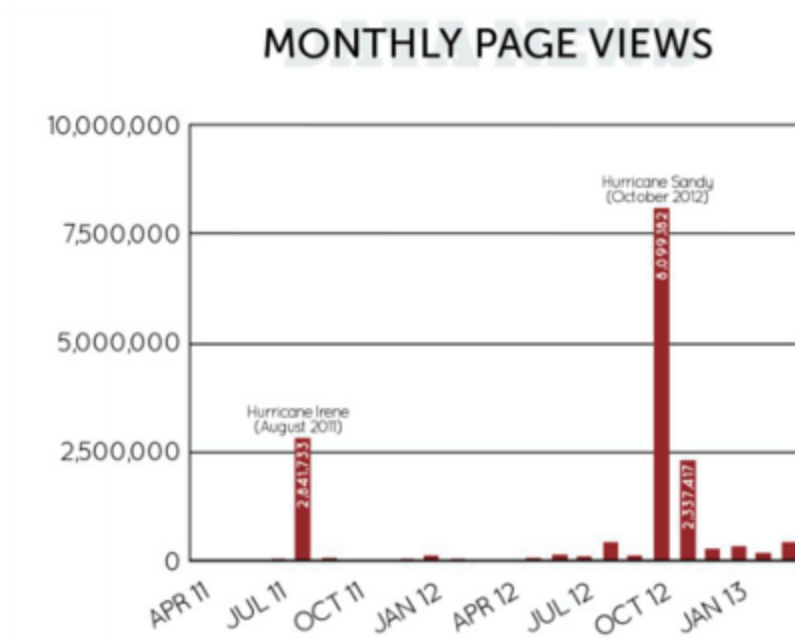
A new administrator had the foresight to move the map off *WNYC*'s little project server to a place in the cloud. Keefe, when asked, predicted it would generate three times the normal traffic. It turned out to be 30 times greater than usual. The mayor had instructed people to check the *nyc.gov* site but the city site crashed under the weight of the user load. "So people Googling around for this kept finding us," Keefe said. "And we basically provided this public service when nobody else did."



There in a crisis

Publishing the evacuation map before Hurricane Irene in 2011 gave *WNYC* its biggest tally of unique visitors (949,588) in its history. The numbers were eclipsed when Sandy struck in October 2012 and *WNYC* recorded 3,399,398 visitors.

Keefe said the map amassed the largest traffic to the site by an order of magnitude greater than any other single thing of any sort *WNYC* had attempted up to that point. “It sort of got everyone’s attention,” Keefe said. “The numbers were kind of through the roof, which showed that we were actually serving the city and also that we were a force to be reckoned with – maybe.”



There in a crisis

Roughly matching unique visitors, *WNYC* breaks its record for page views in August 2011 (2,841,733) and again in October 2012 (8,099,182.)

And that started the process of forming the in-house data team, which now consists of Keefe and two other full-time staff members, all hired very recently. Schachter said more hires for this department are in the offing, including the new, shared data person for SchoolBook.

It's a counterintuitive deduction at first, but Keefe is convincing in his explanation of how these silent visuals are "incredibly radio," especially for an audience like *WNYC*'s. After a decade with the station, he knows the listener/user profile well: smart, educated, analytical lifelong learners who want "smart, complete content." The maps qualify. And, they are great fodder for what is singular about talk radio: talk.

"You can talk about what's on the maps, the stories they tell," Keefe said. Before the stop-and-frisk maps were even published, [Ailsa Chang](#) (snapped up by [NPR](#) in August 2012), came to Keefe and together they figured where the most teen stop-and-frisks were and which high school was geographically closest to the cluster. "And she walked in the door to the high school and

[found all these kids](#) who had been stopped-and-frisked many times,” Keefe said. Chang’s [last project](#) for *WNYC* in August 2012 was her Bronx court stories, in [two parts](#), which, incorporating stark data, showed how rarely criminal cases are prosecuted.

Brian Lehrer was using a spreadsheet to pinpoint “[The New Littles](#),” a project for his show that took a closer look at all the city’s new immigrant enclaves. Keefe turned that into a map. “You can see from the census data where the concentrations of people are. And that was really powerful. And as much as people used the map, it was all about talking about it on the air and about, ‘What does this mean?’ ‘Where are the New Littles?’ Tell us, where is your place?’”

Keefe mentioned the national-to-your-own-locale “[How We Commute](#)” map that happened to have been posted about an hour earlier on the day of our interview. He opened it up on his laptop. “Right now, 1,400 people are looking at this map,” he said, “and it’s being embedded in other places. Oh, *Slate*! *Slate* just picked us up. So there you go. They’re using *WNYC*’s logo on *Slate*.” As Keefe said as he checked the page views the morning the map launched, “We’re kinda knockin’ it out of the ballpark here. It’s getting crazy amounts of traffic.” That continued. Between March 5, 2013, when the map was published, and May 23, it had attracted more than 300,000 unique users.

Also on March 5, *ProPublica* posted the map of post-Sandy government lending that it created from data FOIA’d by *WNYC*, mentioned in Section One. By early May, *ProPublica* reported 4,000 page views for its story, another 2,000 for the map with another 1,000 Web reprints. This is middling for *ProPublica*’s investigations and given its largely national audience, likely attributable to this particular project’s local focus. *ProPublica* said the response on social media was good: 150 tweets, 135 Facebook likes and 19 comments. *Grist* and *Drudge Report*, among many other platforms, picked up the story and linked to the map. The published credit to *WNYC* thus earned it traffic from audiences it does not normally reach.

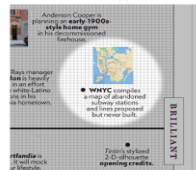
The data-mapping emphasis also figured in the 2012 election coverage, extending the partnership with *Patchwork Nation* to provide WNYC with “[the Patchwork Vote](#),” a unique, real-time view of national election results based on the psychographics of the census tracts, “from the wealthy Monied Burbs to the Service Worker counties.” (Elections are another arena where the local geographic concentration of high-profile national figures -- the Clintons, Bloomberg, Cuomo, Giuliani -- causes the local and the national news agenda to meld.)



