



*BridgeDetroit Staff (Valerian Waller for BridgeDetroit)*

# BridgeDetroit

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

Since its inception in 2020, BridgeDetroit has become a trusted news source for Detroit residents. Its success lies in a steadfast commitment to community-driven journalism, amplifying Detroiters' voices and prioritizing the issues that matter most to them.

BridgeDetroit's unique Community Priorities Model puts residents at the heart of its reporting. Through surveys, community meetings, a dedicated advisory committee and partnerships with local organizations, BridgeDetroit ensures its coverage reflects Detroiters' lived experiences. Staff members even go door-to-door, gathering firsthand insights to inform impactful reporting on housing, education, social justice and city services.

Recognizing Detroit's digital divide, BridgeDetroit broadened its reach in 2024 by launching BridgeDetroit Magazine, a quarterly print publication. The magazine delivers essential stories, resources and guides to residents without reliable internet access, furthering the organization's mission of equitable information access.



*BridgeDetroit's inaugural magazine.  
(Credit: Laurén Abdel-Razzaq, BridgeDetroit)*

# 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:** Building 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 31,000 newsletter subscribers and more than 65,000 monthly website visitors, 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, continuing 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 it has helped lift other organizations' efforts.

## 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.

## BridgeDetroit Team

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

Malachi Barrett, *Reporter*

Jena Brooker, *Reporter*

Orlando Bailey, *Engagement Director (departed May 2024)*

Christine Ferretti, *Managing Editor*

Stephen Henderson, *Executive Advisor*

Bryce Huffman, *Engagement Editor (started September 2024)*

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

Micah Walker, *Reporter*

## Contributors

Quinn Banks, *Photographer*

Olivia Lewis, *Reporter*

Kayleigh Lickliter, *Reporter*

J. Gabriel Ware, *Reporter*

## BridgeDetroit Interns

Juniper Favenyesi, *Michigan State University*



BridgeDetroit Executive Advisor Stephen Henderson. (Credit: Valarian Waller)



(from left) WDET-FM reporter Bre-Anna Tinsley, Daniel Baxter, who oversees absentee ballots for the Detroit Department of Elections, Detroit Deputy City Clerk Andre Gilbert II, Deputy Secretary of State Aghogho Edevbie and Branden Snyder, Detroit Action executive director, take part in a BridgeDetroit Community Conversation on voter access on June 18, 2024 with reporter Malachi Barrett. (Quinn Banks, Special to BridgeDetroit)

# Engagement

BridgeDetroit demonstrates its commitment to community engagement through a variety of strategies that help grow relationships within the community, increase trust and gather the information necessary to deliver on its commitment to produce news for and by Detroiters. In 2024, BridgeDetroit hosted numerous community conversations and events to foster dialogue and address critical local issues. Strategic partnerships with faith-based organizations, local media outlets and national groups expanded BridgeDetroit's reach and enabled the publication to serve diverse communities across the city. The launch of a quarterly print magazine, consistent canvassing efforts and an active social media presence underscore BridgeDetroit's dedication to meeting the needs of Detroiters where they are, making it a model for community engagement in journalism.



(Credit: Quinn Banks)

## Community Conversation Series

Over the summer, BridgeDetroit hosted four free monthly events to engage Detroiters looking to share and receive vital information. The goal of the series was to foster conversation between reporters and residents about the issues impacting them most, and to provide access to city and state officials and agencies that administer programming.

- **Voter Information & Access:** This event provided election information for voters including information on how to vote. It also promoted discussions around voter access and about why voting matters. Following the event, BridgeDetroit distributed 10,000 voter guides, promoted voter information via social media and partnered with the Associated Press to increase election coverage.

## Meet the Reporters Event

BridgeDetroit's Meet the Reporters event provided an opportunity for the community to directly connect with reporters – building stronger relationships and the trust needed to do community journalism. In 2024, this event served as a valuable source for reporting and provided 45 potential story ideas.

