

## ANNUAL CPB LOCAL CONTENT AND SERVICES REPORT 2023

From CPB SAS Report 2023 – Filed March 30, 2023

### 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 2023 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 2023 — around medical research findings, the changing health insurance landscape, Tennessee’s refusal to accept federal funding to expand its Medicaid program, opioid addiction and treatment, and how the pandemic affected the mental health of teens. The broader story of 2023 is of local and national politics shaping our healthcare coverage. When the Dobbs decision overturned Roe v Wade, Tennessee had a trigger law in place to kick in automatically one of the strictest in the country. So, we had coverage of physicians and patients finding themselves in legal gray

areas — around what can be considered threatening to the life of a mother, for example. It was also a year in which the state legislature enacted several laws targeting the trans community, including a ban on gender affirming medical treatments for trans youth. We reported on families traveling to other states to receive treatment and the legal efforts to overturn the law.

**Criminal Justice Desk** Our most high-profile criminal justice coverage of 2023 centered around juvenile courts and detention. In partnership with ProPublica, our criminal justice reporter Paige Pflieger did an investigation into conditions at a juvenile detention center in Knoxville where teens were routinely being kept in isolation as punishment. This built on earlier reporting done by ProPublica and our reporter Meribah Knight on the juvenile court in Rutherford County, Tennessee, where the judge was sending kids into incarceration without legal basis. That reporting led to the podcast *The Kids of Rutherford County* that we did in partnership with Serial and the New York Times. It rose to the top of the Apple Podcasts chart. We also did investigative work around Tennessee's gun laws, diving deep into data to uncover failures of our current laws to protect victims of domestic violence. And with a mass shooting at Nashville's Covenant School last spring, we had a lot of coverage of protests and a legislative special session on public safety that was called by the governor in response to the shooting, a session defined by protests and a lack of action by lawmakers.

**Education Desk** A Tennessee state law was enacted in 2023 — in response to learning setbacks during COVID — that required third graders to score at a certain level of competency in reading on standardized tests in order to move up to fourth grade. We did a lot of coverage around this, as there was a lot to clarify, and the law affected a lot of families — around 60% of third graders scored below the threshold in initial testing. Most families were able to avoid a repeat of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade by either retaking the test with a higher score, attending mandatory summer school, or signing up for tutoring. We also did a lot of culture war coverage — as local school boards became contentious, first over masks and

vaccines and then over books and trans athletes. In higher ed, we've been keeping a close eye on a funding fight between Tennessee State University, a public HBCU, and the state government. A federal audit found that the state has been underfunding the land grant university for years, but the state disagrees. In the last half of 2023, a group of state lawmakers started meeting to discuss whether Tennessee should become the first state to reject federal education funding, and we've been covering that as well.

**Environment Desk** We've did a lot of reporting in 2023 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. In December of 2023, we covered a severe cold snap that resulted in rolling blackouts in Middle Tennessee. This was due in part to failures at fossil fuel power plants during the extreme cold. Our region was no stranger to extreme weather in 2023, and we covered it through a lens of global climate change and intensifying extremes. We experienced several rounds of destructive tornadoes in the state as well as a prolonged drought. We also did stories on endangered species, city recycling policy, tree canopy degradation, water quality, how the warming climate is changing the state's growing season and what garden zone we're in, and the protesting of a natural gas pipeline.

**State Government** We've got a reporter at the Capitol every day of each state legislative session. 2023 was a particularly high-profile session for the state's governing body. Much of the attention came after the previously mentioned Covenant School Shooting. Three democratic representatives were reprimanded for leading a protest inside the gallery. Two of those lawmakers — both Black — were then kicked out of the legislature. Both were reappointed by their local city councils, and both were reelected in a special election. We did a lot of coverage of the often-tense relationship between state lawmakers and a group of mothers from the Covenant School, who showed up every day holding signs, having press conferences, and pressuring lawmakers to enact gun reforms. The

legislature responded, at one point, by banning Capitol spectators from holding signs, a rule that was controversially enforced by the Tennessee Highway Control. (This led to a successful lawsuit from the ACLU.)

**Music and Arts Coverage** Our Senior Music Writer Jewly Hight did robust reporting from Nashville's music scene in 2023, 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. Also in 2023, the Tennessee State University marching band won a couple of Grammys, which we were delighted to cover. Jewly did a feature story on the band.

**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 2023 — as tension with between the city and state ramped up through the passage of several state bills that targeted Nashville's self-governance. For example, the state passed laws giving the state a majority of appointments for Nashville's airport and sports authorities, which led to ongoing litigation. The tension between city and state was cited in polls as a top issue for voters in the mayoral election we had in 2023, which we covered closely. Our Metro desk also focused closely on affordable housing (Nashville has outpaced most of the country in rising housing costs) and transportation infrastructure.

**This Is Nashville** Our daily mid-day talk show had its first full year on the air in 2023. It hosted countless conversations with locals on topics important to our city.

**The *NashVillager*** 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.

***The Kids of Rutherford County* live event** We held a sold-out event at a local independent movie theater. Our reporter Meribah Knight, who hosted and produced *The Kids of Rutherford County* podcast, had a conversation on stage with Madeline Baran, host of *In the Dark* from The New Yorker.