"It defines WNYC as cool."

DATA NEWS

Data news earns WNYC embeds and mentions in a broad range of local and national outlets.



There are more whimsical, conversation-juicing projects, too. They mean great attention both locally and beyond, and great traffic. Two notable ones this year are the “[Dogs of NYC](#)” map, showing New York’s canine pets by breed, name, and area, again right down to the zip code, and the “[Cicada Tracker](#),” which started out with the WNYC Newsroom and the data news team and then was adopted by “RadioLab.” Shares on Facebook have exploded as the project finds its audience. Its shareable nature allows it

to be promoted across WNYC shows and platforms and in outside venues, too. There is a [school science project](#) underway via *SchoolBook*, giving the project a localized dimension beyond the anticipated invasion of clacking critters, and a citizen science project in partnership with the [New York Times Learning Network](#). The Cicada project has been another source of significant national attention for WNYC as an example of both citizen science and sensor-based journalism. A Google search of “WNYC” “Cicada” brings up more than 17,000 citations.

Superstorm Sandy and its aftermath in the fall of 2012 was enormously important for the station, the symbolic pinnacle of its transformation from

sleepier beginnings before 9-11, when it first saw and embraced the imperative to become a leader in breaking local news.

It also demonstrated what was possible -- first with the will to be the go-to media outlet in a civic crisis -- and then with the ability to deliver on that promise with a large enough staff of seasoned reporters, editors and producers of proven ability. Staff size and talent, Schachter said, are essential to the mission. For Sandy, reporters fanned out to the flood zones, where communications and transportation were severely hampered or nonexistent. The partnership with *New Jersey Spotlight* paid off in grand measure. Web traffic and listenership was comparatively off the charts.

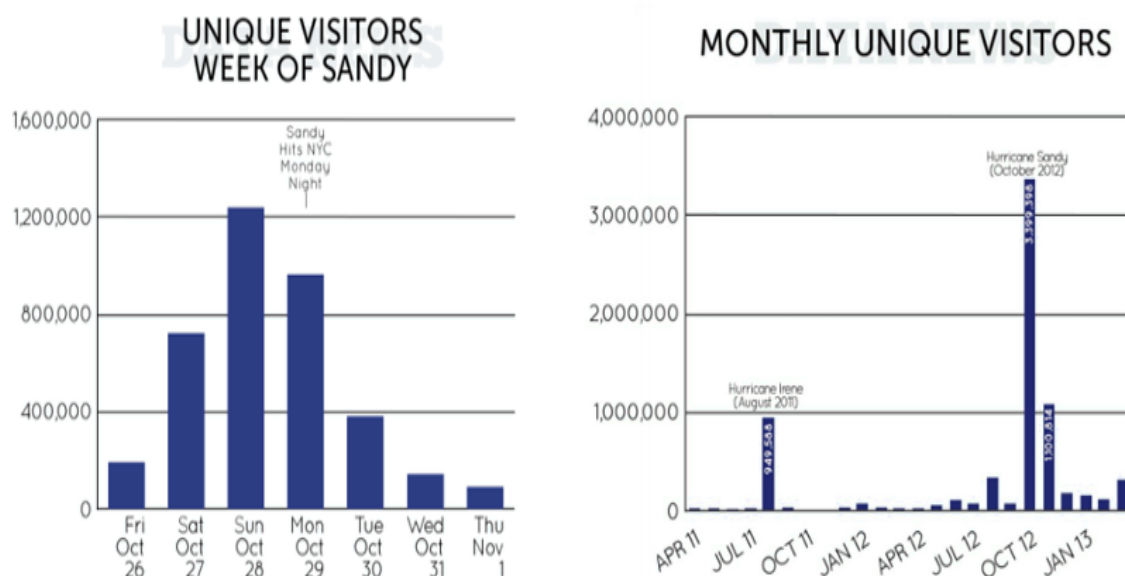
Nothing expresses WNYC's value in that crisis more poignantly than a quote from a flood victim included in WNYC's Peabody submission: "The only thing we have working is a transistor radio. The only thing we have. All Internet service is out. All electric is out. No cell phone service. The phones. Nothing is working down here."

And then the intro, from Brian Lehrer:

This is special coverage of Hurricane Sandy on WNYC and New Jersey Public Radio. And New Jersey has seen the land fall. It happened exactly an hour ago right around Atlantic City and you've been hearing the reports from many of our listeners all around the region about how we are all being shaken. We will ride it out with you tonight, with Amy Eddings, with the WNYC news team. More guests from the power companies and elsewhere and many of your calls to provide information as eyewitnesses in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Stay with us on WNYC and New Jersey Public Radio.

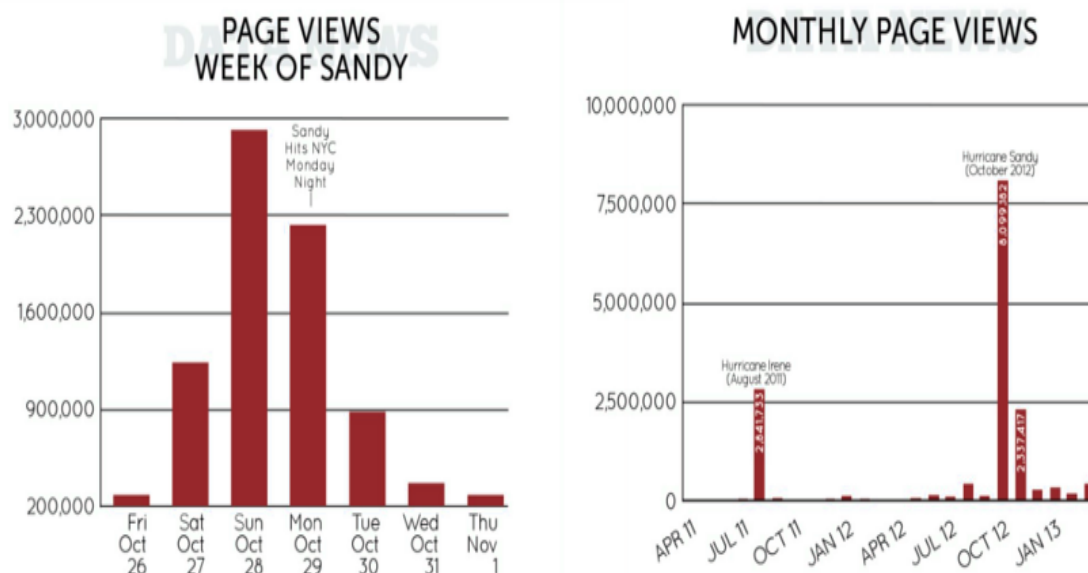
In the data realm, WNYC again rolled out Keefe's interactive map of evacuation zones and emergency centers. The map received millions of page views on WNYC.org as well as through the numerous other online outlets that embedded it. Just on October 28, 2012, the day before Sandy struck the city,

