

# WAMU 88.5

## CPB Station Activities Survey for Fiscal Year 2022

### Section 6: Local Content & Services Report

#### Telling Public Radio's Story

**1. 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.**

For FY2022, our primary goal was to implement the newsroom expansion plan created in FY2021. In addition to the more than 1800 individual stories serving our audiences this year, WAMU continued to deliver local content mainstays that listeners and readers have come to expect: *The Politics Hour*, *Dish City* (season 4), *Heath Hub*, *Get Out There*, and *Voices of Wards 7 and 8*. *Dish City*, a food-based podcast about local culture and history, was recognized with a [James Beard Award](#).

The newsroom expansion plan aimed to provide diverse communities across the D.C. region with robust daily public service journalism, *and* deeply reported features that lead to impact. It further assumed that our team would meet audiences where they are: by investing in engagement and partnership staff; and by embracing a multiplatform publishing strategy across audio, website, and social – as well as collaborating with other publications.

We are now the only local newsroom in the region with dedicated reporters to follow the environment, immigrant communities, and criminal justice beats. We also have reporters assigned to transportation, arts and culture, housing, education, Wards 7 and 8, and politics in each state. We also added general assignment capacity and spread some of the burden of breaking news coverage across our full team via shifts.

On top of expanding our staff and the beats they focus on, we also leveraged our partnership with NPR and WAMU's other content teams to maximize the reach of our local content. The newsroom's engagement staff diligently swapped in fresh local web stories for the NPR homepage. The newsroom's production team began uploading more stories to the NPR One mobile application and to fill out our portion of the [Consider This podcast](#) every day. Newsroom editors actively sought to flag local reporting that may be of interest to the 1A production team to discuss at a national scale such as the [baby formula shortage](#), our investigation into [how MPD officers avoid accountability](#), and the newsroom's look back on [the Jan. 6 insurrection](#). And engagement staff flagged stories with strong visuals to be featured on the @NPR Instagram account.

This year, our web traffic decreased from the spikes seen in 2020 and January 2021 back to pre-pandemic levels. The [acquisition of DCist](#) in FY2017 continues to pay dividends in terms of

audience, reaching nearly three times as many users as WAMU.org this year — it is the primary domain for all of our local web stories. On air we consistently ranked number one among radio stations in our market for the last half of FY2022. Our cumulative listening audience fell dramatically at the onset of the pandemic and has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, but it steadily climbed throughout this entire year. Our AQH listeners on the other hand did reach pre-pandemic levels by the end of FY2022, also climbing steadily through the year and ending on a 10% market share. On social, we cultivated explosive growth on the @DCist Instagram account by focusing more staff time and strategy on engagement. For local podcasts, *Dish City* saw more than 20,000 downloads per episode, *The Politics Hour* saw more than 12,000, and *Consider This* saw more than 6,500.

In terms of page views, our most widely read stories for the year were guides and explainers that helped people navigate their community: [“A Dozen Day Trips To Escape D.C. This Summer”](#); [“Where To Get A COVID-19 Test In D.C.”](#); [“Here’s How To Help Afghan Refugees In The D.C. Area”](#); [“Do Your Holiday Shopping At These 12 Festive Markets In The D.C. Area”](#); [“D.C. Has A New Visitor Parking System And It Actually Works.”](#)

Election coverage ranked similarly high in views, and kept readers on the page for extended periods of time. We prioritized identifying and covering issues important to local voters in the region. Here’s what some audience members had to say:

- “Really good reporting from DCist on how Loudoun County schools issues became central to the VA gubernatorial race,” [said](#) one about a Virginia story.
- “Big props to @amanduhgomez, @Curious\_Kurz, @colleengrablick & @maustermuhle. As someone with strong opinions about these races, I found this voter guide to be fair, thorough but concise, and a great way for voters to get a lay of the land if they’re just tuning in. Check it out!” [said](#) another about the D.C. guide.
- “Maryland’s election is less than a month away and mail-in ballots are already going out, so here’s a primer on all of the races you should care about ... There’s a lot going on in Maryland this election cycle. Let us break it down for you,” someone else [said](#) about the Maryland guide.

Stories that engaged people for as long as the voter guides were either reflections on pivotal moments our community faced, or they were unique features not reported by other outlets. Both types tended to include thoughtful visuals such as photo essays. Three were rich audio packages to mark various dates: the [20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks](#), celebrating [the 60th anniversary of WAMU](#), and [looking back on the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. capitol](#) one year later. Examples of unique features that captured residents’ attention include [local Maya immigrants seeking services in their Indigenous languages](#), a [family that says a shoddy house flip punctured their dreams of homeownership](#), and an author, poet, and visual [artist based out of D.C. and Maryland who was released from prison after serving 22 years](#) of two sentences of 40 years and 20 years to life.

