PUBLIC MEDIA PARTNERS WITH LOCAL LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY ISSUES

An Analysis of a Community Engagement Model – American Graduate in Action
A Nation in Crisis... What every citizen, leader and caring adult can do to make a difference.

Recent headlines show that after decades of stagnation, the high school graduation rate is at a record high of 83.2 percent in 2015, up from 79 percent in 2011 and 71 percent in 2001, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics. These increases mean more students have graduated from high school instead of dropping out since the turn of the century, with better opportunities to go on to college, secure gainful employment, and engage with their communities. The nation is making great progress toward reaching a goal of a 90 percent graduation rate set by the last four U.S. Presidents.

A number of actions have made this possible: increasing awareness of the existence of a high school dropout epidemic and identifying geographic areas where the dropout rate is highest; creating cultures within schools and communities where “every student counts”; using individual student data from early warning systems to look at behavior and course performance in reading, math, and other subjects; and setting graduation rate goals at the school, district and state levels with accountability for progress over time.

The public media initiative, American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen, made possible by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, has played an important role in creating public awareness and inspiring action to improve educational outcomes for more students. Public media is helping communities understand the complex factors at play and what works in keeping students on track to graduate, and has demonstrated that public media stations are uniquely positioned to serve as trusted communicators, conveners, and capacity builders. American Graduate has told the stories of the teachers, students, parents, and organizations most affected by the dropout crisis and identified paths to success.

As a result of these efforts and working in partnership with the GradNation campaign, communities across the country are coming together to address the challenge with solutions based on best evidence, leverage investments, and measure progress over time. Since the initiative was launched in 2011, more than three-quarters of communities working with American Graduate public media stations have seen increases in high school graduation rates. Further, nearly one-third of communities working with American Graduate public media stations have seen a 10 percentage point increase in graduation rates since the Average Cohort Graduation Rate was first calculated in 2011—more than double the progress nationally.

Not only will communities across the country need to work harder to address persistent gaps in graduation rates to reach a 90 percent graduation rate for the nation, we also know that high school is the new starting line, as the majority of career pathways require some postsecondary education. As we stay committed to reaching our goals for success for all our youth, we must ensure that school prepares students for high school diploma and the demands of postsecondary education, the workplace and civic life.

John Bridgeland
Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Civic Enterprises

A Letter from Pat Harrison, CPB President and CEO

Public media’s mission is steadfast: to educate and inspire all Americans. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was established nearly 50 years ago to advance a vibrant public media service that continues to evolve and innovate alongside the diverse populations we serve.

As the last locally-owned and operated media organizations in most communities, public media stations are dedicated to providing the best in quality content and education services that connect the community, give voice to all Americans, and educate not only our nation’s children, but all lifelong learners. Long known for earning the trust of listeners and viewers through outstanding journalism and inspirational stories, public media stations have innovated in their ability to create dynamic forums – both in person and online – to foster an informed and thriving citizenry.

CPB has supported this evolution and innovation in public media’s work for more than a decade through local grant programs, including the Community Engagement Initiative, National Center for Community Engagement, Major Giving Initiative, a Partnership for a Nation of Learners, Facing the Mortgage Crisis, and Ready To Learn.

Over the last five years with support from CPB, more than 125 stations have participated in American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen, a public media initiative responding to the high school dropout crisis and helping prepare today’s youth for success in college and careers.

With leadership from Nine Network of Public Media in St. Louis, and in partnership with 1,700 national and local organizations including General Colin and Mrs. Alma Powell’s America’s Promise Alliance and Civic Enterprises, American Graduate stations responded to this issue with increased local broadcast and digital content focused on education, expanded forums for greater reach, and built deep community connections that go beyond a single program and premiere. Stations also collected and shared over thousands of stories from local American Graduate Champions who are filling a significant void in many children’s lives as a consistent, caring adult.

As a result of American Graduate, more individuals are stepping up to support all youth. Broad-based community organizations are working effectively together, and more than $17 million has been raised to continue this important work.

A high school diploma is not a destination; it is a launching point for many successful pathways later in life and is necessary for everyone to find their place in a thriving civil society. Many youth are still in the shadows. These are the young people who can dramatically change the trajectory of their career potential, even family history, and must be part of setting the stage for a new future where no one is left behind.

Importantly, this initiative has served as a launching point for public media stations that are now positioned to engage and bring the community together to address other issues of local and national importance in the years ahead.

