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All of You



# WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD OUR FUTURE

Strategic Priorities: FY24 to FY28

# The WNET Group

Working Together to Build Our Future: *Strategic Priorities: FY24 to FY28*



## FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR

**T**he strategy outlined in this document covers a period that is of critical importance to the future of **The WNET Group** and indeed to public broadcasting. I am honored to have had the privilege of chairing the committee that oversaw it and that generated the thinking behind it.

In a complex and rapidly changing media landscape, WNET is currently at a pivotal transition point between two worlds. There is the world of linear broadcasting, where we have been very successful and garnered support from a loyal viewing audience; then there is the world of digital streaming and multi-platform consumption. As linear viewership has experienced an accelerating decline, and audiences have become more fragmented, we have also seen a decline in the audience's understanding of the core importance of public media. Our strategic challenge can be stated simply: how do we retool intelligently for the future, while leveraging our strengths and successes?

Though there are indeed challenges to navigate, through this process, we also recognize the ongoing value of WNET and public media — to develop connections with audiences that fully represent our communities and fill the gaps left by commercial media. Our work has identified four priorities where **The WNET Group** will focus to balance changing audience realities, emerging funding opportunities, and our mission to deliver media that educates, informs, entertains, and inspires:

- 1. Centering the production of new content where audiences need and will appreciate our work:** in News and Public Affairs, in Arts and Culture, and in Kids Media and Education.
- 2. Building our brands** so that audiences recognize the value of our work.
- 3. Focusing on a digital future** by investing in new distribution models and infrastructure to support our content.
- 4. Unifying how we work together** toward shared success, building a more diverse workforce that is more collaborative with a shared set of values and goals.

When we look at publishing, music, entertainment, or travel, we see industries undergoing similar transformations and experiencing both successes and failures. The failures are those who did not have the imagination to see the world as different or the will to act on their understanding. The successes are those who embraced the changes in their environment and planned for them. Herein we describe how we plan to build the future of The WNET Group — I look forward to the journey.

*James A. Attwood*  
*Chair, The WNET Group*

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## FOREWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



**W**ith a rich history of creating quality programming that has touched generations, the WNET Group now stands at a crossroads.

In the early days of television, we were pioneers, so many innovative ideas and programs were brought to life by public television. The media world we face today is propelled by, indeed defined by, change. If we want to be relevant, we must change as well. We have no choice. The challenges we face are significant and the degree of difficulty will not always be straightforward, but we will forge a trail to a new world, charged with possibility and imagination. In short, we must be pioneers again.

As we were preparing to create this plan, we asked ourselves some very Important questions:

*What is a strategic plan? What is it not?*

*What is our place in today's media landscape? Why now?*

*Through what lens should we be evaluating our current and future content decisions?*

The plan is a framework for our future. It outlines what our strengths are, what our audiences have come to expect from us and how we can better serve them. This is not an evaluation of all the great work we have done. In fact, you won't see the name of any programs, channels, or services of which we are so proud. It's not a step-by-step agenda of what we will be doing over the next five years. Those decisions are yet to come. But it does provide insight into how we will find our path to success. It will serve as a North Star for us.

We have tremendous assets — television and radio stations; digital channels; extraordinary content on and off digital platforms; community and educational services — and most of all, our employees. Without the dedicated, talented staff at The WNET Group, none of our work would reach and inspire our audiences. This plan will create new opportunities for our people as we become more inclusive and collaborative in our approach to our business.

The aspirations and ambitions we have for our organization will be meaningless if we lack the necessary resources. So, this plan requires that everything be viewed through the lenses of sustainability and audience development. Some things we have gotten used to may no longer be viable. Some new things we haven't thought about will be necessary. This plan will keep us focused and aligned as we mold the future we want and need.

We have seen other organizations grow and transform — and we can do it, too. But it takes a Group. With all of us pulling together, I know The WNET Group can remain sustainable and continue to serve our communities with content and services that educate, inform, and inspire.

*Neal Shapiro*

*President & CEO, The WNET Group*

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## THE PLANNING CONTEXT:

## WNET PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE



**F**rom the moment our broadcasting began on September 16, 1962, with Edward R. Murrow welcoming viewers to “a great adventure,” The WNET Group has delivered significant history as a public broadcaster, especially as a producer of PBS national content. We will of course continue to look for ways to support and leverage our programs that are vital parts of the PBS schedule, at the same time acknowledging that we must also adapt to a media world in convulsive change. That same wave of change is washing over residents in the Tri-state areas and our audio, video and digital services must adapt and respond. Change is here and we must change with it.