embedded maps from *WNYC's* data news team received over 1.2 million cumulative unique visitors and recorded just under three million page views.



Helping the Region Prepare

With the Sandy evacuation map on the site, Data News embeddable assets recorded over a million unique visitors on the day before Sandy struck the city.



35

Be the Go-To

Data News's maps also received a staggering number of pageviews.

Data news continued to be a vital asset for reporting after the storm. [“Elevation and Sandy Deaths”](#) demonstrated how Staten Islanders who drowned may have been caught off guard when the waters overtook their beachfront road. Keefe said the idea grew out of reporting by Matthew Schuerman, who learned from Staten Island residents about the bowl-like topography on the other side of a highway that runs along the beach. The highway serves as a berm. When the water overtopped the highway, it quickly filled the bowl of land on the other side. Keefe plotted the places where the deaths took place against the elevations. “The purple areas are the two-to-four-foot elevations,” he said. “So you can see the bowl and you can see that all these people drowned. They all drowned in their homes and their basements.”

Schachter also believes data matters for the wide national exposure it attracts. “It defines *WNYC* as a leader in media generally and public media specifically,” he said. It contributed to *WNYC* winning a [Silver Baton](#) DuPont-Columbia award in 2012 for Ailsa Chang’s stop-and-frisk coverage. “It defines *WNYC* as cool in ways that other news organizations are desperate to achieve,” he said, “as they strive to engage younger (and also more sophisticated) audiences.”

What’s next? “Making maps appear better on mobile,” Keefe said. “More mobile sharing, more mobile work,” he said, “and more attention to investigative projects.” He mentioned one in particular he has admired, created by the data journalism team at the *Los Angeles Times* (“Say what you will at the *Los Angeles Times*,” Keefe said, “but their data team kicks butt.”) [“How Fast Is the LAFD Where You Live?”](#) breaks down where the L.A. Fire Department’s response to 911 calls has either exceeded or not met its standard. He said there also were a couple of ideas in the vein of the much-admired Washington, D.C. site, [Homicide Watch](#), that his team wants to pursue, but as one-off investigations rather than in a sustained commitment.

Keefe said at the regular staff meetings when traffic figures are compared, data journalism and the enormously popular [Radiolab](#) site often duke it out for first place, with data holding its own.

But what about retention of new users after the mapping projects are posted? To that question, Tom Bartunek, *WNYC*'s vice president of planning and special projects, gave a heavily contextualized yes in response, the same way he did for all of our questions seeking meaningful metrics.

"You can infer that this has become a standard part of our branding and that it appeals to people," he said. "We do know that as our digital content has increased, and our focus on digital and the far more sophisticated platforms that we've created with our own internal staff, that the digital traffic has zoomed, certainly since 2010."

Bartunek's hedging reflected the more generalized discomfort with metrics we encountered throughout the organization, as noted earlier in this section. Beyond the concern over how to measure engagement was trying to determine what really constitutes "meaningful" or more importantly, "true." For a wider discussion of the issues surrounding metrics for non-profit journalism, please see Dick Tofel's white paper, "[Non-profit Journalism: Issues Around Impact](#)" or Jonathan Stray's recent examination for [Niemanlab](#) of how to measure journalism's impact more generally. Stray, for one, urges a rethinking of the current over-reliance on page views.

SECTION THREE

NEWSROOM REORGANIZATION and LOCAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS REPORTING

- *The proposal to Revson called for a newsroom reorganization that would provide a strategic and more efficient allocation of staff time and resources, a leveraging of digital tools and platforms to report the news and a full integration of the station's digital and broadcast dimensions. In the arena of local public affairs reporting, WNYC's goals for these three years emphasized nurturing healthy communities by providing access to information and demanding accountability from governmental and other significant institutions; providing multiple ways for the broadest possible population to feedback information about their own lives to share with the general public, and demonstrating the importance of participation in the democratic process.*
- *Newsroom organization has a more streamlined workflow meant to support excellence in day-of and breaking news while freeing beat reporters to produce more in-depth enterprise. There are still growing pains in serving these two demanding, conflicting masters -- radio production and the Web's 24/7 get-it-first pace -- but the staff has become fully ambidextrous in outlook. Penetration into the outer boroughs has increased markedly through enterprise, new projects, events and significant public affairs/crisis reporting, exemplified by such huge events as Superstorm Sandy with a Presidential election in her wake. Participation in social media has become a heightened priority, now being addressed beyond the efforts of reporters and editors with the hire of a designated social media coordinator.*

The newsroom fusion of audio and digital that the Revson grant helped expedite has happened. "We are platform-agnostic," said Xana O'Neill, the newsroom's executive editor for news, "not digital, not air, but multiplatform. It speaks to a change in philosophy, largely since Jim [Schachter] has been here, but something we were moving toward anyway: merging on-air and digital products into a more cohesive way of doing things."

In the two years O'Neill has been at WNYC, the change has become most apparent in the way staff members approach whatever they are producing. Reporters now know instinctively that there will always be a digital component to any story: an article, a slide show, live tweeting; that they will be responsible for a digital piece.

