

MARYLAND PUBLIC TELEVISION

11767 OWINGS MILLS BLVD
OWINGS MILLS MD 21117-1499

T 410.356.5600 F 410.581.4338
WWW.MPT.ORG



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Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission
Fiscal Year 2023 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis

Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business and Administration
Senator Nancy King, Chair
February 4, 2022

Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development
Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
February 3, 2022

Introduction

The pandemic that changed the world and this statewide network sparked innovation and creativity. It was not possible to operate as we had since 1969 with dozens of skilled craftspersons and administrators routinely coming to campus for productive days and nights, making television and using platforms old and new to tell stories and engage citizens.

So, since our appearance before this committee last year, we have witnessed a year of reinvention and, remarkably, solid achievements under highly adverse conditions.

Mission

Maryland Public Television enriches lives and strengthens communities through the power of media.

By the numbers

Notwithstanding the coronavirus and its deleterious impact on our statewide communities, MPT was able to post some impressive numbers as milestones of the year. Foremost among these were:

Membership – 69,888 voluntary paid members (a record 20,471 of them monthly sustainers)

Viewing – 1.34 million monthly viewers on our top two channels

On-demand streaming – 410,977 users, conducting 441,535 streams of our content

Revenue – ranking 12th in revenue among 151 PBS member stations

Awards – climbed to 185 in earned regional Emmy Awards since the network's founding in 1969 (including 4 national Emmy Awards)

Website pageviews – 2,753,265 views of our primary website, *mpt.org*

MPT Digital Studios – 58 digital-first productions, web-exclusive features extending the network's reach

Delivering content

In the past year, the content intended for air on MPT's two primary channels, MPT-HD and MPT2/Create®, or destined for online viewing thanks to MPT Digital Studios, was frequently taped remotely or – if in person – recorded by masked personnel at safe distances. Rooms in a family home became ersatz TV studios, and mobile devices became surrogates for expensive studio robotic cameras. High-flying drones – inherently at safe distances – zeroed in on interview locations. Reinvention was the order of the day and MPT's adaptability paid off.

These are the primary statistics that evidence the network's productivity in the last fiscal year:

Local productions - 126 programs accounting for 70 viewing hours

Local acquisitions - 24 programs accounting for 20 viewing hours

National productions – 3 series, 64 separate episodes accounting for 32 viewing hours

National presentations – 6 series/specials, 44 separate programs accounting for nearly 24 viewing hours

A special initiative stimulates dialogue on racial issues

The tragic death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, produced enormous upheavals and protests across the nation. It also sparked the need for all citizens to recommit themselves to racial justice and alliance with their African American brothers and sisters.

At Maryland Public Television, we embrace a mission that calls on us to enrich lives and strengthen communities. During the early days of FY21 we embarked on a content initiative called "Standing Against Racism: Fostering Unity Through Dialogue" to help deliver on that mission. In the days following Mr. Floyd's death, MPT's programming unit quickly began scheduling thought-provoking programs on our air and created a Standing Against Racism program block that continues every Monday in primetime. The network also expanded its public affairs coverage and dialogue focused on racial issues.

On top of that, MPT fostered two-way communications with citizens across the state. This was accomplished by organizing and conducting a series of online outreach activities and interactive engagement programs that stimulated thoughtful discussion and understanding of race-related issues.

A special group, the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Advisory Council, was formed. This team of civic leaders and businesspersons guides the implementation of the networks strategy to foster greater organizational and civic concord through both internal and external communications and engagement.

One aspect of the overall initiative was the development of a first-ever week devoted to historically Black colleges and university. "HBCU Week" placed a spotlight on the contributions of these valued institutions in our region.

State of Maryland funds two remarkable national documentaries

Last month, PBS and Maryland Public Television announced the production of two new documentaries (produced by acclaimed filmmaker Stanley Nelson) for a debut in the fall of 2022. *Becoming Frederick Douglass* and *Harriet Tubman: Visions of Freedom* will be distributed nationally and offer fresh perspectives into these iconic historical figures.

These landmark productions were made possible by an investment from the State of Maryland.

