



Shortwave Committee Report Fact Sheet



The Broadcasting Board of Governors established the Special Committee on the Future of Shortwave Broadcasting to undertake a comprehensive review of the efficacy of shortwave radio as a distribution platform for U.S. international media (USIM).

Actions

- The Committee reviewed audience-based research, including analysis of user experiences and user choices, as well as opportunities and limits of the medium.
- The Committee examined the characteristics and listening experience of shortwave users in the BBG's target markets, the use of shortwave radio by the BBG's networks, the networks' relative success in reaching their target audiences through shortwave, and the costs of operating the BBG's shortwave transmitting facilities.
- The Committee published a request for comments, to which dozens of industry experts, academics, shortwave listeners, former employees, and other stakeholders responded. The Committee also requested and received substantial input from State Department overseas posts regarding the importance and impact of shortwave.

Main findings

- USIM must optimize delivery by audience/market. While there is still a critical need for shortwave in key countries, it is a medium of marginal and continuously declining impact in most markets. Even in countries with currently significant levels of shortwave usage, audiences will migrate to other platforms as they become more accessible.
- The Committee recommends that BBG take an aggressive approach to reduce or eliminate shortwave broadcasts where there is either minimal audience reach or the audience is not a target audience based on the BBG's support of U.S. foreign policy.
- Evidence suggests that availability of high-quality content on preferred platforms is primarily responsible for the declining use of shortwave. AM and FM radio, podcasts, and mobile streaming are more widely used for audio consumption.
- Shortwave users generally have viable alternative means of accessing USIM content. Top target demographics are unlikely to use shortwave exclusively or at all.
- The BBG has found no evidence that shortwave usage increases during crises. Audiences continue to use their existing platforms (TV, FM, and the Internet) or seek out anti-censorship tools including online firewall circumvention, private chat software, flash drives, and DVDs to access content.
- Shortwave is a relatively expensive platform to operate and maintain.
- Digital shortwave, or Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM), is unlikely to become an established mass media distribution methodology in enough of the BBG's current or future markets to justify the costs.
- The Committee supports almost all of the shortwave broadcast reductions previously approved by the Board under sequestration and the implementation of the FY14 Operating Plan. However, given current situations in Ukraine and other nearby states with large Russian-speaking populations, the Committee recommends revising the FY14 Operating Plan and ensuring that shortwave broadcasts in Russian to Russia and the Caucasus be continued at current levels, subject to re-evaluation during FY16 budget formulation processes.