



# BridgeDetroit

A community-engaged, community-focused, journalist-led newsroom

Four years ago, BridgeDetroit began as a daily news and engagement organization with a deep relationship with Detroiters. The purpose: provide critical journalism that helps residents better understand and participate in their civic lives.

BridgeDetroit launched at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, right before the summer of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter, in a city whose majority-Black population was devastated, inspired and forever changed by all of it. BridgeDetroit leaned into the promise of improving access to information and engagement and built an organization that has become an essential, leading part of the city's journalism ecosystem.

## BridgeDetroit is:

- **CONNECTED:** Reaching thousands of Detroiters through its engagement approach, which is not about the extraction of information, but the formation of deep, sustained relationships.
- **RESPONSIVE:** BridgeDetroit has built its newsroom and priorities around the feedback it gets from Detroiters about what they need and want. The pillars of BridgeDetroit coverage — things like housing security, community safety, housing development and education — are all subjects Detroiters have told BridgeDetroit they care about deeply.
- **PROLIFIC:** With 30,000 newsletter subscribers and more than 40,000 monthly website visitors, BridgeDetroit is among the city's largest nonprofit news sources. Publishing new content almost every day, it brings the power and value of both responsive and enterprise journalism to Detroiters to enhance their civic understanding and participation.
- **GROWING SUSTAINABLY:** In addition to support from nearly every local foundation and several national ones, BridgeDetroit continues to enhance revenue through other sources (e.g., reader support, corporate support) through the model of income growth established by the Center for Michigan and Bridge Michigan.
- **PARTNERED:** Building substantial, important partnerships with other journalism, community and engagement organizations that broaden BridgeDetroit's reach and impact, and have helped lift other organizations' efforts.

## BridgeDetroit Staff

Laurén Abdel-Razzaq, *Executive Director* (started January 2024)

Malachi Barrett, *Reporter*

Jena Brooker, *Reporter*

Orlando Bailey, *Engagement Director*

Christine Ferretti, *Associate Editor*

Stephen Henderson, *Executive Advisor*

Catherine Kelly, *Executive Director and Editor* (departed March 2023)

Nushrat Rahman, *Reporter* (in partnership with Detroit Free Press)

Micah Walker, *Reporter*

## BridgeDetroit Interns

Paul Stryker, *Michigan State*

Erik Lominchar, *Michigan State*

## New Leadership

On Jan. 3, 2024, Laurén Abdel-Razzaq began as BridgeDetroit's new executive director. Before joining BridgeDetroit, Laurén spent two years with Crain's Detroit Business where she was an assistant managing editor working with reporters who cover the city of Detroit, nonprofits, real estate and health care. Laurén was born in Detroit and grew up in Sterling Heights. She's a two-time graduate of Wayne State University where she was a member of the Journalism Institute for Media Diversity. She currently sits on the board of the Michigan chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association. Stephen Henderson continues in his role as executive advisor to BridgeDetroit.



- BridgeDetroit is an unincorporated project of the Center for Michigan.
- BridgeDetroit is an editorially independent publication with a specific focus on serving Detroiters.
- Bridge Michigan and BridgeDetroit have same-day publishing rights to each other's content and the editors and reporters of both publications seek to coordinate where editorial agendas overlap.
- BridgeDetroit benefits from the membership, audience development, production and administrative experience and expertise of the entire Center for Michigan team.
- The Center serves as fiduciary and employer for all BridgeDetroit staff.

## What Our Readers Are Saying

"**Great work**, wish I had more to give. **Yes for 313!**"

– Elizabeth Loria

"I grew up downriver & like to stay informed about local news. **Your reporters cover stories I can't get anywhere else.** Thanks!"

– Kim Peters

"Wonderful stories on a diversity of topics. I especially **enjoy the food coverage!**"

– Lisa Young

"I appreciate being kept **up to date on issues and news in the Detroit community.** Unbiased."

– Anita Orr

"**You tackle topics that no other Detroit news outlet covers** (e.g. detailed city council coverage) and without being tendentious – or at least **from the point of view of the majority of Detroiters.**"

– Maxwell Morgan

"BridgeDetroit gives **an in-depth look at what's happening in Detroit** and I have been **really impressed with the content** thus far."

– Tiffany Gilsbach

# Engagement

Detroiter's engagement with BridgeDetroit community town hall meetings and events has significantly contributed to the understanding of what matters most to Detroit residents. BridgeDetroit is committed to using this insight to inform its reporting and drive change in Detroit.