Patricia de Stacy Harrison
President and Chief Executive Officer
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Establishing the need, framework, partnerships, and measurement to achieve success

Five years ago, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) launched American Graduate: Let’s Make It Happen in collaboration with public media stations. The goal is to help communities understand the high school dropout crisis and prepare today’s youth for success in college and careers through storytelling, dialogue, partnerships, and classroom resources.

American Graduate Executive Producer Nine Network of Public Media in St. Louis, in partnership with other local public media stations, developed a new community engagement model to align public media’s national and local content and education services around community needs. This model was refined from best practices learned through over a decade of CPB-funded community engagement projects.

Pictured below, the model illustrates a reinforcing cycle of work: 1) a trusted public media organization prompts discourse across different groups and partnerships, and gains insights into community concerns; 2) these insights support the interests and need for news and documentary coverage, digital content and engagement, and media-based resources for use by students and teachers in and outside the classroom; 3) multiplatform reach and local forums with partners increase understanding and dialogue across the community toward solutions and outcomes; and 4) the value is communicated back through community channels and the cycle begins again.

Community Engagement Model Deployed Through American Graduate

Stations harnessed this model to tackle an issue their communities identified as a concern: that nearly 1 million American students fall to graduate from high school with their peers each year.

Working with Nine Network of Public Media in St. Louis, more than 125 local stations, 40 national producers and distributors, and 1,700 local and national partner organizations, the American Graduate initiative has amassed more than 20,000 hours of content and hosted more than 5,000 local workshops and forums exploring the causes of and solutions to the dropout crisis. Stations also worked with partners to identify and share more than 9,000 stories—both on-air and online—of American Graduate Champions who are committed, caring adults helping to support our nation’s youth.

Stations participated in and conducted surveys with partners, viewers and funders, resulting in a collection of distinct data sets over the last five years. This report analyzes multiple data sources that represent responses from a range of constituencies including public media professionals, community partners, funders, and community members. A full description of the data sources and analysis approaches are provided at the conclusion of this report.

The analysis identified five findings that affirm the expanded role public media is playing in communities through American Graduate. These five findings showcase the building blocks needed for a successful “community-first” approach to stations’ service operations. The framework and activities can be applied by stations towards any issue of importance to a community. Further, these methods of data collection and measurement can be refined and expanded for future initiatives to track progress and showcase impact.

FINDING 1
American Graduate stations are working across all sectors to develop a deeper understanding of the education and business needs of their communities, and connecting their community to the national conversation.

FINDING 2
American Graduate stations are bringing together stakeholders—sometimes new or adversarial—to advance dialogue and engagement around education and workforce development.

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FINDING 4
American Graduate stations are expanding their local services and internal operations to partner more effectively with the community.

FINDING 5
Nationally, American Graduate stations are inspiring increased citizen participation and philanthropic support to improve outcomes for all youth.

Through American Graduate, it is extremely important to concentrate on ways to get our nation’s youth to graduate. Public media provides a great vehicle to create a public understanding of how complicated these problems are.

Kurt Karakul
Third Federal Foundation | Cleveland, Ohio
American Graduate stations are working across all sectors to develop a deeper understanding of the education and business needs of their communities, and connecting their community to the national conversation.

Locally owned and operated, public media organizations are uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the needs of the communities they serve. American Graduate stations partnered with over 1,700 local organizations and individuals representing a cross section of community interests and perspectives to work toward improved youth and community outcomes.

98% of community partners indicated stations’ trust and credibility were a benefit to local community-wide efforts.

90% of viewers and listeners surveyed believe public media plays an essential role in their community.

Percentage of American Graduate Funders, by Funder Type

- Non-profit partners: 586
- School partners: 193
- Government partners: 131
- Higher Education partners: 107
- Business partners: 100
- District partners: 93
- Civic partners: 88
- Foundation partners: 58
- Faith partners: 16

85% of stations surveyed were invited to join an advisory board focused on education and youth outcomes.

86% of stations reported an increase in the value their station provides to the local community.

Community partners have realized increases in civic participation and local funding—which they attribute to their partnerships with American Graduate public media stations:

- 51% of partners interviewed said they saw increased participation in their programs, and 33% of partner organizations actively recruit volunteers reported an increase in volunteers as a result of American Graduate.
- Over 74% of community partners reported increased visibility for their role in providing solutions to the community due to their partnership with public media stations, and within that group, 80% reported increased funding for their work.