- A proliferation of platforms, content choices, and technological changes have disrupted legacy broadcast media. The cable television era gave way to thousands of options for content in the Internet era — from emerging streaming options to user-generated content, mobile games, and perhaps soon, virtual reality in the ‘metaverse’.
- Even among WNET’s own core constituencies, the shift to non-linear consumption of video content is dramatic, with over 90% of the audience using a smartphone regularly and more than 70% of survey respondents who can now stream live to their television sets.<sup>1</sup>
- Awareness of and engagement with public media has diminished. The brand-scape is crowded, new content discovery is a challenge, and a shrinking share of the audience understands what public media is or are able to identify their local public television station.

<sup>1</sup> WNET Audience Research Study by City Square Associates, 2022/2023.

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- Business models are also changing. Pledge revenue has declined alongside viewership and the emergence of more sophisticated fundraising mechanisms. Passport, once a boon for acquiring new donors, has now stagnated as a means of acquiring new constituents.
- Foundation, corporate, and individual funding priorities have seen major shifts.<sup>2</sup>
- Our national partners at PBS, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and NPR are evolving too. Maintaining these mutually beneficial relationships is important to us, while we also create space to invest in growth areas in partnership with other major-market organizations.

Through this time of ongoing change, we continue to believe in the value of our mission today: the opportunity to deliver impactful media to our audiences and communities, especially where commercial media can't or won't, is as critical as ever. The challenge that our work therefore must address is how to leverage WNET's strengths to connect to current and new audiences and transition successfully to the new world that has arrived.

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2 Funding landscape assessment by AEA Consulting, 2022.



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## OUR MISSION

To use the power of media to educate, inform, entertain and inspire audiences everywhere.

**The WNET Group** will extend beyond its broadcast television origins to embrace existing, new and emerging media venues. We will produce and present life-changing media content that offers an alternative to commercially driven media.

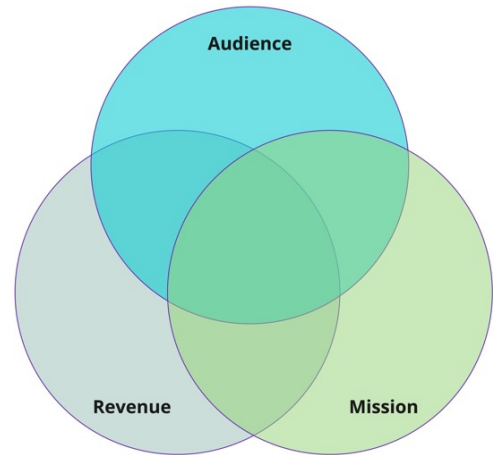


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## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Transformation requires clear focus and engagement across the organization. As we move forward, operational success will be determined by strategically aligning our activities — where **Mission** aligns with **Revenue / Funding** opportunities and an enhanced understanding of and focus on **Target Audiences**.



**Our ambitions moving forward are to be more “audience centric”** in our approach to content development, distribution, and decision making across the organization — using research, data, and consistent ongoing evaluation to ascertain success and future viability for our programming. To be audience-centric is two pronged:

1. Optimally serving our current, core audiences
2. Deliberately identifying new audiences and creating content on appropriate platforms to serve and engage them.

This plan thus identifies four priorities where **The WNET Group** will focus during this time of transition:

### I. CREATING AUDIENCE-CENTRIC CONTENT

- News & Public Affairs
- Arts & Culture
- Kids Media & Education

### II. DEVELOPING OUR BRANDS

### III. ENHANCING DIGITAL FOCUS

- Distribution
- Infrastructure (technology and data)

### IV. WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS

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## I. CREATING AUDIENCE-CENTRIC CONTENT

WNET’s content, both self-produced and redistributed, is the company’s core product and where its financial and organizational efforts are primarily directed. Through this plan, programmed content will focus on achieving mission, audience, and revenue goals and be targeted into three categories where we have strength and opportunities to fill a unique niche:

- **NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

We will create a “media home for understanding and connection” for our Local News, National News, Public Affairs, and Documentaries — coordinating news efforts across the organization, increasing audience reach through digital-focused initiatives, and growing our local news coverage by reimagining the local newsroom of tomorrow.

- **ARTS AND CULTURE**

We will strengthen and expand our arts programming to reach younger and more diverse audiences and develop new partnerships to leverage expanded content. We will explore how to maximize the impact of our arts brands and the possibility of expanding this work beyond New York.