MPT to broadcast live coverage of inaugural Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill

MPT offered more than 13 hours of international equestrian competition last October when the inaugural Maryland 5 Star competition was staged at Fair Hill in Cecil County.

In partnership with The Fair Hill Organizing Committee, MPT both broadcast and livestreamed its coverage of the Maryland 5 Star, one of only two equestrian events of its kind in the United States and among seven worldwide.

Remote and robust: MPT education

The pandemic created challenges and disruptions in most aspects of contemporary life. Particularly hard hit were the education and childcare systems, impacting student learning and care for young children. MPT worked to support families, educators, and child care professionals as they struggled to find resources and strategies to boost learning.

MPT responded with a number of new programs, collaborating with community partners who came together to strengthen the efforts.

For example, in the early childhood arena, MPT's At-Home Learning initiative centered on three main components: an on-air educational broadcast schedule featuring PBS KIDS, connected online resources to extend the learning at home, and toolkits for parents and educators. *Thinkport*, MPT's education website, served as the centerpiece for digital learning content and viewing guides that connected each PBS KIDS broadcast with active at-home learning extensions. Online digital toolkits curated for both educators and parents led to rich resource collections of articles, websites, tips, and strategies supporting social and emotional well-being and a learning-at-home environment.

Summer On! featured a 10-week, theme-based activity collection that combined fun and learning while children day-camped from home. Camp Counselor Krissy introduced parents and caregivers of children ages 2-8 to dozens of screen-free summer games and hands-on activities. Favorite themes included dinosaurs, cooking and animals.

Early Learning Social is a new virtual space created for early educators in response to a need for peer-to-peer support and learning. On the first Thursday of each month, this professional development and networking series featured free, credit-bearing workshops and opportunities to learn, discuss, and share together. The series is growing as providers are appreciating this low-barrier entry to a collegial fun and lively network.

Your Digital Backpack brought together trusted organizations across the state to share free early learning resources and information for parents and caregivers. MPT, together with PNC Grow Up Great, launched this initiative during the height of coronavirus infections to help all Maryland families find the information they needed during a challenging time.

Informed by community partners, more than a dozen video messages were produced and disseminated among partners, across platforms statewide, to share important information to support family's health, safety, and early learning at-home.

MPT did not neglect what we feel remains a very important aspect of childhood learning. Our media literacy efforts were timely indeed. The pandemic caused children to increase their screen time inordinately because of remote learning. MPT had a measured and ongoing commitment to support parents and early childhood educators in taking charge of media's impact and influence on children's learning and development. Through online courses, workshops, and digital resources, in FY21 MPT shared skills and strategies in media literacy, all grounded in best practices.

In K-12 learning, "virtual" was the order of the day in FY21. MPT worked to support teachers with high-quality digital resources that provided interactive and engaging ways for students to learn. Through collaborative partnerships and grants from the Library of Congress, MPT offered several online experiences to teach Civics with a historic lens and primary source analysis.

And, finally, the audiences for MPT education efforts continued to include educators themselves. Through *Thinkport*, we offer a catalog of credit-bearing online courses for Maryland K-12 teachers and childcare providers. Approximately 1,200 educators in FY21 maintained their teaching certification and childcare licensure through MPT courses in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE).

During the fiscal year, MPT began production of seven online student and two professional development courses in a number of academic areas for the MSDE. Student courses were being developed for both online and blended learning environments and will be available to Maryland students in a staggered roll out beginning in the fall of 2022. In addition, professional development modules for Maryland teachers supporting the instruction of several critical health topics have been developed and are now available for self-paced learning.

Engaging the community

In FY21, through the efforts of its Audience Engagement team, MPT interacted with no fewer than 12,000 persons at 71 separate, station-hosted virtual events. These remote activities attracted remote participants, too, since geography was no longer a barrier to attendance. It wasn't all virtual, however; two in-person (and COVID-19 safe) outdoor events were staged as well.

Audience engagement activities in FY21 most often were supporting national broadcast programs or public broadcasting initiatives and promoted viewing of and a deeper examination of the televised production.