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Public Media Nation’s Most Trusted Institution

A 2016 study found that nearly 8 in 10 people trust the Public Broadcasting Service or PBS (79% “trust a great deal” or “trust somewhat”). The 2016 study marks the 13th time in a row that PBS was called the nation’s most-trusted among institutions that include courts of law, commercial cable and broadcast television, newspapers and others.

86% of stations reported an increase in the value their station provides to the local community.

SR1 believes in funding American Graduate because first we believe education is key. Mississippi Public Broadcasting and other organizations are key to driving and informing the community. Even though we’re all involved together sometimes we live in silos so it’s important to educate everyone and bring everyone together because collectively we have to work to solve the dropout crisis in the United States.

Dorinda Hunton
Scientific Research (SR1) | Jackson, Mississippi
American Graduate stations are expanding their local services and internal operations to partner more effectively with the community.

As stations improved their external relationships and understanding of community issues, they also improved how they collaborate, share information, and build services across different departments within the organization, rather than working in silos.

- 70% of stations indicated more cross-department collaboration on funding proposals
- 73% of stations benefited from increased collaboration across departments
- 100% of stations said the American Graduate initiative changed the way they work

As partners became more effective through collaborations, teams within the stations were also able to accomplish more.

- 53% established the groundwork to successfully execute future initiatives
- 50% of stations increased hours of educational content
- 68% increase in the number of community workshops offered by stations

We had a range of responses from local funders (because) American Graduate started a new dialogue—with local funders and with education and civic leaders. ... The high school graduation rate is a great barometer for many important things. It reflects the conditions in our school systems and communities, and it is a good indicator for future issues we will face because of lower educational attainment. For us, American Graduate gave a kick-start to many important conversations.

Andrew Russell
PBS SoCal | Greater Los Angeles & Southern California

FINDING 3

American Graduate stations’ comprehensive content and services are essential to reach and educate community members locally and nationwide.

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Andrew Russell
PBS SoCal | Greater Los Angeles & Southern California

FINDING 4

American Graduate stations are increasing access to information and helping their communities understand and identify solutions to the dropout crisis in America.

79% of partners confirmed that they need public media to reach target audiences and improve youth outcomes

86% of organizations view their local station as an essential partner

56% of stations received local and regional awards and recognition for their American Graduate work

Impact

- 88% of participants in community conversations reported that they learned something new from public media.
- 88% of viewers and listeners, surveyed after attending a station’s community town hall, believed young people are the greatest resource in their community.
- 77% of community partners saw improved engagement between their organization and the community.

WFSU has voices from the classroom on the radio. We get phone calls (from) community members that say, ‘I heard this student talking on the radio this morning and they’re a student at Success Academy. That really touched me, how can I be part of what you’re doing? Can I come and volunteer?’

WFSU Partner
Tallahassee, Florida

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WFSU Partner
Tallahassee, Florida

Funding Received by American Graduate Stations

The new internal collaboration and external partnerships brought new approaches to stations’ development work and additional revenue streams:

- 42% of stations pursued a different type of funding organization
- 26% pursued local connections to national funders
- Funding was received from a broad range of funders—including 27% who contributed money to stations for the first time

Existing Funder 32% (already contributing to station for other work)
Existing Funder 34% (already contributing to station for AG work)
New Funder 27% (First time ever contributing money to station)
Lapsed Funder 4% (contributed money to station five or more years ago)

Other 3%
Nationally, American Graduate stations are inspiring increased citizen participation and philanthropic support to improve outcomes for all youth.

Over the last five years, stations participating in American Graduate inspired citizens to engage in their communities to support youth and raised over $17 million.

Total amount raised by American Graduate stations: over $17 million

WHO

- 66% were existing funders who raised their contributions in response to the initiative
- 27% were first-time funders of public media
- 7% were lapsed funders who had last contributed five or more years ago, or who did not identify past contributions

WHY

- 88% of the funding received was in response to stations’ use of local data, partnerships with local organizations, and by addressing local issues or building engagement with the community beyond just broadcasting.
- 39% of new funders, and 31% of existing funders cited stations’ work as part of a national initiative as the primary reason for their decision to fund station work.

On average, stations received an additional $57,542 in funding by showcasing long term commitment to an issue, and an additional $13,149 more, on average, when the funding was provided in support of specific production elements.