- **KIDS MEDIA & EDUCATION**

We will refocus on leveraging audience research (beginning in fall 2023) in a changing market, better understanding the opportunities to reach children, parents, and educators at home and in schools. We will partner with other organizations across the educational sector and ensure projects incorporate clear learning outcomes from their inception.

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Note that a refreshed focus on these areas does not limit continuing the high-quality work we already produce — but rather provides focus for investment of our resources and energy.

Our overarching goal as we implement this plan is to make WNET more intentional in its approach to content: connecting our economic sustainability to the need to expand and diversify our audiences.

**We aim to better represent the emerging demographics of our local market and the country — younger, more diverse, and more economically stratified.** In particular, the pursuit of partnerships will be critical to both growing our audiences and finding more ways to engage our communities. This growth will not only provide an opportunity to generate revenue from the individuals consuming it but also from the institutional funding community who has interest in supporting the audiences we aim to reach.

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## II: DEVELOPING OUR BRANDS

Audience research indicates that 1 in 5 adults are unsure of the definition of public television, and that 50% of those who do know cannot identify the name or call sign of their local public television station.<sup>3</sup> This lack of public recognition prevents WNET from cultivating and retaining support from individuals and households that are not already directly tied to the organization. This dynamic has only accelerated over the past few years as more and more people are used to searching for the content they wish to watch rather than searching for the station they've watched previously.

Meanwhile, The WNET Group has an incredibly complex hierarchy of brands: an association with PBS and NPR, station brands, and program brands. A dedicated market research study, to begin in fall 2023, will assist us in better understanding how we might streamline and consider how we can leverage brands differently for current versus prospective audiences.

Looking forward, **WNET aims to grow its ability to stand out among the market competition by increasing the connection of its programming and identified brands with the broader public.** Our leadership position in the system provides us an opportunity to leverage the PBS and NPR brands, while also finding ways to stand out on our own.

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3 WNET Audience Research Study by City Square Associates, 2022/2023

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## III: ENHANCING DIGITAL FOCUS

### DISTRIBUTION

WNET's distribution investments have been primarily directed toward broadcast, with digital being a secondary priority. As with all other aspects of media, the ability to execute on defined digital distribution strategies will be critical as more and more people consume content on their phones and through other digital devices.

Looking forward, **WNET will focus on being intentional about our distribution decisions as a direct function of our audience targets, acknowledging they are inseparable.** This will necessitate improving user experiences on our owned platforms like our apps and website, in addition to updating current infrastructure and developing a data-driven distribution strategy on third-party platforms like social media and YouTube.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

The implementation of new technologies can have significant upfront costs, however **identifying intelligent ongoing investment is required to maintain our position in a digital market.** Leveraging new technologies can also make our content production process more efficient and improve our audience's ability to find that content.

The ability to leverage various platforms has important implications in helping convert viewers to donors. Both Passport and PBS Streaming apps play a role in developing a donor relationship — but they are not particularly well known or seen as primary viewing options by many. Data collection from these platforms is also critical in order to evaluate how we are progressing against our audience goals and associate revenue generation. It is essential for us to understand the ways people engage on third-party platforms that we do not own to encourage more people to become donors.

Digital infrastructure and the broader transformation agenda — including new modes of remote and hybrid work — will position us for the future.

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## IV: WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS

WNET is a collection of legacy and emerging media entities under one umbrella. **In order to achieve success in an increasingly complex environment, WNET will need to transform our workplace culture and operate more cohesively in service to a common set of organizational goals.** This requires investing in our employees and the growth of a high-quality, collaborative work environment built for the emerging future of work.

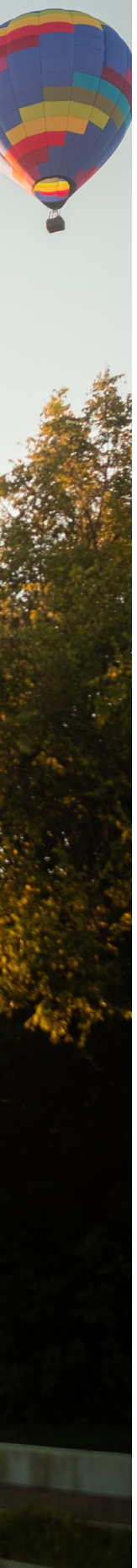
### OUR SUCCESS WILL BE BUILT UPON:

- Fostering better alignment around audience goals between WNET content leaders, with a focus on our three main areas of content focus.
- Promoting “work excellence”— investing in needed skills and developing other internal resources required to execute, including a growth mindset for all.
- Increased focus on fostering a workplace culture that is fair, inclusive, just, sustainable, and high-performing—values that not only shape our internal environment but are also reflected in the content we create, ensuring all voices are represented.
- Ensuring appropriate leadership structures are in place to guide the strategic alignment of our content to audiences and funding, and that our HR team is strategically positioned to lead the future needs of the organization.
- Investing in new staff positions and focusing on employee engagement and retention.
- Promoting a collective understanding of and accountability for revenue and economic sustainability.

**The output of this work will be an organization that is aligned cross-functionally around reaching our audiences and generating revenue and funding as an outcome — the shared success our teams need.**

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## EVALUATING SUCCESS

Establishing a baseline framework for evaluating our work will be critical to creating accountability for the goals we have outlined. The opportunity to research audience behaviors and make use of data generated by viewers on digital platforms will be of increasing importance in developing a deeper relationship with viewers. Tracking and monitoring data from fundraising operations, marketing campaigns, and other back-office activities will elevate the organization's ability to act on up-to-the-minute insights. And leveraging learnings from pilot projects across the organization will be important in choosing the best opportunities to develop moving forward.

We developed key operating metrics at the organization level in order to track our progress against this plan's strategic priorities. These metrics will incorporate existing data that can be tracked across The WNET Group, as well additional information points that become available as the plan comes to fruition. The **organizational-level metrics** identified include:

- Audience demographics — age, income mix, racial and ethnic mix
- # of new audience members — especially in target audiences
- Sustainable new content developed within focus areas
- # of new donors (individual + other donors)
- Donor retention rates
- Earned and contributed revenue growth
- % of content on digital vs. broadcast distribution
- Viewers on digital and other new distribution channels
- Staff engagement / satisfaction
- Staff demographics that match those of the metro areas we serve

We have also begun to develop metrics to help understand **success at the program level**. These are not metrics that demonstrate a “one-time” snapshot, but instead will illuminate trends and provide benchmarks to provide the context needed to understand success. Next to these, we will also use revenue and expense data for each program to create metrics that will allow us to understand how our impact aligns with our resource use.

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## THANK YOU

...to the 50+ members of our management and staff and our entire Board of Trustees who were participants in creating and developing this plan.

“This plan is not just about recognizing the challenges and opportunities ahead, but creating the path to success.” – Neal Shapiro, President & CEO

The WNET Group, home to PBS stations THIRTEEN, WLIW21 and the network NJ PBS, and NPR station WLIW-FM, uses the power of media to educate, inform, entertain and inspire audiences everywhere. The WNET Group extends beyond its broadcast television origins to embrace existing, new and emerging media platforms, producing and presenting life-changing content that offers an alternative to commercially-driven media.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Audience-centric** — focusing on the preferences, needs, and interests of the audience or target group. It implies prioritizing the audience’s perspective and tailoring actions or content to better serve their expectations and requirements.

**Brand-scape** — often used to describe the visual and symbolic environment in which a brand operates. It encompasses all the elements and factors that influence the perception, recognition, and positioning of a brand in the minds of consumers. This can include elements like a brand’s logo, packaging, advertising, and how it appears in various media and contexts. The brand-scape concept emphasizes the importance of understanding how a brand fits into its broader visual and cultural context, as well as how it relates to competitors and influences consumer perceptions.

**Digital distribution strategies** — planning how to effectively offer and deliver digital content or products to your target audience online while considering factors like technology, marketing, monetization, and user experience.

**Economic sustainability** — the ability to maintain or continue our initiatives over the long term without depleting resources.

**Linear broadcast** — live and scheduled television content which the viewer watches as it airs, instead of on-demand.

**Monetize** — to generate revenue or profit from a particular asset, resource, content, product, or activity. It involves finding ways to turn something into a source of income. In the digital space, this could mean revenue coming from consumers or advertisers. Non-linear media — includes video on demand type services, video games, and social media.

**Non-linear media** — includes video on demand type services, video games, and social media

**Third-party platforms** — external, independent, or non-affiliated digital or online platforms, services, or websites that are separate from a company or organization’s own online presence. Third-party platforms refer to technical systems that mediate exchanges between content producers and consumers. This includes content platforms like YouTube, social media platforms like Facebook, and search platforms like Google search.