- **Reparations/I-375:** A reparations-focused panel discussed arguments for and against reparations in Detroit, the history behind I-375 and how the current-day project factors into the conversation, and how community input can play a part in driving solutions. Reporter Malachi Barrett covered the topic through a multi-part reporting series that examined the status of Detroit's reparations task force, possible forms of reparations and the influence of notable Detroiters.
- **Housing & Home Repair:** Community conversations in every district amplified a need to connect people with housing and home repair resources. This event featured a panel that provided crucial information on the resources available, how to gain access and how to navigate through the red tape. In addition to the discussion, the 60 participants had access to information provided by 10 nonprofit and city resource tables. BridgeDetroit complemented this session through its reporting and a focus on housing and home repair in the quarterly magazine.
- **Refugee Resources:** The Refugee Resource Fair served as a gateway to vital information and resources for attendees. Attendees were provided information on issues of immigration, accessing basic city services and career resources – and Spanish and Arabic translators were on site to guide residents. Additionally, municipal IDs were offered at the fair, a service provided in partnership with Detroit ID. Following the event, BridgeDetroit partnered with El Central to publish a guide on how undocumented residents can protect themselves.



*(from left) Janis Hazel, a member of Detroit's Reparations Task Force, takes part in a BridgeDetroit Community Conversation on Reparations/I-375, alongside Khary Frazier, founder of Detroit is Different and Kim Faison, vice president of Detroit Future City. (Quinn Banks for BridgeDetroit)*

# Awards

## Michigan Press Association (MPA) Awards



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

**Special Section:** First place, Malachi Barrett for his [City Council Notebook](#) newsletter.

**Government/Education News:** BridgeDetroit swept the category for local media.

- First Place, Micah Walker, [Recreational marijuana: A path to Black prosperity in Detroit](#)
- Second Place, Bryce Huffman, [Detroit families wait-listed for 'maxed out' after school program](#)
- Third Place, Micah Walker, [Detroit nonprofit leader asks: Where are the men in education?](#)
- Honorable Mention, Malachi Barrett, [When nature calls on Belle Isle, visitors struggle to find a bathroom](#)

### News Enterprise Reporting:

- Third place, Nushrat Rahman, [Youth homelessness an 'invisible crisis' in plain sight, providers say](#)
- Honorable Mention, Olivia Lewis, [New Bargain Block season, same appraisal problems](#)

## LION: Local Independent Online News



- Finalist, Community Engagement
- Finalist, Collaboration of the Year

## Society of Professional Journalists - Detroit Chapter



**Sojourner Truth Award:** One Detroit, American Black Journal staffers Zosette Guir and Bill Kubota and BridgeDetroit staffers Bryce Huffman and Orlando P. Bailey received the Sojourner Truth Award in Topical Reporting, which honors excellence in journalism covering racial justice. The Sojourner Truth Award seeks to recognize reporting that is revealing and impactful in tackling new subject matter. The group was recognized for its [Walk to Freedom coverage](#).

**Young Journalist of the Year:** Jena Brooker for her outstanding work on community and justice issues

## What Our Readers Are Saying

"Bridge Detroit has been **vital in my decision to move to Detroit** this summer. Learning about what's happening from a community oriented perspective **made the difference when choosing to invest in Detroit long term.**"

- AJ Durand

"Your view of the reality of Detroit is **broader than that of our other local news sources**, your editorial approach is **fairer to all the stakeholders and decision-makers**, and **your writing would make Strunk and White blush with pride.**"

- Michael Madigan

"I'm a **social worker serving people who live in Detroit** and your reporting **helps me to better serve them.**"

- Emily DeMeester

"I believe in the **transformative power** of the kind of **community-centered journalism** that BD **champions.**"