Further, funding received by stations was, on average, more than three times greater when justified by public media’s multi-platform (broadcast, engagement and distribution) capabilities.

Comparison of Average Grant Amounts Received based on Stations’ Emphasis on Multi-platform Capacities and Reach

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The Grays Harbor Community Foundation committed to fund a collaboration (which) KBTC is a part of—a three-year, $800,000 proposal to support early learning in the county. We are so excited about this commitment and what it represents for the resource-poor, rural county of Grays Harbor and KBTC. Without the American Graduate initiative, we wouldn’t have pursued this, and I am excited about the rollout of the initiative and seeing the real change it can bring. American Graduate was key to helping us build this capacity.

Sherri Stanton
KBTC | Tacoma, Washington

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A Researcher’s Perspective

My research collaboration with public media began in 2005, contributing to a partnership between the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This partnership was established to accelerate the impact that public media, libraries, and museums could have in their communities (Partnership for a Nation of Learners). The premise was that more could be accomplished with these organizations working together than apart. By “more,” the intent was to solve problems, address needs, and generate positive outcomes in communities across the United States.

As I worked to help CPB, IMLS, and public media, museum, and library professionals across the country shift their practice and track the progress of such shifts where they occurred, it became apparent that a sea change was underway. For so long, organizations had based their practices more on the assets they possessed and less on the needs of their communities and how these collective assets and their organizations’ expertise might best be leveraged in response. On paper, the envisioned change in perspective sounds like a simple shift, but such systemic changes in orientation are challenging to achieve, take significant time and practice, and monumental when achieved.

Over the past 10 years, I have studied a diverse range of public media initiatives and outcomes. I have worked with local stations and on national scale efforts led by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. As I’ve come and gone from one project to the next, with as many as two to three years in between, I’ve been afforded a unique lens through which to observe progress toward the systemic change I describe. And there has been positive change.

Best practices born of the original initiative included conducting needs assessments and basing action on community needs; defining outcomes, building programs that are responsive to defined outcomes and charting progress against defined outcomes; and conducting evaluations to measure impact, prove worth and continuously improve efforts in targeted communities. Today, 11 years later, multiple initiatives have shaped the practice of public media professionals and the service to their communities.

Of recent note are the American Graduate achievements outlined in this report. This work has provided an interesting opportunity to apply the public media system’s best practices to an issue that affects communities nationwide. The American Graduate work has been accomplished with intention towards a critical community need, as well as attention to the practices that have proven, time and again, to support effective public media work.

Realizing an impact has required hard work within public media stations and throughout their communities. The work has prompted stations to rethink the ways they accomplish their work, their internal structures and staffing, and the interactions that are necessary to produce effective solutions. As a result of becoming better at telling their own story and demonstrating their value, the criticality of their role in the communities they serve has increased. This work has resulted in increasing recognition of the unique and valuable education and community expertise that resides within each community’s public media organization.

The Phase I and II American Graduate findings reflect these truths. We see clear evidence of the importance of public media in the communities that participated in this initiative. We see increasing amounts of underwriting revenue when stations increasingly apply established best practices related to community needs, outcomes and evaluation to their work. And finally, we see the increased capacity of public media to address a need, provide leadership within communities, and offer solutions that are effective because of this unique role that only public media fulfills. While the foundational skills to successfully establish partnerships to affect community needs laid over 10 years ago have gone far beyond the original library and museum partners, the benefits of community partnerships and an intentional approach to impacting community needs are clearly evidenced in the American Graduate initiative.

James Marshall, Ph.D.
Educational Leadership
San Diego State University
Methodology

The American Graduate effort described in this report, and the resulting measures of impact, were made possible through a range of data sources. Each of the evaluation efforts or data sources below contributed to the reported findings. The analysis, when possible, triangulated data sources for purposes of exploring relationships between a station's efforts, and measures of its impact. For example, the total amount of funding was calculated for each station, and used to compare the relative impact of various process outcomes (e.g., community needs focus, definition of outcomes, etc.). While results presented in this report accurately describe the work and impact of American Graduate stations, the results may or may not be generalizable to public media work as a whole.

2015 Questionnaire of Station Education Work

This data collection effort detailed the activity of public media stations across the United States. The 22-item online instrument was developed in collaboration between the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Dr. James Marshall of San Diego State University. Station general managers received an invitation and were asked to identify the person with the most knowledge of the station's education work to complete the instrument. Data was collected in March 2015. For the analysis described in this report, responses from the 34 American Graduate stations that committed to implementing new models for their work were reviewed.

