

Local Content and Services Report – 2024 CPB SAS Report

Describe your overall goals and approach to address identified community issues, needs, and interests through your station’s vital local services, such as multiplatform long and short-form content, digital and in-person engagement, education services, community information, partnership support, and other activities, and audiences you reached or new audiences you engaged.

To best serve our community, we had four guiding content principles for 2024:

- On-the ground reporting
- Accountability/investigative journalism
- Stories that could impact policy discussions and cultural conversations
- Stories that reflect and add depth to the experience of diverse communities
- Events that would stimulate community conversations around some of the big issues in our community.

The work mentioned below captures the major themes that emerged in the hundreds of stories our newsroom produced, aimed at achieving these principles.

Health Desk We’ve had a dedicated healthcare reporter for several years now, and we continued to offer our audience robust coverage in 2024 — around public policy, like how debates around IVF and Title X funding are playing out in Tennessee and how the state became an epicenter for the national conversation around gender affirming care for teens; public health issues, like Tennessee’s poor performance in infant mortality. We had coverage on around medical research findings, the changing health insurance landscape, childhood vaccination rates, the state’s approaches opioid addiction and the ongoing struggles of rural hospitals. We also did coverage on how local conditions like heat waves and allergens in the air affect health. We’ve also continued to cover the ramifications of the state’s abortion ban.

Criminal Justice Desk In 2024, we did extensive coverage on Tennessee’s gun disposition laws — where and why they fail and, in one rural county, how they are implemented with success. As in years past, we reported on juvenile justice issues, like a juvenile detention center that uses isolation as punishment for behavioral issues. We did stories about the efforts of formerly incarcerated Tennesseans to have their voting rights restored and how the state’s no tolerance law against students making threats at school resulted in the arrest of unarmed kids, some with disabilities. We also followed policy debates within Nashville’s police department and Metro council around allocating funds to replace tasers and whether the city should adopt a system that gives them access to privately-owned security cameras.

Education Desk 2024 began with extensive coverage of the governor's efforts to expand the state's voucher program to the entire state, which led to robust debate at the capital. We also reported extensively on efforts by community efforts to remove certain books from school libraries, and on the ongoing saga of underfunding at Tennessee State University (a federal report found that the university has been underfunded by the state for decades as the school faced layoffs and current funding disputes with lawmaker). We provided statistical analysis on how Tennessee students rank in comparison to national trends. We covered efforts to litigate policies around transgender students. We did a lot of stories on Tennessee's 4th grade retention law, which requires 3rd graders to meet certain academic standards to move on to 4th grade. We reported on a new state law that allows certain teachers to carry firearms — and the decision by school districts to opt out of it. We also did a number of human-interest stories with teachers and students, like one about how high schoolers observe Ramadan.

Environment Desk As in the previous year, we did extensive reporting in 2024 on the Tennessee Valley Authority, our statewide source of electric power. The TVA has continued to put a lot of resources into developing new fossil fuel power plants as the Biden administration pushes for more renewables. The TVA's mix of fossil fuel vs renewable energy remains unchanged despite promises made that they would increase renewables. We reported on national weather trends through a local lens, like how Tennessee had the hottest year on record for the second year in a row. We covered conservation efforts, like success in bolstering an area gray bat population, and a state agency's quest to encourage Tennesseans to plant pollinators, giving away free milkweed seeds to provide habitat for monarch butterflies. Through 2024, we covered how public policy affects state wetlands and how policy and development affect Middle Tennessee's tree canopy.

State Government We reported from the state capitol throughout the 2024 legislative session when lawmakers took up school vouchers, the governor's top priority of the year that ultimately failed. We produced a series with NPR's Embedded, called Supermajority, which followed the efforts of lifelong Republican mom's, who had children at the Covenant School during the 2023 shooting, to be heard by the legislators on gun safety issues. (This was downloaded over a million times.) We did a lot of reporting on voting access, local elections, voter turnout and disaster relief after Hurricane Helene. We also covered policy changes that state lawmakers enacted to restrict protesting at the capital and stifle dissent from Democratic lawmakers.

Music and Arts Coverage Our Senior Music Writer Jewly Hight did robust reporting from Nashville's music scene in 2024, with a focus on artists outside of the mainstream of what Nashville is typically known for. There was an emphasis on artists of color and queer artists. We launched a special series called Music Citizens that follows the people who work behind the scenes in the music business.

Metro / City Government Our Metro reporter reported from Metro Council meetings and tracked and explained complex city government issues to our audience. This also overlapped with

our coverage of state government in 2024 — as tension with between the city and state ramped up through the passage of several state bills that targeted Nashville’s self-governance. We dedicated a lot of our coverage to the biggest Metro story of the year: an ambitious mass transit plan that was put before Nashville voters on the November ballot. After its passage, we did a lot of coverage on how the plan will roll out. We also focused on a major redevelopment around the Titans new stadium, the largest public/private development project the city has undertaken in years.