We shaped a lot of our strategy around how best to engage with community members to inform our coverage and fulfill our mission of connecting Washingtonians to each other.

For six months, the local newsroom's [audience producer joined our weekly arts and culture segment](#), *Get Out There*, increasing listenership and [using social media to include residents' recommendations](#) in the conversation. And in one case, our arts and culture reporter who hosts the segment took the whole show into the community and [recorded with a 7th-grade art class](#).

Our engagement team also partnered with reporters to experiment with [Instagram Live](#) and [Twitter Spaces](#) to connect with virtual event attendees more directly.

Since in-person events were still a safety concern amid the Delta and Omicron variants of COVID-19, WAMU creatively used the *Kojo In Our Community* series to remotely convene conversations on pressing local matters. Two virtual events discussed [gaps in health care](#) and [how local businesses were affected](#) by the pandemic. Recognizing the potential for "Zoom fatigue," we built on that success and moved to hosting live call-in specials. Topics included [learning and the politicization of school policies during COVID-19](#), [local gun violence](#), and [traffic deaths in our region](#). To discuss [the Virginia governor's race](#), Jenn White from our national program *1A* joined Kojo as a co-host, and the show was simultaneously broadcast by partner stations in Virginia: WHRV and WVTF/Radio IQ.

Kojo Nnamdi, along with *The Politics Hour* analyst Tom Sherwood, also provided a [live election-night special following the Virginia governor's race](#) and an [on-air debate between candidates for D.C. mayor](#) (the Democratic primary, which usually decides the general election). These specials are in addition to the weekly *The Politics Hour* broadcast where residents may call in to discuss regional politics.

In the second half of the year, WAMU partnered with The Moth to present 10 [live storytelling events](#) in Washington, D.C. That Spring, WAMU also hosted the StoryCorps Military Voices Initiative and helped facilitate [approximately 50 interviews with local veterans, service members, and military families](#) to preserve their oral histories in the Library of Congress.

**2. 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.**

At this time, WAMU's local content teams primarily collaborate with other newsrooms.

At the end of FY2021, we began sharing audio stories with [VPM Media Corporation](#). We allow our Northern Virginia coverage and any stories of national relevance to be broadcast to VPM's Central Virginia and the Shenandoah Valley audience. Likewise, WAMU may broadcast any

statewide VPM stories that are relevant to our Virginia listeners or our region more broadly. In FY2023, we intend to expand this content sharing relationship to include web stories.

Since 2010, WAMU has also had access to broadcast stories from across Virginia produced by the [Virginia Public Radio](#) network coordinated by Radio IQ. And since 2015, [Capital Weather Gang at The Washington Post](#) has produced weather reports for our broadcast – we also collaborate to bring their meteorologists' expertise to our listeners via interviews in the case of odd or extreme weather events.

This year, the newsroom began collaborating with local Spanish-language newspaper El Tiempo Latino to share content and expand language access. [El Tiempo Latino translates its stories into English for WAMU](#)'s audience and [WAMU's local reporting into Spanish](#) for their audience. In FY2023, we are planning to begin producing audio stories with El Tiempo Latino reporters to accompany the written stories they share and increase the diversity of content and voices on our air.

Since 2019, WAMU has had a similar content sharing relationship with the local street newspaper — focused on homelessness and sold by people experiencing homelessness — [Street Sense Media](#). Our newsroom can [republish their written stories](#) online, and WAMU's local content may be published in Street Sense print editions. In April, when a serial killer was targeting people experiencing homelessness, we tried a more active [collaboration](#) to connect WAMU journalists with homeless and formerly homeless Street Sense contributors to talk through what that threat felt like. We expect further co-reporting in FY2023, along with expanding our content sharing to include producing audio stories with Street Sense Media reporters. And every year, WAMU and DCist join Street Sense Media and other local outlets to collaboratively cover local homelessness for a single day. DCist co-founded [the project](#) with Street Sense Media in 2016. [This year](#), the WAMU/DCist newsroom contributed four articles to the annual collection.

We also renewed our partnership with [Report For America](#) to fund a third and final year of our current corps member on the Wards 7 and 8 beat. We anticipate turning that position into a permanent FTE and pursuing another RFA corps member in FY2023 and continue building capacity to better serve under-covered communities in our region.