BridgeDetroit reaches thousands of Detroiter through its engagement efforts, which are not about the extraction of information, but the formation of deep, sustained relationships. It is an approach based on building relationships with Detroiter over time and building trust that leads to an ongoing exchange of information. BridgeDetroit's full-time engagement director coordinates all of BridgeDetroit's outreach and connections with Detroiter, collects and organizes data about their priorities and concerns, and helps reporters and editors place that information at the center of their work.

BridgeDetroit's engagement model gives Detroiter multiple touchpoints for interaction with the organization and its staff. These inputs are designed to build relationships with a broad spectrum of Detroiter, and the efforts are focused on reaching Detroiter who live in poverty and/or are disconnected from traditional channels of news and information.

In 2023, engagement activities included:

- Large-scale community meetings (six in 2023 alone, in different parts of the city, each focused on a specific issue).
- Door-to-door canvassing (3,000 doors knocked in 2023) to reach disconnected residents.
- A phone line and email address dedicated to readers to share their issues and concerns. Average response of about a dozen calls and emails per week.
- Town hall discussions, in collaboration with community organizations, to harness their connectivity to neighborhoods and Detroiter.
- Social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok) where 19,000 followers have another touchpoint for reaching staffers and providing tips.



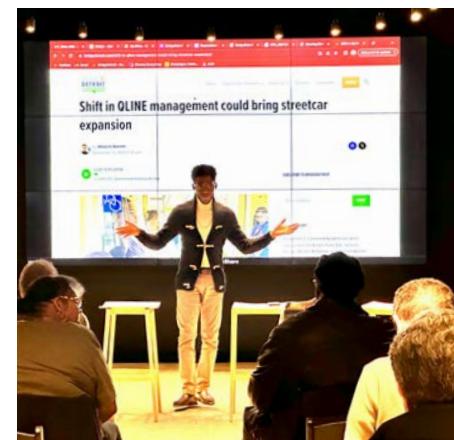
The BridgeDetroit newsroom convened a community conversation on an issue that's crucial for many Detroiter: housing. (Photo by Valaurian Waller)



Reporter Jena Brooker delivering fact sheets related to her recent reporting. (Photo by Jena Brooker)



Reporter Malachi Barrett provides a weekly recap of Detroit City Council news in his blog and on the Lavonia Perryman Show. (screenshot)



Engagement Director Orlando Bailey welcomes concerned residents to a Community Conversation on transit-related issues on Dec. 19, 2023 at Chroma Detroit. (Photo by Laurén Abdel-Razzaq)

# Awards

## Society of Professional Journalists – Detroit Chapter

- **Racial Justice Reporting** - Fourth place, Olivia Lewis, [Birth Detroit helps Black moms take control of their birthing experience](#)
- **Social Media Strategy** - First place, Jena Brooker, Bryce Huffman, Orlando Bailey and Malachi Barrett, Engaging Detroiters.
- **Community/Local News Reporting** - First place, Daphne Hughes, Stephen Henderson, Catherine Kelly, Malachi Barrett and Bill Kubota, Detroit Public Television, [Detroit Home Repairs](#)
- **Community/Local News Reporting** - Third place, Daphne Hughes, Stephen Henderson, Bill Allesee, AJ Walker, Orlando Bailey, with Detroit Public Television, [The Black Church in Detroit](#)
- **Collaborative Coverage** - Second and third place for Nushrat Rahman for her work with BridgeDetroit, the Detroit Free Press and Report for America on economic mobility.

## Webby Award

Winner: Video - Public Service & Activism with NBC News Digital, [A Detroit neighborhood stands in the shadow of a segregation wall built 80 years ago](#)

## Michigan Emmy Award

[The Black Church in Detroit: One-Year Anniversary Special](#), with Orlando Bailey and Stephen Henderson.



*Bethany Howard's family has lived in the East Canfield neighborhood for generations. She has childhood memories of the devastating impacts of the Chrysler plant expansion. She's fearful of history repeating as the automaker, now Stellantis, continues to build its footprint in her community and rack up emissions violations. (Photo by Nick Hagen)*

## Fellowships

### **Micah Walker, National Press Foundation Widening the Pipeline 2023 Fellowship**

Reporter Micah Walker was chosen as one of 25 journalists of color who were provided professional development, classes and support. Among the offerings: veteran editors and journalists leading discussions about how to navigate racism and sexism in newsrooms.