- David Porter

## Collaborative Coverage

- Second place, Nushrat Rahman, [Vouchers help low-income families find housing but using them isn't easy](#)
- Third place, Malachi Barrett and Mike Wilkinson, [See how much you'll save under Detroit land value tax proposal](#)
- Fourth place, Christine Ferretti and Sarah Rahal (The Detroit News), [AFSCME puts Michigan's Council 25 in receivership](#)

## Community/Local News Reporting:

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

**Consumer Watchdog:** Third place, Jena Brooker, [Hantz tree farm falls short on solving east side blight](#)

## Engagement-Driven Coverage

- First place, Nushrat Rahman, [What happens when a court officer comes knocking during an eviction?](#)
- Third place, Jena Brooker, [Can Detroiters afford more dollar stores?](#)
- Fourth place, Malachi Barrett, [When nature calls on Belle Isle, visitors struggle to find a bathroom](#)

**Feature Reporting:** First place, Nushrat Rahman, [From shelter to home, how one woman climbed out of homelessness](#)

**Newsletter Strategy:** Fourth place, Malachi Barrett, Micah Walker, Jena Brooker, Nushrat Rahman, Christine Ferretti, [BridgeDetroit Newsletters](#)

## Racial Justice Reporting

- Third place, Malachi Barrett, [False arrest of Detroit mother reignites criticism of facial recognition tech](#)
- Fourth place, Nushrat Rahman, ['Rationing justice': Legal aid programs struggle to meet high demand](#)

**National Headliner Awards:** BridgeDetroit won its first national award, taking third place for local news coverage. Winners were noted for "creating a model for the future of journalism."



*From shelter to home — how one woman climbed out of homelessness. Tonya Hogan, 50, opens a treat bag for her dog Pepper inside their room at Harbor Light Salvation Army in Detroit. (Sarahbeth Maney, Detroit Free Press)*



*Olivia Lewis, third from left, was chosen for a year-long fellowship program with the Us@250 initiative. (Laurén Abdel-Razzaq, BrideDetroit)*

## Fellowships

**Olivia Lewis:** BridgeDetroit contributor Olivia Lewis was selected for the prestigious Us@250 fellowship, where she focuses on the I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project in Detroit. Her year-long [project](#) explores the freeway's legacy of displacing African American communities and the potential impact of proposed changes on safety, walkability and community inclusion.

**Jena Brooker:** Awarded the Kozik Grant from The National Press Foundation (NPF) and the National Press Club Journalism Institute (NPCJI). She was awarded funding for a project investigating the Michigan Air Pollution Control Exemption law, with the aim of increasing transparency, informing Detroit residents about the law's impact and identifying how much it has cost Detroit.

**Malachi Barrett:** Selected for the National Press Foundation's Elections Journalism Fellowship. This fellowship provides journalists with training and resources to prepare for election coverage, including topics like election infrastructure, safety, voting rights and changes in voting laws.

**Nushrat Rahman:** Picked for a fellowship through the New York & Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative. As part of the collaborative, Nushrat examined the effectiveness of monthly cash assistance for mothers. Her work produced two articles examining the programs overall, as well as looking closely at the impact in Flint.

## What Our Readers Are Saying

"You provide **information about Detroit** that **I cannot get anywhere else.**"

*- Deborah Grace*

"I support **independent journalism in Detroit, by Detroiters!**"