Since radio is aired on a program schedule and digital is 24/7, O'Neill often thinks it's better, especially with "day-of" or breaking news, to go digital first. It is her sense that more people are actually reaching *WNYC* on the Web. Certainly *WNYC* wants to post its well-crafted features with audio attached, so editors will wait for a complete package for those pieces. But for day-of news, she said, whichever platform is fastest and gets more people to see the work is best.

No one disputes that it is a lot to ask reporters and their editors to be producing for two such disparate platforms at the same time, even when working from the same reportage. Newsroom staffers expressed frustration with the production bottleneck and how hard it can be to get to the Web fast enough in an environment that often must privilege audio. This is largely because of radio's more elaborate production requirements; the time production takes limits the availability of reporters after the studio work is done and before they go home or slip into overtime. Even on quiet news days, several staffers reported that the newsroom still sometimes feel as if it's in triage mode.

This is how it was explained: If, for example, the press of time keeps reporters from being able to file both air and Web, the Web component will fall to the hub producers. Sometimes, this is planned well, "but what happens most is, 'Whoops!'" was one comment. It often takes much longer than it should for a Web piece to get posted. Again, the audio-first necessity is frequently the reason. The expressed wish-dream, if staffing would permit, would be for an air expert and a web expert to be available for every shift, but with both able to do the other's work seamlessly.

O'Neill acknowledged that the bifurcation of performing both functions is a challenge, especially with *WNYC*'s outsized ambitions and its larger but still limited editorial workforce. Every newsroom is grappling with these issues. *NPR*, she said, has a separate staff to write its Web files, and she occasionally resorts to this method as well. But it means a second process, and the more

removed that second process is from the story, the more problems that are likely to arise, and the greater the opportunity for errors.

Better is for one editor to handle and be responsible for both versions, to have asked and answered all the questions from beginning to end. “But then,” she said, “you can’t get both done as quickly.”

Social media has become ever more important, as it has for every other news organization. O’Neill said some reporters and editors are more adept than others at using Twitter, Tumblr and other such platforms, but at this point everyone understands and has accepted that expectations to make effective use of these tools have heightened.

WNYC’s [main](#) Twitter account showed 56,927 followers as of May 24, 2013 and each of its programs runs a separate feed. “[Radiolab](#),” for example, showed 86,819 followers that day; “[Brian Lehrer](#),” 21,546, and Alec Baldwin’s “[Here’s the Thing](#),” 14,207. By comparison, the flagship accounts of two other non-online native but New York-centric news organizations showed significantly higher figures. The *New York Daily News* had 131,962 followers on May 24 and the *New York Observer*, 76,275. All had similar growth rates over a three-week period. On the other hand, New York radio news to New York radio news, the Twitter account of *WINS* had 16,763 followers the same day.

One unexpected appeal of social media is the way it “mirrors the back-and-forth of call-in radio,” in O’Neill’s phrase, with the push back and feedback from people who comment and the opportunity social media provides to build communities of followers. She said reporters have been successful at live-tweeting events and then putting the tweets and art together in platforms such as [Storify](#), as WNYC did during the preparations for Sandy.

“Every day,” Schachter said, “we have a ‘[question of the day](#)’ that we put to our audience on all platforms - radio, Web and social media -- and we bring the results full circle, incorporating the information back to all platforms, including radio newscasts and magazine shows. We’ve set ourselves up to

capture voice comments, not just text, so we elevate the audience voice onto our biggest platform, the radio.” Often, he said, the *Brian Lehrer Show* will coordinate to further the intended impact.

A new social media coordinator was just hired at the first of March to give this added dimension of *WNYC*’s presence on the Web better consistency and intentionality across its programs and platforms. But even before that, there were innovations in the use of the format. During Sandy, *WNYC*’s Twitter feed grew by more than 4,500 followers in the first 48 hours of the storm alone, *WNYC* reported.

WNYC also collaborated with New Jersey News Commons and its members to cover the storm and its aftermath on Twitter. It also created shared Twitter feeds with Commons in New Jersey and Common Cause in New York. This way, voters could report problems they encountered during the 2012 Presidential election, which took place just a week after the storm. In real time, the partners were thus able to bring to the attention of officials the problems they identified through voter reports.

O’Neill said it is critical now for *WNYC* to be fast and accurate with breaking local news, not only for its public service function or to attract new users and listeners (“We get a ton of traffic from breaking news if we’re fast,” she said, “and that’s not always our forte”), but also to maintain a high level of credibility, which undergirds *WNYC*’s major investigative and enterprise efforts as well.

Speaking of investigative efforts, those are likely to grow further with the hiring of three new reporters. [Sarah Gonzalez](#) started March 4 as *WNYC*’s enterprise reporter, covering a range of issues and communities in northern New Jersey. She reported on education issues in Florida for *NPR*’s StateImpact project. [Terri Langford](#) started March 18 as *WNYC*’s government accountability reporter, based in Trenton. She most recently was a reporter for the *Houston Chronicle*, known as the top investigative reporter in Texas. She has done investigative work across many topics, including health and social services. [Robert Lewis](#), late of *Newsday*, has

covered a number of topics since his start in December 2012, including reports on Indian Point, Sandy rebuilding, LIPA and schools that profit from the problems of troubled teenagers.

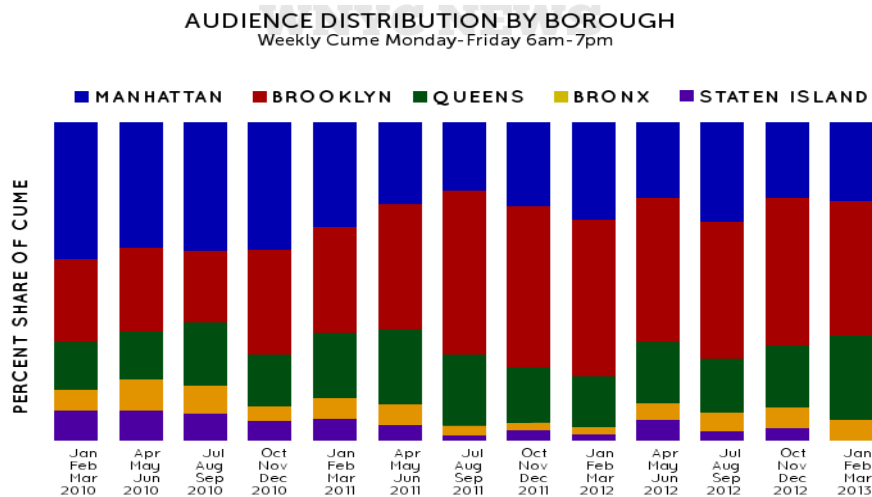
Gisele Regatao, *WNYC*'s executive producer, finds the combination of working on both audio and text both dizzying and exhilarating. Sometimes in addition to helping reporters develop stories, she herself winds up taking photos, doing audio, and writing slideshow captions.