*Note: BridgeDetroit/Detroit Free Press reporter Nushrat Rahman was chosen for the 2024 fellowship cohort.*

### **Jena Brooker, 2022-23 National Science-Health-Environment Reporting Fellowships**

Reporter Jena Brooker was one of 12 journalists chosen to receive the National Science-Health-Environment Reporting Fellowship, which allowed her to participate in niche workshops and customized webinars, to attend national conferences, and access to unique resources and professional mentors to assist with career development. It also kicked off her partnership with Climate Central, which led to [her story on climate change triggering worse allergies for people](#) and [her story on flooding in Detroit leading to toxic mold](#).

### **Jena Brooker, USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism 2022 Data Fellowship**

Reporter Jena Brooker received the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism's 2022 Data Fellowship which resulted in her deep reporting on health and environmental racism related to Stellantis and the company's impact on neighborhoods on Detroit's east side.

*"I wanted to lay out everything Detroit has given and sacrificed on behalf of residents for Stellantis in the name of jobs that might not be here to stay for long."*

– Jena Brooker

# BridgeDetroit Reporting

BridgeDetroit's journalism begins with engagement — steady, multi-sourced, compiled feedback and interactions — and uses various streams of information to shape journalism that informs at the highest level.

It is an approach based on building relationships with Detroiters over time, and building trust with them that leads to an ongoing exchange of information. This is key in Detroit, where many residents feel used by media organizations, or looked past. It's not just that they don't see themselves or their lives reflected in news coverage; they literally feel no relationship with the people or organizations that produce that coverage.

Top community issues for BridgeDetroit reporting in 2023 included:

- Housing / Home Repair
- Civic / Community Information
- Politics / Policy
- Jobs / Economic Development
- Police / Public Safety
- Environment / Climate
- Health / Welfare
- Transportation
- Education
- Arts / Culture

The following are examples of the type of reporting being done at BridgeDetroit:

## [The City Council Notebook, Malachi Barrett](#)

The City Council Notebook, an ongoing reporting project and weekly newsletter by Malachi Barrett, informs residents on the discussions and proposed ordinances that develop in City Hall. It gives Detroiters a seat at the table when decisions are made that affect their health and well-being. It is unique because it takes complex and difficult to understand policies and politics, and makes them accessible to all residents.

## [Detroit's cost for automotive growth: Generational displacement, Jena Brooker](#)

Reporter Jena Brooker took an in-depth look at how once thriving Black neighborhoods have been heavily damaged by automotive companies' expansions over the years.

## [From shelter to home — how one woman climbed out of homelessness, Nushrat Rahman](#)

BridgeDetroit's in-depth coverage of housing insecurity and the unexamined challenges facing the unhoused in the city, ranging from the difficulty in securing housing vouchers to trying to get into a shelter. In 2023 Rahman spent six months following a family that



*A Detroit City Council session that spanned more than six hours, primarily tied to discussions about tax abatements for the District Detroit development. (City of Detroit)*



*A residential block on the city's east side near the Stellantis facility. The plant has received numerous violations since its expansion in recent years and neighbors frequently raise concerns over the pollution and odors. (Photo by Nick Hagen)*



*Amanda Jordan, a leasing consultant, left, talks with Tonya Hogan after she fills out a housing application at the Carriage Park Apartments in Dearborn on Friday, Feb. 3, 2023. "Just the stress of everything is taking a toll on me physically and mentally," said Hogan who rushes to secure housing before her voucher expires on Feb. 13. "I am however trying to keep positive about everything." (Photo by Sarahbeth Maney, Detroit Free Press)*

had a crisis push it to homelessness and chronicled their journey back. It told a story about poverty and recovery in Detroit that had not been told before. Her reporting highlights how these challenges impact Detroiters' lives and the emotional toll on the unhoused.

#### [Detroit police say ShotSpotter is worth the cost, despite few arrests, Malachi Barrett](#)

BridgeDetroit's ongoing reporting on Shotspotter, the controversial surveillance technology deployed in Detroit has received criticism from residents, activists and police oversight officials.

#### [What happens when a court officer comes knocking during an eviction?, Nushrat Rahman](#)

One of the ways BridgeDetroit seeks to serve Detroiters is by asking them what big questions they have and then providing guides to explain how to handle problems and difficult situations. This piece by Nushrat Rahman is a prime example of this type of explanatory journalism. For many people who get evicted, it comes as a shock and without preparation. This guide provides answers to questions for those in the community up against this challenge. It also follows along with her overall coverage of housing issues for Detroit residents, including [low-income housing challenges](#).