2015 Environmental Scan of Public Media Community Partners

A spring 2015 data collection effort was initiated to understand perspectives of organizations that regularly partner with public media organizations. Interviews and focus groups were first conducted with a subsample of partners to document public media partnership experiences with key community partners. Results informed the development of a 10-item online survey instrument. Station questionnaire responses (above) were used to identify 72 stations with significant partnership activity. These stations were provided with a community partner survey invitation to distribute to their key community partners. Data was collected during June and July 2015. For the analysis described in this report, responses from community partners who identified working with one of the 34 American Graduate stations that committed to implementing new models for their work were reviewed. The resulting sample size was 53 partner organizations.

American Graduate Final Evaluation Report

Contracted by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Nine Network of Public Media conducted an evaluation of American Graduate’s Phase II work between May 2014 and April 2016. This diverse study, which employed survey and interview methods, involved quantifying the activities and outputs of 34 American Graduate-funded stations that committed to implementing new models for their work, as well as describing community partnership and their corresponding results. In addition, an analysis of each station’s internal structure and practices was conducted to describe changes in work and processes resulting from the AG initiative.

Hub Station Funding Analysis, American Graduate Phase II

Contracted by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Nine Network of Public Media analyzed the results of the 234 grants received by public media stations in response to American Graduate’s Phase II work between May 2014 and April 2016. This analysis documented various descriptors of each grant, including the amount, funder type, funder status (e.g., first time funder of public media, lapsed funder of public media, etc.), and the appeal(s) to which the funder responded (e.g., responding to local needs, being part of a national initiative, etc.). Both interview and survey methods were employed to document and describe funding. Reported analyses are inclusive of the 234 grants received, but exclude a grant of $5 million received by an American Graduate station in support of a national initiative, etc.). Both interview and survey methods were employed to document and describe funding. Reported analyses are inclusive of the 234 grants received, but exclude a grant of $5 million received by an American Graduate station in support of the program. This exclusion was made to result in more accurate measures of central tendency. The reader should be mindful of this approach when interpreting data. Future evaluation efforts should further investigate relationships between a station’s American Graduate work and education and engagement funding.

Community Town Halls Executive Summary

Contracted by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Nine Network of Public Media conducted an evaluation of the Community Town Halls, which were a component of the American Graduate Phase I initiative between Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. This effort was largely descriptive, and initiated to understand town hall participation and determine town hall impact.

Station Activities Benchmarking Study (SABS)

The Station Activities Benchmarking Study (SABS) survey collects standard financial and operational information for all public television licensees. This complete industry data provides stations and national organizations with a tool to support decision-making, to understand performance issues, to identify improvement opportunities, and to move towards defined objectives. SABS data for the 34 American Graduate stations that committed to implementing new models for their work was analyzed to explore change in key areas (e.g., education workshops offered, workshop attendance, education services and community outreach revenue). This analysis employed a year-over-year comparison by establishing baseline data (figures from the two years prior to American Graduate involvement), and comparing it to the results following the first and final years of American Graduate involvement. While 2015 figures provided the final year data for all participating stations, baseline and first year data varied due to some American Graduate stations beginning in 2011, and others in 2014. It should also be noted that SABS data was not available for 2016 at the time of this publication, and therefore a full analysis of this data into the final months of American Graduate Phase II could not be completed.

As a funder we have been very supportive of the internship program. Without American Graduate, we would not have the opportunity to have young people learn how to advocate. It shows them how to use that voice in this multimedia environment. To me – that’s exciting. It’s just a good feeling to see that something of this nature can make a difference in young people’s lives.

- Cynthia Cim
- Norman J. Stupp Foundation
- St. Louis, MO

We need initiatives like public media’s American Graduate to keep momentum behind the national conversation about graduation rates and to mobilize caring adults everywhere.

- John S. Gomperts
- President and CEO
- America’s Promise Alliance

Honestly, the prospect of community engagement was pretty intimidating when we first started this, but it has changed the way that we see our work and that we work internally completely. I know there won’t be any going back. We are just going to build on where we’ve come so far.

- Gloria Skurski
- ThinkTV
- Dayton, Ohio
### American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen Participating Stations

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