This Is Nashville Our daily mid-day talk show had its second full year on the air in 2024. It hosted countless conversations with locals on topics important to our city.

The *NashVillager* Podcast We launched an ambitious daily newsletter in 2023, it has a hosted / narrative style that reads like a letter from a friend. Not only does it expose our journalism to a different audience, it aims to spark conversations about what it means to live in Nashville and how we interact with each other. In 2024, we expanded this idea with a daily news podcast, also called the *NashVillager*. In under 20 minutes each weekday, it provides listeners with all of our reporting of the day, as well as essays about Nashville history that put today’s news into context.

Describe key initiatives and the variety of partners with whom you collaborated, including other public media outlets, community nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, the business community, teachers, and parents, etc. This will illustrate the many ways you’re connected across the community and engaged with other important organizations in the area.

- **NPR** – We’ve been the go-to source for NPR when national news breaks in our region, and our voices are on the national airwaves often.
- **ProPublica** - co-reported with us on criminal justice stories on guns and juvenile detention and helped us develop The Kids of Rutherford County with the New York Times.
- **NPR Music** - we have an ongoing relationship for live sessions from our Sonic Cathedral to be included on NPR music’s web site. Many of our featured artists appear on “Song of the Day,” and much of our editorial work is distributed nationally as well.
- **Do615** - each week we collaborate with the events site for What Where Whens-day, a comprehensive list of performances, theme nights, and general stuff to do in the music scene.

Our music station WXP produces these special features throughout 2024:

- **Nashville Artist of the Month** - we highlight a local artist each month through their personal playlists, a featured profile, a live performance video, interviews, and tracks. We’re able to provide additional exposure through our relationships with NPR Music, which often features local artists in the national “Song of the Day,” to sister station WPLN, which airs the feature profiles.

- **Record of the Week** - focuses on an album of merit, introducing new songs daily with selected quotes from exclusive artist interviews and culminating in a feature that varies from non-narrated audio postcards to in depth interviews. Local artists often make the cut.
- **Thematic Static** - listener recommendations power this 5-song theme set. The series rotates between fun, thoughtful and timely.
- **What Where Whens-day** - is our weekly arts, culture, and events series to keep listeners aware of what is happening in the area.

What impact did your key initiatives and partnerships have in your community? Describe any known measurable impact, such as increased awareness, learning or understanding about particular issues. Describe indicators of success, such as connecting people to needed resources or strengthening conversational ties across diverse neighborhoods. Did a partner see an increase in requests for related resources? Please include direct feedback from a partner(s) or from a person(s) served.

Anecdotally, we know that our coverage is referenced by people in our community all the time. Sometimes, our reporting causes higher profile conversations. Our coverage of an East Tennessee juvenile detention center resulted in debate in the state legislature.

Please describe any efforts (e.g. programming, production, engagement activities) you have made to investigate and/or meet the needs of minority and other diverse audiences (including, but not limited to, new immigrants, people for whom English is a second language and illiterate adults) during Fiscal Year 2023, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2024. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.

One initiative we began in 2024 (and will continue this year) is extensive coverage inside Nashville's Kurdish community, which is the largest in the United States. We sent a reporter to Nashville's sister city Erbil, Kuridstan in the fall — so that we could report on this diaspora from both places, interviewing family's with members in both places. This has helped us gain trust in the Kurdish community and is helping our city better understand our own diversity. We intend to offer this special series in Kurdish.

We continue to strive to have the breadth of our community represented in our coverage. In that effort, we log demographic information of our story sources and seek to reflect the diversity that exists here.

Further, our reporters, editors and hosts participated in public events 37 times in 2024 — many in partnership with other groups like the National Museum of African-American Music, various schools and universities and book stores. We also have a "coffee with reporters" day where we positioned reporters all across Nashville so that they could answer question, receive tips, and listen to the concerns of our audience.

Please assess the impact that your CPB funding had on your ability to serve your community. What were you able to do with your grant that you wouldn't be able to do if you didn't receive it?

With the financial headwinds facing so many public media news organizations, including ours, CPB funding is arguably more important than ever to our effort to bring robust local news to our community. We have aggressively grown our local newsroom in recent years, making much of the above possible and garnering national recognition and awards.

Financial pressures are currently our biggest challenge as we try to continue to grow our coverage and reach a broader, more diverse audience through multi-platform transformation. Like other stations, our audience is more diffuse than it used to be, as the media landscape fractures and goes online. But we also know that our potential audience is larger than ever, as our region continues to grow quickly.

In addition to direct funding of the station, we joined the CPB's Civic Spark initiative in the fall of 2024, led by PBS SoCal. This project will bear fruit in 2025, and it entails using short-form vertical video to highlight the moments when Middle Tennesseans decided to get involved to make a positive difference in their communities.