#### [Detroiter Willie Mae Gaskin is 'mother of the east side', Micah Walker](#)

Micah Walker was hired in 2023 to cover education and arts and culture. It's an unusual mix of assignments, but creation of her role is a direct response to feedback from Detroiters. They told BridgeDetroit that one of the profound gaps in coverage of their communities is "joy," or news about the city's rich cultural amenities and experiences. This piece on 89-year-old community activist Willie Mae Gaskin came about because she kept showing up to BridgeDetroit's Community Conversation events. The team recognized that there was a story here highlighting the life of someone truly working toward a more positive community.



*The vast majority of shootings detected by a controversial police surveillance tool do not result in an arrest, but Detroit Police insist that ShotSpotter listening devices are driving down shootings this year. Detroit Police Department Crime Data Analytics Director Stephen Lamoreaux, left, and Deputy Chief Franklin Hayes, right, address City Council during an Oct. 16, 2023 meeting. (Screenshot | City of Detroit Livestream)*

## Audience Highlights

**45%**  
Growth in Newsletter Subscribers

**123%**  
Growth in Unique Visitors

Audience	2020 (Partial Year)	2021	2022	2023
Newsletter Subscribers	4,992	9,856	20,700	30,011
Unique Visitors	90,933	229,889	332,304	740,569
Average Monthly Unique Visitors	12,136	20,391	22,651	38,037



# Funders

Community Foundation for  
Southeast Michigan

DTE Energy Foundation

Ford Foundation

Google News Equity Fund

Google LLC

Hudson-Webber Foundation

Institute for Nonprofit News

John S. and James L. Knight  
Foundation

Joyce Foundation

Kresge Foundation

McGregor Fund

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation

Skillman Foundation

Kathryn Vizas

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

# Financial Support

	2020 (Partial Year)	2021	2022	2023
Supporting Members	426	495	549	562
Total Donations	\$30,160	\$52,746	\$58,486	\$56,961
Average Household Annual Donation Size	\$71	\$107	\$102	\$100

# Partnerships

From the start, BridgeDetroit's mission leaned heavily into collaborative work. The goal has been to leverage the power of combined resources and to focus other newsrooms on the kind of engagement-driven journalism BridgeDetroit was created to pursue. BridgeDetroit's partnerships are a fundamental part of the work — seamlessly integrated and consistently producing great journalism. These partnerships take many forms and remain flexible to maximize the possibility of working with as many organizations as possible.

## Detroit Free Press

**Detroit Free Press:** BridgeDetroit shares reporter Nushrat Rahman with the Detroit Free Press, the largest for-profit news organization in the city. Covering economic mobility, one of Detroit's most critical issues, Rahman works out of both newsrooms and taps into BridgeDetroit's engagement efforts for guidance and direction.



**Detroit Public Television:** BridgeDetroit has a standing, funded partnership with Detroit Public Television through several projects. The 40-year-old public affairs show, American Black Journal, regularly produces segments with Engagement Director Orlando Bailey. Another three-year project that focuses on the critical role of the Black church in Detroit scored an Emmy nomination in 2023. Detroit Public Television and BridgeDetroit also co-host forum discussions and community meetings to help build engagement with both organizations.



**WDET and Eastside Community Network:** A long-term partnership with WDET, Detroit's public radio station, focuses strongly on the production of the podcast "Authentically Detroit," a project of another BridgeDetroit partner, the Eastside Community Network. The weekly show focuses on issues, and features guests whose ideas and concerns come through Eastside Community Network and BridgeDetroit's engagement efforts.



**Planet Detroit:** A growing partnership, the Planet Detroit newsletter and website focus on the environment and environmental justice issues. The two organizations share story-planning meetings and cross-edit content, having evolved beyond content sharing. Planet Detroit is now housed in the same physical space as BridgeDetroit.



**Chalkbeat:** The education-focused nonprofit newsroom Chalkbeat Detroit shares education reporting and editing resources with BridgeDetroit. BridgeDetroit's reporter adds to Chalkbeat's reach, while Chalkbeat's editors, who have more experience managing education stories, help with guidance and growth for BridgeDetroit's reporter.

## What Our Readers Are Saying

"I really **enjoy your journalism**. It doesn't feel overly glamourized, but really **authentically Detroit**."

*- Adrea Simmons*

"I very much enjoy reading your articles. **Keep up the good work.**"

*- Edsel Ford II*

"I believe that **BridgeDetroit has changed the landscape of journalism in Detroit** and is a tool I use."

*- Yolanda Jackson*

"Bridge features stories that aren't covered in other local media and I have an **immense respect for Stephen Henderson's reporting** and his style of respectful interviewing on WDET."

*- Beulah Bartus*