To make all this engagement possible, MPT partnered with dozens of community organizations, and for most of the events, free admission was the order of the day. All told, MPT sought and secured eight grants that enabled Audience Engagement to plan, promote, and stage the events.

Growing voluntary support for Maryland's only statewide broadcaster

A pandemic and the housebound citizens who coped with it didn't mean it was time to relax the ongoing quest for paid members. If anything, the cultivation of new members ramped up with the FY21 establishment of a "Focus on 70" goal – a drive to enlist at least 70,000 paid members by year's end.

An ambitious goal in a time of coronavirus – or anytime – moving the membership needle from 63,000 (cited in the FY20 annual report) to 70,000 meant that MPT needed to reinvent its member cultivation and retention practices.

Space prevents our listing all the innovative cultivation steps that MPT staff undertook in FY21, but one special initiative deserves to be mentioned:

As FY21 was in its waning months, an offer went out from MPT to State of Maryland employees and retirees, extending a free, one-year basic membership to these audiences. Some 6,000 persons responded, and from this pool MPT hopes to convert the "free" members to paying members when their one-year membership expires. The FY21 offer set the stage for similar opportunities afforded to other nonprofit groups in FY22.

Maryland State Ad Agency: important messages effectively delivered

A new service for State of Maryland agencies and governmental units, the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) division of MPT achieved remarkable milestones in both the number of clients served and campaigns conducted. The agency grew an impressive 28% in billings year-over-year from the prior year.

As the fiscal year ended, MSAA was serving 13 clients, all agencies or units within the State of Maryland government. The single-largest client based on billings was the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which hired MSAA in 2021 for the first time and has conducted campaigns for emergency rental assistance, the Maryland Mortgage Program, and energy-related messaging.

Other FY21 clients included the Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration (for opioid and problem gambling campaigns), the Maryland Higher Education Commission (a "near completer" campaign), the Maryland Department of Aging (a senior call-check campaign), and the Maryland Department of Labor (an unemployment insurance campaign), among others.

Production Services furnishes legislative session coverage

Each year's coverage of a Maryland General Assembly session includes MPT's reporting on the weekly series *State Circle* where the analysis is cogent and comprehensive on the part of anchor Jeff Salkin and Annapolis correspondents Sue Kopen, Charles Robinson, and Nancy Yamada.

But an equally important Maryland General Assembly focus is the significant work-for-hire performance on the part of the Production Services team that in FY21 delivered on 90 days of

streaming of proceedings from the Maryland Senate and House of Delegates chambers. The agreement with MPT and the cameras, controls, and streaming capability were planned and installed before COVID-19; it turned out to be perfect timing to enable MPT to bring the proceedings to citizens since the chambers themselves were sealed from public witness.

The assignment: provide the technical expertise, staffing, and execution over a span of 13 hours daily and make that coverage available by streaming to citizens statewide. The sessions were viewed on the Maryland General Assembly's website.

What made this assignment particularly challenging were the day-to-day variables of starting and ending times, the unknown duration of sessions, the incredibly difficult camera work due to the partitions erected around senators' and delegates' seats, and the unpredictability of what would happen from minute to minute. It called for reinvention, and MPT delivered.

The Kaplan Studio takes shape in preparation for 2022 opening

Despite the impact of the pandemic, construction on the major expansion of MPT's largest production studio and the plaza in front of the Owings Mills headquarters building continued in earnest during the past year. With an anticipated FY22 opening, the studio for the first time will feature a flexible seating structure for 165 audience members, an opportunity for town hall meetings, candidate debates, and similar gatherings to benefit our statewide communities.

We are grateful to state government leaders for their financial commitment to this project and the future of Maryland's statewide public TV network. We'll look forward to welcoming guests to the newly named Irene and Edward H. Kaplan Production Studio – named in honor of two of MPT's most generous benefactors – this year.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the accomplishments enumerated above – as well as those not included in this testimony – MPT thanks the State of Maryland, our largest benefactor.

MPT concurs with the analyst's report and thanks this committee for its ongoing confidence placed in us and our work.

February 1, 2022