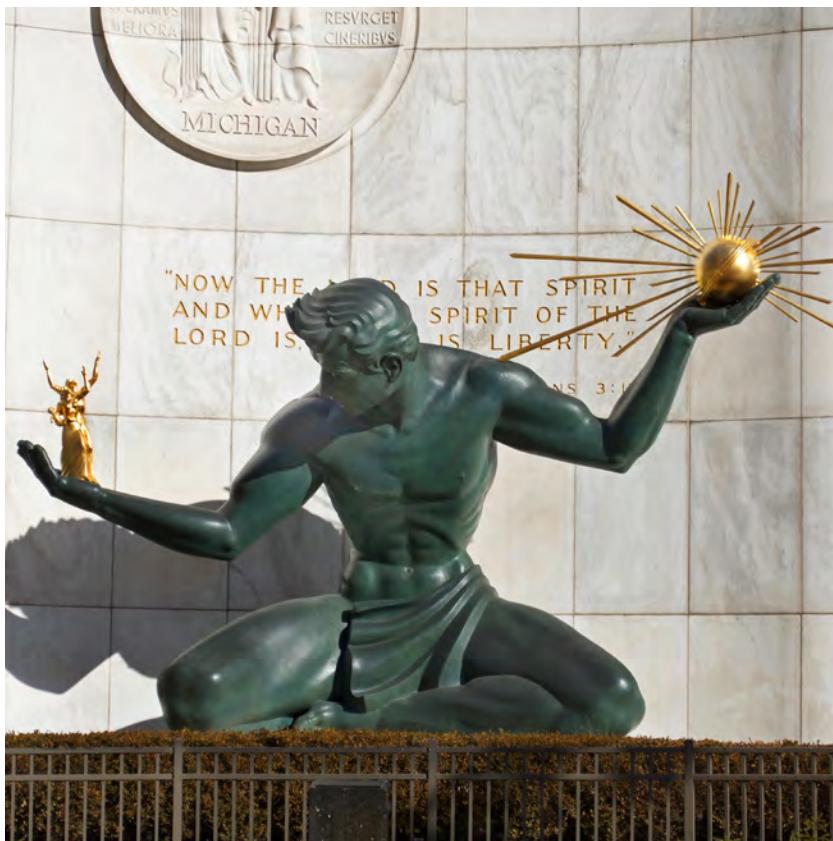
*- Barry Fishman*

"It's so important to have a forum for **local voices** on issues of **equity and justice.**"

*- Kathe Stevens*

"I want to **support publications that represent underserved populations.**"

*- Leah Miller*



## 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 2024 included:

- Arts and Culture
- Education
- Environment
- Food
- Government and Civic Engagement
- Housing and Home Repair
- Public Safety
- Small Business and Economic Development
- Transportation

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

### Meet Detroit's other 'People Mover,' Michael Cunningham II, Bryce Huffman

BridgeDetroit highlighted the story of a taxicab driver and public transit activist who provides taxi rides at no charge for those who don't have the money to pay. The story further profiled Cunningham's experience with housing instability and how he was living directly in his taxi. Following this piece, Cunningham spoke at a Community Conversation on transit issues. It's there where he met city officials who helped him secure an apartment — he is no longer experiencing homelessness.

### Black men bond where they feel at home — in the barbershop, Bryce Huffman, Orlando Bailey and Quinn Banks

In a first for BridgeDetroit, three Black male journalists partnered to create a first person narrative of the importance of barbershops as a "third space" for Black men. The story expanded beyond written word to include audio and photo essay elements — and was so consequential that it took off on social media and was picked up by WDET for an on-air segment.

### Reparations Series, Malachi Barrett

This three-part series by reporter Malachi Barrett looked at where the Detroit reparations task force stands after a year, what form reparations could reasonably take and the role iconic Detroiters played in the history of the reparations movement nationally.

## Detroit targets 8K abandoned vehicles in crackdown. Do residents know the rules?, Kaleigh Lickliter

In its first story for a partnership with Next City, BridgeDetroit reported on the city's crackdown on abandoned vehicles. Through her investigations, Lickliter received a tip about Detroiters paying to get their stolen vehicles out of impound nearly two years after the Duggan administration announced reforms to eliminate the practice. Her follow-up story prompted the Detroit Police Department to change its policy on informing residents of impound fees.