Initially, reporters resisted having to prepare separate stories for the Web as "yet another thing to do." But the permanence of a story on the Web, in comparison to radio's more ephemeral nature, quickly began to generate its own appeal. Reporters like seeing how much further the Web can carry the reach of their work, Regatao said. That indelibility also commits a reporter to the story for a longer time. Readers often happen on the work many months after it first appears and seek contact.

Stephen Nessen, a general assignment reporter, attested to another important benefit of sustaining strong credibility, especially for his efforts in the outer boroughs. Reporting the recent police shooting of a teenager in East Flatbush, he was struck by how many [people were willing to talk to him](#) after he identified himself as a reporter for *WNYC*. On his personal wish list is being able to file audio directly from the field, rather than phoning in notes to a producer that must serve as his report until he can get back to the studio to file.

With the more aggressive local reporting agenda, *WNYC*'s reach into the boroughs beyond Manhattan and Brooklyn indeed has grown. The station has amplified its reporting with targeted events in the Greene Space and in outer borough locales. *WNYC* reports it held 18 events targeting non-traditional listeners and users in 2010; another 24 in 2011, another 21 in 2012 and nine to date in the first four months of 2013. Subject matter has ranged from the future of Haiti to gender and literature in translation to the past, present and future of Habana-Harlem cultural fusion. There has been a celebration of East

African artists and an examination of the real costs of unemployment. Events have featured locales and subjects as disparate as Egypt, Japan and women who box. Many events emanate from “[Soundcheck](#)” and celebrate the city’s rich, diverse musical heritage. Almost all of the events attracted audiences of well over 100 people. *See Appendix B for diversity events list*

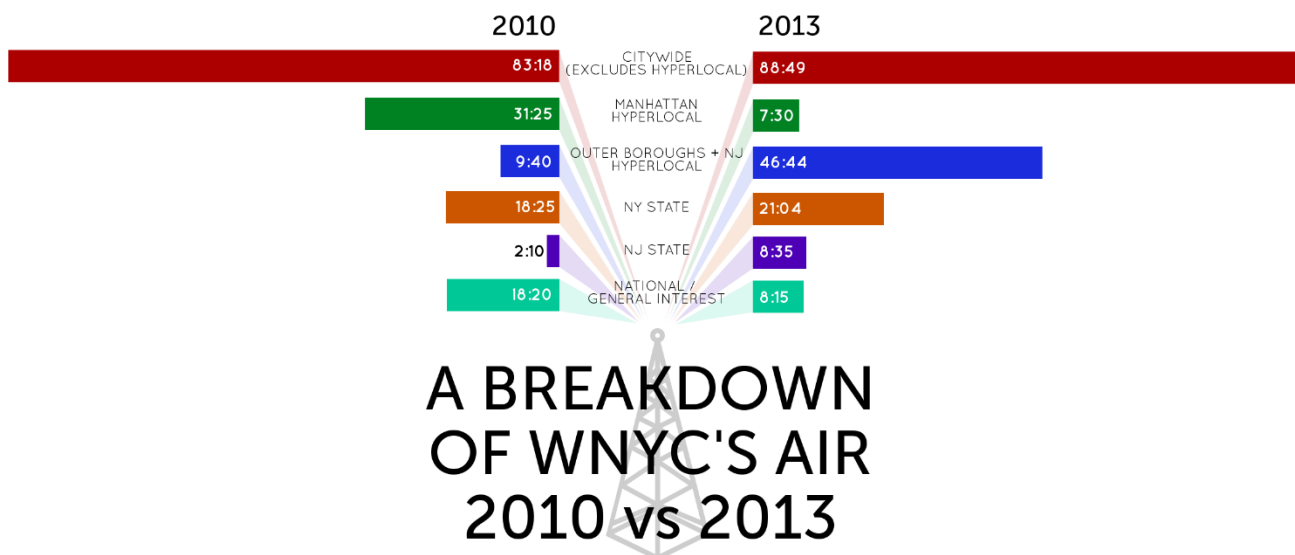


Where the Audience Is

While the weekly cume stayed relatively stable from 2010 to 2013, the audience distribution showed a shift to the outer boroughs. Brooklyn grew, Manhattan shrank while Queens made humble gains.

Attention to outer borough concerns also has been extended virtually, often through the attention programs with an audience as large as Brian Lehrer’s can and have given to important stories. The East Flatbush shooting is only one case in point. Lehrer subsequently hosted an online, on-air [community roundtable](#) on violence in that neighborhood. Also, the [comment stream](#) occasioned by WNYC’s reporting on the shooting anecdotally indicates engagement of users from all over the New York area.