In January we explored a one-off partnership to republish and amplify [an investigation](#) reported by The Washington Informer and the Center For Public Integrity. It showed a D.C. home repair program for low-income residents, which usually serves Black seniors and has an average wait time of three years. Many on the waiting list end up feeling pressured to sell their homes if they can't find another comparable amount of help.

And at the end of FY2022, two WAMU/DCist reporters were accepted into a year-long Philanthropy and Nonprofit Accountability Fellowship with the [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#). More to come from their work in FY2023.

As part of the newsroom expansion plan, a partnerships editor was hired to support existing collaborations and to coordinate development of new connections with our community.

**3. 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.**

Since FY2020, our local newsroom has measured impact in categories such as influencing policy, leading to community-based action, and developing trust with community members.

At least seven stories had a direct policy impact in FY2022.

For example, in mid-December the newsroom published a [major investigation](#) that was co-authored with Reveal about a secretive process that blocked the firing of nearly two dozen police officers. [Multiple councilmembers](#) called for greater transparency and MPD has since started [publicizing the schedule for adverse action panels](#). Our findings also became the subject of a [Washington Post op-ed](#), which wrote: “The workings of this powerful tribunal have long been hidden from public view, but now comes a searing account that raises questions about what interests are being served – those of troubled officers or that of the public and its safety.”

In February, our initial [story](#) about law-enforcement being unable to step in when “heritage trees” are illegally cut down led the D.C. Council to [pass emergency legislation to close a loophole](#) often exploited by real estate developers. Our reporting was cited in the bill.

And in one case, a simple tweet by our reporter that amplified a resident’s letter about poor housing conditions [led a city agency to investigate the complaint](#).

More than 100 stories were referenced in other work, from a [county council member’s comments on zoning](#) informing another local outlet’s reporting, to an abundance of stories appearing in the footnotes of the Council on Court Excellence’s [review of D.C.’s justice system](#), to a story cited in a lawsuit against a neglectful corporate landlord.

More than 20 articles resulted in community action, such as a PTA group organizing donations for [families affected by flooding](#), a local [freedom of information group getting involved in debating local jail conditions](#), and a reader delivering face masks to support [employees at a Trader Joe’s grocery store](#).

Many stories built trust with members of our community. Comments include:

- “Thanks for reporting on the [fraudulent unemployment claims](#). My husband and I BOTH discovered fraudulent claims this week. Called the hotline only to be diverted to voicemail.”
- “Wow, DCist is killing the DMV environment beat! [Must read story](#) from Jacob Fenston.”
- “DCist I appreciate so much of the [reporting](#) y’all have done through the pandemic, crucial local work! Y’all don’t have to copy the worst of the major papers by treating people’s survival like a light cocktail debate.”
- “Amazing [piece](#). A must read if you live in D.C. or any area where people are obsessed with the rise in crime. A must read for Mayor Bowser, Council of D.C., and every candidate that is running for office. In my field, human-centered design, we call this empathy research -- where you examine and solve the problems from the perspective of the people you are solving for. These kids don’t want anything more than what the kids in the affluent suburbs have. They express themselves in as clear a way as any person can. They have brilliant ideas about how to fix their city. why the politicians don’t take the most obvious path to solutions, IE listening to these kids and acting on their solutions, is mystifying.”
- “I applaud Ms.Gathright for following the [story](#) of drugs in the DC jail. I attended Catholic University School of Nursing in the 1990’s and when I did a student rotation at DC General Hospital’s Emergency Room, I was shocked that so many of the inmates from the jail were coming into the ER due to drug overdoses. No one on the hospital staff seemed perplexed by it. It was so routine. I can’t believe it has taken so long for something to be done about it. I’m sure there were/are many jail staff smuggling drugs to inmates. Great article!”

All told, expansion of the local news team, sustained focus on engagement strategies, and collaboration with both local and national partners increased our audiences’ understanding of each of particular beat, regularly built trust or moved audience members to action, and amplified more diverse voices throughout our region.

**4. 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 2022, and any plans you have made to meet the needs of these audiences during Fiscal Year 2023. If you regularly broadcast in a language other than English, please note the language broadcast.**

Since its inception, the Wards 7 and 8 beat created through our partnership with Report For America aimed to better serve, and better represent, communities in the two majority-Black wards of D.C. This year, we expanded that web-only work to begin reaching members of our broadcast audiences, too.