## With more hot days, Detroit students' learning and health suffer, Jena Brooker and Katie Worth of Climate Central

In collaboration with Climate Central, BridgeDetroit reported about Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) releasing students early due to extreme heat, a policy triggered by rising temperatures and the city's lack of widespread air conditioning in schools. The story highlights the impact climate change has on student learning and health — and the challenges both students and parents face due to early school closures.

## Election Coverage, BridgeDetroit Staff

In 2024, BridgeDetroit provided Detroiters with comprehensive election coverage. Pre-election coverage included results from the primaries, and highlighted voter sentiment across the city. Election day coverage included original reporting as well as shared content with Bridge Michigan, VoteBeat and the Associated Press, and focused on turnout and outcomes in the days following the election.

**BridgeDetroit** created a series of practical guides to support Detroiters facing challenging situations. These resources offer clear, actionable steps on navigating situations and empowering residents with the information they need during critical times.

- Detroit Police have arrested your loved one. Here's what to do next

- The eviction process: What Michigan renters should know
- Thousands of Detroiters need home repair help. Here's how to get it
- Immigrant rights group: Noncitizens can take these steps ahead of Trump presidency
- How to respond to Detroit ICE agents in a variety of places

**78%** Growth in Unique Visitors

**71%** Growth in Average Monthly Unique Visitors

Audience	2020 (Partial Year)	2021	2022	2023	2024
Newsletter Subscribers	4,992	9,856	20,700	30,011	31,179
Unique Visitors	90,933	229,889	332,304	740,569	734,872
Average Monthly Unique Visitors	12,136	20,391	22,651	38,037	65,227

# Partnerships

From its inception, BridgeDetroit has prioritized collaboration. The aim has been to harness shared resources and encourage other newsrooms to embrace the engagement-focused journalism that defines BridgeDetroit's mission. Partnerships are integral to its operations, seamlessly woven into its efforts to produce high-quality journalism. These collaborations are diverse and adaptable, ensuring maximum opportunities to work with a wide range of organizations.



**Associated Press:** Thanks to a program funded through LION and INN, BridgeDetroit gained access to election-related stories and photos from The Associated Press for three months, including Election Day results and race calls. BridgeDetroit also shared original reporting on Election Day with the Associated Press.



**American Press Institute:** BridgeDetroit's partnership with the American Press Institute (API) focused on an election engagement experiment aimed at increasing voter participation and connecting print materials with online engagement. Funded by a grant as part of API's work with the Knight Election Hub, BridgeDetroit printed and distributed 10,000 voter guides at two community meetings. This project tested how effectively print materials could drive online engagement and used social media to extend the project's reach.



**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.



**Climate Central:** BridgeDetroit collaborated with Climate Central on a story about the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) having to close schools due to extreme heat. This partnership brought together BridgeDetroit's local reporting expertise with Climate Central's data analysis capabilities to highlight the impact of climate change on Detroit's schools.



**Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism:** BridgeDetroit's partnership with the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism through the Black Media Initiative provided funding for three in-depth election stories focused on community issues, which were intended to offer a deeper perspective than mainstream media. This partnership also included an invitation for BridgeDetroit to participate in CUNY's National Elections Reporting Grant Program with nine other community newsrooms nationwide. This initiative underscores a commitment to community-based election coverage and highlights BridgeDetroit's role within a larger national network of community news organizations focused on enhancing their election reporting.



**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 ID:** BridgeDetroit worked with the City of Detroit's Detroit ID program to offer municipal IDs to attendees at a refugee resources fair. The fair was held in October and welcomed over 70 residents who spoke English, Spanish and Arabic.

# BridgeDetroit's Interfaith Insight Initiative

BridgeDetroit teamed up with three diverse faith-based organizations in Detroit: Downtown Synagogue (Jewish), Dream of Detroit (Muslim) and Triumph Church (Christian). The partnership was developed to introduce BridgeDetroit to new constituencies by sharing BridgeDetroit's top stories each week in the newsletters that these organizations send to their members. BridgeDetroit's first quarterly magazine, published in June 2024, was designed specifically to reach Detroiters who might not have easy access to the internet or who prefer reading printed material. The printing included 3,200 copies distributed through the Interfaith Initiative partner organizations, as well as libraries, schools, rec centers and religious institutions across the city. A second printing in October 2024 furthered this outreach.