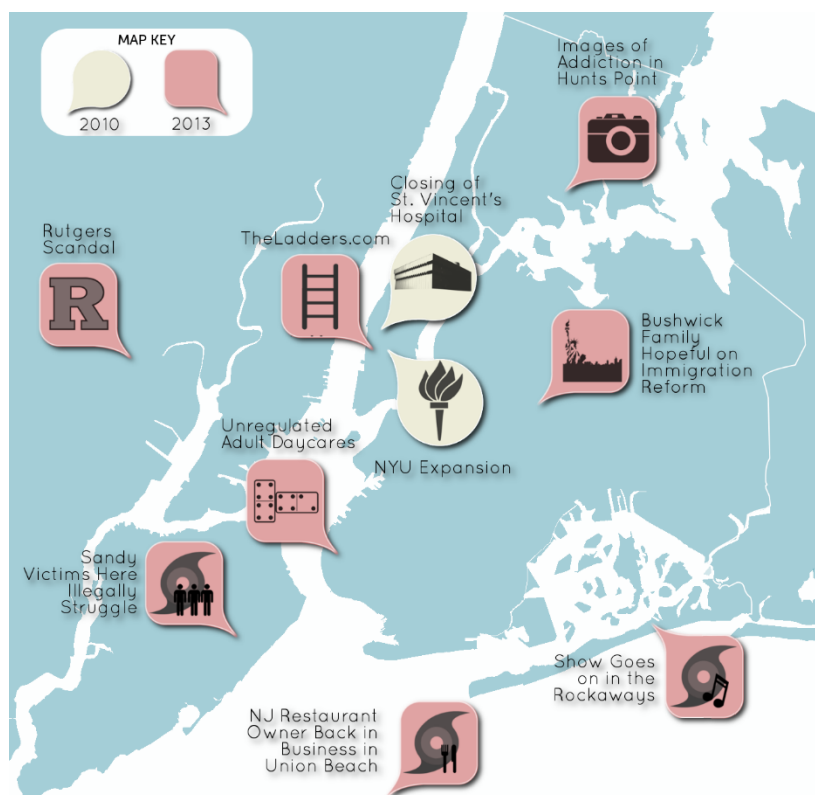
As an indication of how profound the redoubled emphasis on local public affairs reporting has been since 2010, the following chart of the WNYC “newsplan” or daily budget, compares a 12-day period in April 2010 with the same span in April 2013.



Covering the Region

A comparison of *WNYC's* newsplan for 12 days in April 2010 with April 2013. The content of *WNYC's* on-air news is broken down into geographic categories based on estimated airtime. There was a noticeable increase in air devoted to citywide stories and New Jersey state, as well as a pronounced shift away from Manhattan to the other boroughs and New Jersey.

Under the reorganization that started during the Sandy coverage, a spot news team of editors, producers and general assignment reporters takes the lead in covering the day's news. "The aim is to do that extremely well while freeing beat reporters to do more in-depth work," Schachter said. "We've also curtailed the production of evergreen short pieces for the weekends in favor of local cultural reporting designed to give the audience insight into the local arts scene and ideas of what to do on weekends." The chart already shows signs of these very newly implemented changes as well as evidence of the newsroom's new emphasis on neighborhoods outside of Manhattan.



Deeper Dives, Increased Diversity

WNYC is now more deeply committed to reporting in the outer boroughs. During a 12-day period in 2010, *WNYC* covered only 2 geographically focused stories for more than 4 minutes each, and both were in Manhattan. The stories covered during a similar period in 2013 were spread out over the 5 boroughs and New Jersey.

Although *WNYC* did not provide figures that showed new membership penetration into outer borough zip codes, other figures show that household giving, in general, has been rising. (The significantly higher growth between 2010-11 reflects the conversion into new members of pre-existing *WQXR* listeners.) The percentage increase in household giving, then, from March 2010 to March 2011 is 28 percent; from 2011 to 2012, it is 10 percent; and from 2012 to date, four percent. Here are the actual figures:

	NYPR DONORS			
	2010	2011	2012	2013
March	116,566	148,898	163,747	170,667

Online giving is an area ripe for further growth. In 2010, donors who primarily gave online (48,615) represented 38 percent of the total and in 2011, some 42 percent of the total, or 55,626 donors. In 2012, the percentage stayed the same but the number of donors who were giving primarily online increased to 57,188.

The leadership at *WNYC* knows the questions it needs answered. "We're trying to invent the idea of what membership is in public media," Dean Cappello said. "What's the transaction going to be for online-only users? Is it going to be a membership message? Is it going to be pay-for-content? The *Radiolab* app?" Stimulating online revenue growth to push it past 42 percent will require answers to these questions in the coming period.

Nothing, however, more than *WNYC*'s coverage of Sandy exemplifies the power of this audio-digital integration or the emphasis the station has placed on serving greater New York City and New Jersey more completely.

Colin Campbell, co-creator of "The Takeaway" and "Freakonomics Radio" told the story: "On the evening of October 29, 2012, *WNYC*'s studios lost power along with the rest of Lower Manhattan, but managed to stay on the air with a generator, austerity, and the sheer will of a dispersed staff. In a city without subways and tunnels, hosts, reporters and producers walked in the dark to reach the station, and improvised to report from far-flung storm-ravaged areas."

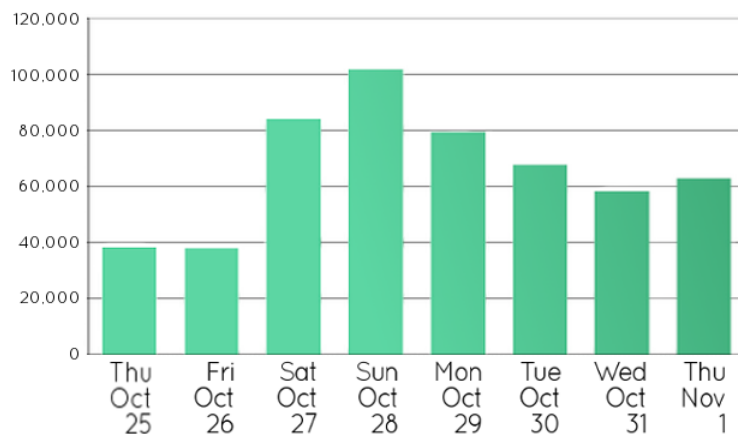
For several weeks, *WNYC* altered its program schedule to produce live call-in programs at all hours of the day. It extended local newscasts, allowing more reports to come in from listeners, who not only talked about their needs, but challenged officials about the shortcomings of disaster responses, Campbell wrote. It allowed the station to capitalize on the expertise of beat reporters "especially those focused on development, transportation, housing, schools, politics, health and New Jersey -- all of which have unique Sandy angles."