Starting in [October](#), [reporting](#) from this beat — including the hallmark [Voices of Wards 7 and 8](#) series — was broadcast in our local feature segments during Morning Edition and All Things



Considered on an ad-hoc basis. Plans for FY2023 include solidifying this audio series on a regular cadence.

In the previous year, the results of a community listening and audience research project focused in Wards 7 and 8 were provided to the newsroom. Now that the expansion plan is well underway, plans for FY2023 also include reviewing these findings. In January, General Manager Erika Pulley-Hayes held a virtual listening session with residents of Ward 7 that affirmed much of the report's broad takeaways. The WAMU/DCist newsroom is invested in meeting the needs of new audiences in these communities.

This year, as part of our work with Report For America, Wards 7 and 8 Reporter Dee Dwyer designed an education and engagement opportunity — [a one-week workshop](#) — where WAMU journalists can share their skills with teens and tweens in a Wards 7 and 8 community. She built a partnership with youth-empowerment nonprofit The Creative School to begin this work with students from the Congress Heights neighborhood. WAMU approached building the program as a curriculum and model that could be reused with The Creative School or applied with other school partners in our region.

In addition to this multi-year focus on predominantly African American communities in Wards 7 and 8 of D.C., we hired and deployed our first [Immigrant Communities](#) reporter in FY2022. This broad beat encompasses a diverse cross section of people throughout the region. Plans for FY2023 include applying to host a new RFA corp member, a video-first journalist to serve people of color in the region: further growing our internal team of people dedicated to providing high quality local news coverage about and for marginalized communities.

In FY2023 we plan to expand our audio work with partners – currently El Tiempo Latino and Street Sense Media – to include training their staff in audio production. WAMU has also committed to implementing diversity source tracking across our Content teams to assess how well we reflect and represent the communities we serve. Finally, we seek to build on the El Tiempo Latino partnership to explore additional ways to expand language access: more content in Spanish and possibly additional languages.

**5. 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?**

WAMU covers one of the largest and most diverse metros in the country spread over multiple jurisdictions in Maryland, Virginia, D.C. and the federal government. Despite this expansive coverage area (5,000,000+ residents), we have one reporter (11) per beat. For example, our education reporter covers K-12, all area colleges and post grad institutions.

The funding that WAMU 88.5 received from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting in Fiscal Year 2022 amounted to \$1.6 million and was critical as we worked hard to provide the latest news and information on air, online and everywhere our listeners look for it. This year we continued to face a budget shortfall due to lack of recovery from the reduction in corporate underwriting we experienced during the pandemic. While we received approximately \$1.9 million more in underwriting support this year over FY2021, we are still \$7.2 million below pre-pandemic levels.

As the demands on WAMU keep increasing, losing any portion of our budget will make it harder to meet the growing needs of our audience. It would dramatically and negatively impact our ability to reach new listeners and serve the folks who have come to rely on us to report about things happening in the community that you don't hear on other news outlets. If we did not receive this funding, we would be faced with hard choices about our programming and our station's entire budget would be significantly affected.

Here's a small sample of why members say they support us, via comments that accompanied their donations:

- "WAMU and DCist are critical for our community. There is no other decent source for local news."
- "I am so grateful for the local coverage from Kojo [The Politics Hour] to DCist. We need all the skills of your journalists to keep an eye on developments. It's a rough time."
- "You are professionals and respond to community needs honestly."
- "Independent journalism, like *Politics Hour*."
- "I give to WAMU because local news on D.C. politics and policy is crucial for an engaged and informed local democracy. WAMU and DCist provide extremely high quality and in-depth coverage of issues that matter most to residents, from affordable housing to public safety."
- "Making a difference starts in our neighborhoods and communities — thank you for what you do every day!"
- "DCist is a major source of local news for me at a time when many D.C. neighborhood publications have disappeared."
- "I get a sense the writers are invested in their stories as people who feel the impact of the reported event."
- "I give because WAMU's in-depth reporting and conversations not only inform the adults in our house, but have gotten our 8-year-old asking important questions about the world."
- "We truly appreciate the trustworthiness of the reporting, the rich and nuanced conversations, and the variety of programming. We're active artists in the D.C. theatre scene, and we truly appreciate how DCist continues to spotlight the rich local arts and culture scene here."
- "WAMU and DCist were my introduction to this city's identity, which reaches so so far beyond the political notions of those who don't live here. This outlet continues to show me facets of this city and metropolitan area I would've never seen otherwise, like



beautiful art festivals, amazing local musicians, and awesome (often free) events, all in addition to reporting on local issues with local voices. Thank you so much — you've helped me make this new city a home in just a few short years.