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.
- **Nashville Noticias** – WPLN news reporters continue to do biweekly reports in Spanish for the community news outlet, Nashville Noticias. This includes a 45-minute Facebook Live conversation on Wednesdays and a weekly news roundup on Fridays.
- **Kaiser Health News** – we continued to participate in the partnership among KHN, NPR and local member stations.
- **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 WNXF produces these special features throughout 2023:

- **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.

One obvious answer is that our reporting with ProPublica from 2022 on the juvenile court in Rutherford County was developed into a podcast with Serial and the New York Times. It was number one on the Apple Podcasts charts for several days and got millions of downloads. A live event we held for that podcast was sold out, and a live discussion of juvenile justice.

With the launch of a daily newsletter in 2023, we have been able to extend the reach and impact of our reporting. With over 18,000 subscribers and a roughly 55%, it is opened by around 10,000 Middle Tennesseans each weekday morning.

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.

During the 2020 protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, we made a commitment to facilitating understanding and fostering conversation around equity and race. We been intentional about tracking the ethnicity of our sources to ensure that we're reflecting the breadth of our diverse community and increasing the diversity of our staff to bring greater awareness to our blind spots and the inherent perspectives in our coverage.

In 2023, we provided coverage of issues affecting our region's diverse immigrant communities; the area's indigenous history and efforts to celebrate, preserve and protect indigenous cultures; Nashville's civil rights history and Black culture and the many ways that race and sexual identity have bubbled up into our state and local politics.

On the birthday of Andrew Jackson, we covered a protest at his historic home, organized by Nashville's indigenous community offering a counter-narrative to Jackson's legacy. When city planners started mapping plans to build a new NFL stadium and redevelop a large section of downtown Nashville, we hosted a conversation on our local show with indigenous activists calling on city leaders to study and protect indigenous history buried beneath.

When war broke out in the Middle East, we did a feature story where we spoke with three generations from Nashville's Palestinian community about their perspective on the history of the conflict. We also reported from inside an emotional interfaith conversation on the conflict, pro-Palestine protests and vigils held by Nashville's Jewish community.

**“Alternate Ending”** We produced a one-hour radio special in which a reporter explores changes in the historically Black neighborhood she knew as a kid, how the city's decision to route a major interstate through it undermined it decades ago, and how gentrification is tearing at its fabric today as it begins to bounce back. After the special aired, we held a live discussion event.

The special aired March 21 (plus re-airings) and was accompanied by two community events meant to extend the conversation on how community is built and lost through public policy. The podcast version of the special topped 4,000 downloads.

We also closely covered the racially tinged ousting by the Tennessee legislature of two Black representatives who participated in protests inside the Capitol chambers over gun control.

The legislature also passed laws targeting the state's LGBTQ community in 2023, including bans on drag performances and gender-affirming healthcare for trans teens. In addition to reporting on these issues and interviewing those affected, we hosted hourlong conversations about them on our daily show.

And we continued our partnership with Nashville Noticias in an effort to bring our news coverage to Spanish-speaking Tennesseans.

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 also were able to participate in Poynter's Digital Transformation Project in 2023, which I understand is funded in large part by the CPB. That project led to the launch of our newsletter and is continuing to show results through a station-wide multi-platform mindset and several new projects we have in the works, including a daily local news podcast and a sharp increase in our online coverage.

## **DIVERSITY PROGRAM**

Nashville Public Radio strives to ascertain that its staff, board of directors and community advisory board are reflective of the diverse population it serves. Additionally, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's (CPB) Diversity Eligibility Criteria require public media organizations to adopt formal goals for diversity and to report annually on steps taken to work toward those goals. These actions are required for all stations receiving Community Service Grant funds (CSG).

To that end, Nashville Public Radio has set the following diversity goals:

To recruit and retain a diverse workforce that is representative of our service area. • To provide equal opportunity in employment.

To educate our management and staff annually in best practices for maintaining an inclusive and diverse environment for all persons.

To seek candidates for Nashville Public Radio's Community Advisory Board that represent the geographically and demographically diverse composition of the many communities we serve.

Seek diverse candidates for our Board of Directors through the Nominating Committee process.

To assist in developing a more diverse future workforce with professional skills in the broadcasting/media industry by recruiting diverse candidates for Nashville Public Radio internship opportunities and/or by participating in minority or other diversity job fairs.

Review with the station's governing board those practices that are designed to fulfill Nashville Public Radio's commitment to diversity and to meet the applicable FCC guidelines

In addition, Nashville Public Radio shall undertake one of the following initiatives on an annual basis:

Include individuals representing diverse groups in internships or work-study programs designed to provide meaningful professional level experience in order to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and further public broadcasting's commitment to education;

Include qualified diverse candidates in any slate of candidates for elected governing boards that the Nashville Public Radio controls;

Implement a diversity training program for members of the organization's governing board of directors on an annual basis;

Participate in minority or other diversity job fairs; or

Implement formal diversity training programs for management and appropriate staff.

In addition to these goals Nashville Public Radio will interview at least one qualified diversity candidate for each senior leadership position hired. The term senior leadership position includes: CEO, COO, CFO, Chief Content Officer, General Manager, and other equivalent positions.