WNYC has pledged to be a central resource about the storm's impact and, as already noted, has partnered with *New Jersey Spotlight* in a commitment to document the recovery for at least a year. In the meantime, *WNYC* has been checking in regularly with sources cultivated during the storm in a series of "[Life After Sandy](#)" documentaries. The most recent, as of this writing on May 6, appeared three days earlier with a look-in at Staten Islanders hit by the storm.

The results show audiences responding in different ways across *WNYC*'s radio and digital platforms. On the digital side, in addition to the data team's contributions already noted in Section Two, *WNYC* posted real time weather feeds during the storm and provided a [transit tracker](#). But the figures for *WNYC.org* show that *WNYC*'s digital assets were the most helpful before the storm hit. From Friday, October 27, to Sunday, October 29, the number of visitors to the site more than doubled, reaching over 100,000 on Sunday alone. Visitors were back down after Sunday.

Any number of causes could be to blame for the drop-off, notably the widespread power and telecom outages in the New York/New Jersey region after the storm, which cut off much of the potential audience from the Internet. But it is worth noting that the number of visitors was significantly higher on Thursday, November 1, than before the storm on Thursday, October 25.

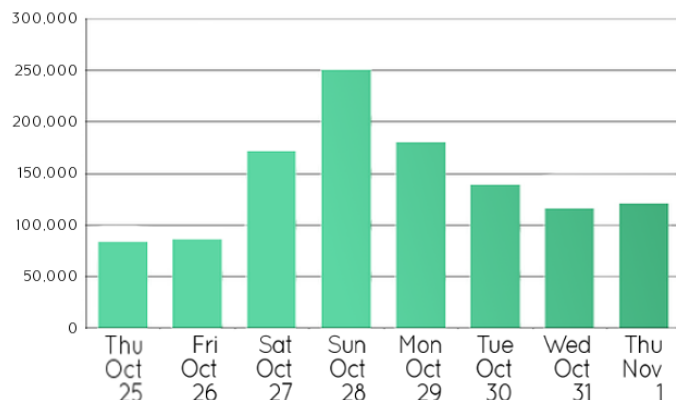
UNIQUE VISITORS WEEK OF SANDY



The Digital Source

With the evacuation map and other Data News assets, *WNYC.org* became a vital source of information, especially for visitors on Sunday, October 29, the day before Sandy struck New York. Visitors dropped but were still stronger than the week before on Thursday, November 1st.

DAILY PAGEVIEWS WEEK OF SANDY

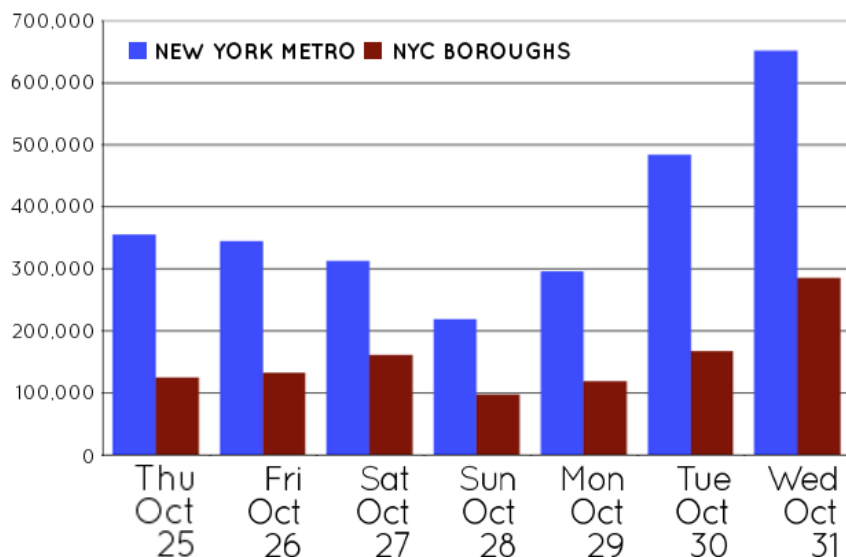


The Digital Source

WNYC.org's pageviews also spiked on the day before Sandy struck, with an even more noticeable drop during the days following Sandy.

Arbitron data from the week of Sandy shows how New York's radio audience responded to WNYC's coverage. WNYC had its first week of over a million cumulative listeners, with the most tuning in on Wednesday, October 31, two days after the initial impact of Sandy. According to Campbell, WNYC-FM's listening audience was up 133 percent over the average of the previous six days. Tom Bartunek notes that the pattern was the same for the other public radio stations in the metro areas affected by the storm. "The conclusion was the public radio was a key source of 'what to do now.'"

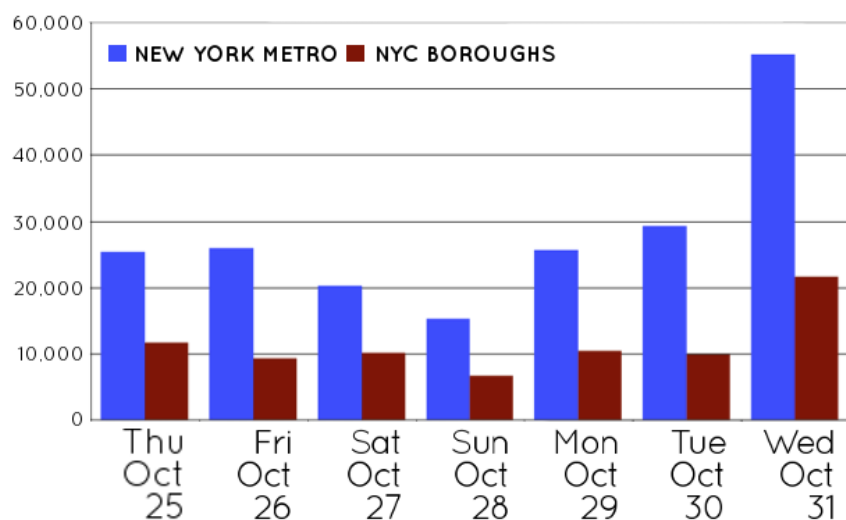
DAILY CUME WEEK OF SANDY



What Now?