**Detroit PBS:** BridgeDetroit collaborated with Detroit PBS's One Detroit and American Black Journal programs on several joint segments that appeared on American Black Journal. They also worked together on a project about the preservation of the Malcolm X house in Inkster and a feature segment on the impact of a concrete crushing plant.



**El Central:** BridgeDetroit partnered with El Central Hispanic News to translate and co-publish some of its stories in Spanish for El Central's weekly print product. This collaboration aimed to reach a wider audience, particularly Spanish-speaking residents in Southwest Detroit and the metro area. The partnership began with a story about a Venezuelan refugee's journey to Detroit, highlighting the changing demographics in Southwest Detroit.



**Freedom House:** BridgeDetroit partnered with Freedom House to offer resources at a refugee resources fair. This partnership was part of an effort to provide support to the community by offering valuable resources in multiple languages.

**Next City:** BridgeDetroit's partnership with Next City was established to contribute to solutions journalism in Detroit, including reporting, photos, visuals, dissemination and promotion of six stories about public safety issues. This initiative was funded by the Kresge Foundation.

**New York & Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative:** BridgeDetroit's partnership with the New York & Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative is a collaboration focused on solutions journalism, where news organizations and community groups work together to report on successful responses to social problems. This collaborative is highlighted by reporter Nushrat Rahman, who produced two articles: one examining monthly cash payments to mothers and another exploring the outcomes of giving mothers and babies \$7,500 in Flint.



**Outlier Media:** BridgeDetroit partnered with Outlier Media to cover 46 city budget hearings. The partnership resulted in a concise weekly newsletter and stories published on both websites. The goal was to make the information from the hearings easily accessible to residents.



**Planet Detroit:** 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.

## VOTEBEAT

**VoteBeat:** BridgeDetroit partnered with Votebeat, a nonpartisan reporting project created by Chalkbeat (now Civic News Company) covering local election integrity and voting access, to share content on Election Day, including results. This collaboration was part of a larger effort that also included Bridge Michigan and the Associated Press.



**Wayne Metro:** BridgeDetroit partnered with Wayne Metro to offer resources at a refugee resources fair. This partnership was part of an effort to provide support to the community by offering valuable resources in multiple languages.



**WDET:** This collaboration allowed BridgeDetroit's work to reach a wider audience through WDET's radio platform. This content sharing and cross-promotion, where an existing story from BridgeDetroit was adapted for a new medium, increased the visibility of BridgeDetroit's journalism.



# Financial Support

	2020 (Partial Year)	2021	2022	2023	2024
Supporting Members	426	495	549	562	591
Total Donations	\$30,160	\$52,746	\$58,486	\$56,961	\$100,205
Average Household Annual Donation Size	\$71	\$107	\$102	\$100	\$170

For the first year, BridgeDetroit surpassed **\$100K in donations** from individuals!

## Funders & Sponsors (\$5000+)

American Press Institute  
Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan  
Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism CUNY Foundation  
DTE Energy Foundation  
Ford Foundation  
Google LLC  
Hudson-Webber Foundation  
Institute for Nonprofit News  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Joyce Foundation  
Kresge Foundation  
Laybel Family Foundation  
McGregor Fund  
Next City  
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation  
Skillman Foundation  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

## Power Circle (\$1,000+)

Our Power Circle membership is a recognition program for individuals who have made significant investments in BridgeDetroit, designed as a way to bring these investors closer to the core of our work.

Laura Champagne  
Paul and Nancy Hillegonds  
Cynthia Ford and Edsel Ford II  
Susan Newell  
Dug and Linh Song  
Kathryn Vizas