Unlike Data News, which had its highest-traffic days right before the storm, the most listeners tuned in to *WNYC* after Sandy struck. *WNYC* had its first 1,000,000+ cume week in Arbitron's PPM (Personal People Meter) era, with the audience rising by 33% over the previous six-day average on Wednesday, October 31.

AQH PERSONS WEEK OF SANDY



What Now?

AQH Persons shows an even starker jump than in the Daily Cume.

To illustrate the huge change that the staff ramp-up, the integration of digital and audio and the local public affairs push have meant, Campbell compared the 2012 effort during the storm to *WNYC*'s mobilization for the city transit strike of 2005. It was a time of significantly thinner resources at *WNYC*, but Campbell's clear recollection was that the station had covered the city's paralysis heroically.

"It began December 20, 2005, and there were talks around the clock and then it happened and lasted a couple of days. It was tough," he recalled. "You couldn't get around the city. Reporters were coming on bikes across the bridges. There were contentious labor talks, spinning and fibbing." For the lives of New Yorkers, it was a matter of who was stuck and who was not.

Beth Fertig, who had the transportation expertise, stayed awake for five days because she was needed to "parse it all," he said. The alternative was an intern, who indeed played a big part in the coverage but simply because he was the only one available to help.

The parallel with Sandy, Campbell said, is that when a city comes back to life, "you want a reporter on the first bus out of the yard or on the first train. We got little chunks of that with the transit strike but not the whole story. The city had been taken off line and put back on line and we didn't have it."

For Sandy, there were reporters available to send everywhere. Because *WNYC* now has New Jersey reporters, they could get to, say, the [flooded low-lying rail yards](#), where there was \$125 million in damage, without having to make what suddenly had become an arduous crossing of the Hudson. "We could not have done that five years ago," he said.

Campbell said *WNYC* was able to combine information from the MTA, New Jersey Transit, and city governments all in one place, making it easier for citizens to access it. No other site did this. It was something that would have been impossible without the current level of staffing, not to mention the in-house digital prowess.

The scope of the coverage and the enterprise reporting was also something that would not have been possible before the ramp-up. Because of the transportation disruption during the storm -- no taxis, no trains, no buses and a gasoline shortage -- once a reporter got to, say, the Rockaways or the New Jersey beach towns, getting back to Manhattan was beyond daunting. During the crisis days, the newsroom would “lose” reporters for at least a day, sometimes a week, Campbell said, “committing assets you’re not going to get back.” It takes a large enough newsroom to sustain that level of absence, but having reporters who could stay in place on assignment was simply critical to the kind of reporting *WNYC* set out to provide.

By being and staying on the scene, it was possible to produce slideshows and audio of people walking back into their homes for the first time “with only a shower head dangling or a plate that belonged to their mother,” the kinds of pieces that come from reporters in a position to put in the time on site that can build trust and rapport with sources.

“When I was assignment editor in 2004-5,” Campbell said, “we would run down what was happening and some days, you would do phone interviews and that was it. You wouldn’t send a reporter. We had a lot more of that kind of thing on our air. You would call a principal and do a phone interview and be done with it. Coverage would have been driven more by phone tape, less on-the-scene reporting and we would have known less.”

FINDINGS SUMMARY

WNYC has both managed and participated in highly successful partnerships and collaborations and from the several that disappointed, has learned valuable lessons it has already been able to apply. Collaborations work best when or where

- all partners derive satisfactorily mutual benefit,
- goals, projected outcomes and staffing requirements are agreed upon ahead of time
- skill sets are complementary and of the same acceptable standard
- reach is extended for one or both parties and if possible into new communities of users
- personal relationships remain strong
- all sides have designated point-people to manage the work
- the unique gifts of each organization are being exploited to maximum mutual advantage.

WNYC's immersion in the digital universe has been head-long in these three years and highly effective.

- It has emerged as a leader in data journalism, an arena that continues to grow with the newly installed in-house team to work with John Keefe and through its collaborations with ProPublica and other leaders in the field;
- it has grasped the value of offering embeddable open source content that encourages others, by extension, to propagate the *WNYC* brand;
- it has grown in reputation and credibility;

- and in staffing, with 14 new digital, data, or developer staff members hired since 2010 among 38 new hires;
- it has been able to provide vital public service and public affairs reporting during region-wide emergencies, such as Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy;
- and through all its digital endeavors, it has dramatically increased online traffic in general and in relation to individual projects.

And the desired fusion of its broadcast and digital reporting universes has been achieved. There is strong evidence of the positive effect of this streamlined organization on *WNYC*'s initiatives in local reporting and its concerted new attention on the outer boroughs and New Jersey.

- Although staff report growing pains are still being felt from the recent newsroom reorganization, reporters and editors have learned to be ambidextrous and more nimble in handling breaking and “day-of” news and in producing more in-depth investigations and enterprise across platforms.
- There is significantly more reporting in the outer boroughs and more vehicles that can attract local audiences, such as the data mapping projects that go granular to the level of any home or business address. There are also more targeted events and community conversations around news and culture in these areas as well as continual deliberate efforts to keep the conversation going via the most popular of *WNYC* radio programs.
- Social media, which was not even envisioned as a force in the original proposal, has become increasingly important across programs and platforms and will become even more so with the recent hire of a designated coordinator. Twitter, for instance, was used effectively during the 2012 elections to enable users of three collaborating New

York and New Jersey entities, including *WNYC*, to report issues with voters and voting places in the aftermath of Sandy.

- *WNYC* was highly effective in its blanket coverage before, during and after Superstorm Sandy. The achievement symbolizes its capabilities in major public affairs reporting in general and as a primary source for future civic emergencies in particular. This is notable in the demonstrably positive public response to the tools, information and even the solace the station was able to provide to its listeners and users.

In sum, *WNYC* has by and large fulfilled, indeed exceeded, the goals set out in its original proposal to the Revson Foundation and is well-positioned for forward movement in all, and future leadership in many, of the targeted areas.

