



ChicagoPublicMedia
CHICAGO SUN TIMES | WBEZ CHICAGO

Annual Impact Report '25

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"Every story we tell, every neighborhood we visit, every conversation we start - it all happens because people like you believe that facts still matter and that Chicago deserves a strong, independent source of local news."

— Melissa Bell
CEO

CHICAGO
SUN*TIMES



A Note from the Chief Executive Officer

When I think about what makes Chicago special, I think about how deeply people care about our city. We show up. We look out for each other.

We want to understand what's happening in our neighborhoods, our schools and our local government in order to make things better.

That's where Chicago Public Media comes in. Our role is to help everyday people make sense of the world around them. Whether it's a young person navigating personal finance questions, a family trying to understand the stakes of the school board election, a new immigrant seeking reliable information or a commuter listening to *In the Loop* to hear what our mayor has to say about happenings in City Hall, our journalism is here to empower you to act with purpose and build a fuller, more connected life.

When I joined Chicago Public Media last fall, I joined a team that shows up every day because they believe that facts, storytelling and connection can make life better for our neighbors. And I joined a proud community of members who continue to show up for us because they share those fundamental beliefs.

Despite the challenges this year has brought, it's hard to imagine a more inspiring place to be.

This past year, our investigative journalism exposed serious, life-threatening gaps in our city's mental health services. Our bilingual resource guide connected vulnerable neighbors to housing and legal support during a confusing and frightening time. And our community events, from listening sessions to our Summer Finale concert in Millennium Park, brought people together to share ideas, art and joy.

All of this work is made possible by you. Every story we tell, every neighborhood we visit, every conversation we start - it all happens because people like you believe that facts still matter and that Chicago deserves a strong, independent source of local news.

Thank you for standing with us and for believing in what this city can be when we understand it together.

With gratitude,

Melissa Bell
Chief Executive Officer
Chicago Public Media

Photo Credit: James Bareham

Our Mission

We envision a thriving Chicago that is vibrant, equitable and inclusive.

Our mission is to strengthen the well-being of our local communities and our democracy through independent local journalism. We produce accessible, trusted news, information and programming that helps all Chicago-area residents make informed decisions every day, participate in our diverse communities and make the most of our region.

Photo Credits: Getty Images





Proudly Public Media

Public media stations across the country, and here in Illinois, are a vital lifeline for communities large and small – providing trusted, fact-based journalism, educational resources, life-saving emergency alerts and cultural programming that informs, connects and enriches lives.

From rural towns to urban centers, public media ensures every person, regardless of locality or income, can access truly local, independent news.

Chicago Public Media and our public media counterparts cover local stories that would otherwise go untold. We dig deep, provide context and help residents make sense of the issues that affect their everyday lives – from covering local government decisions, to the state’s public health systems, and agricultural and environmental issues that often go ignored by other media outlets.

This year, public media withstood unprecedented attacks. For the first time in nearly 60 years, the United States Congress refused to fund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the nonprofit set up to deliver federal funding to public media stations nationwide for programming and emergency alert systems.

These cuts significantly impact all public media stations, but they are especially devastating to smaller stations and those serving large rural areas, which rely more heavily on government funding to sustain their operations.

Let’s be clear: Public media does not serve a partisan agenda; it exists to serve the public interest. Now more than ever, Chicago Public Media stands firm in its belief that access to trusted, fact-based information is not just a luxury - it’s a necessity. We remain committed to ensuring a robust, sustainable news ecosystem for Chicago, and we’re exploring new ways to collaborate with and support local public media stations across Illinois.

Public media is a public good.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Erin Allen, Violet Miller, Cindy Hernandez, Vocolo host Nudia Hernandez, Photographer Anthony Vazquez | Photographers: Manuel Martinez, Ashlee Rezin

Our Year in Review

At Chicago Public Media, everything we do begins and ends with you – our community. As the home of WBEZ and the Chicago Sun-Times, we're deeply rooted in this city.

Every day, our journalists deliver reliable, independent reporting on the issues that shape our daily lives: local government, education, public safety, immigration, business, arts and culture and more. But we don't just cover the news. We experience it alongside you. We're your neighbors, and we're invested in the well-being of our city. That's why we ask tough questions, amplify local voices and follow the threads others overlook.

This past year brought challenge, change and growth. Chicagoans experienced events that will shape our future, from the first-ever elected school board to city budget debates and a national spotlight on immigration policies. In these pivotal moments, our greatest responsibility is to provide trustworthy, independent information to help people stay informed and engage confidently in civic life.

As we reported on the consequential changes happening around us, we also did internal work to transform ourselves to better serve you. This year, we integrated our WBEZ and Sun-Times newsrooms to pool our expertise, expand coverage, deepen collaboration and find new efficiencies. We also embraced a new approach to focus less on platforms and more on people.

Our evolution is ongoing, and it's driven by a simple truth: Chicago Public Media's greatest source of strength is you. Public media can thrive if the people it serves choose to sustain it. Generous supporters like you make our work possible. You ensure our journalism remains free, nonpartisan and rooted in community. And in return, our promise is to deliver the very best service we can – for you, for our city, for each other. Together, we're building the public media organization Chicago needs and deserves.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Reporter Stefano Esposito/CST. Rich Hein/CST | Former choir member Emily Guss of the Wendell Phillips High School. Pat Nabong/CST | Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Mayor Brandon Johnson at a news conference celebrating Chicago's selection as host for the 2024 DNC. Anthony Vazquez/CST | Reporter Elvia Malagón at our We Hear You series. Anthony Vazquez/CST | WBEZ Presents: Vocalo's Summer Finale. Manuel Martinez/WBEZ



“Public media can thrive if the people it serves choose to sustain it.”



By the Numbers

4.1 Million Audience Members

Chicago Public Media reaches a broad audience that reflects the full racial and ethnic diversity of the region.

21,267 Stories

From summer guides to hard-hitting investigative journalism, Chicago Public Media produced more than 21,000 stories in the last year.



96,737 Supporting Members

Nearly 100,000 members powered our mission in FY25. Their support ensures that trusted, local journalism remains free and accessible to everyone across our region.

704,369 Newsletter Subscribers

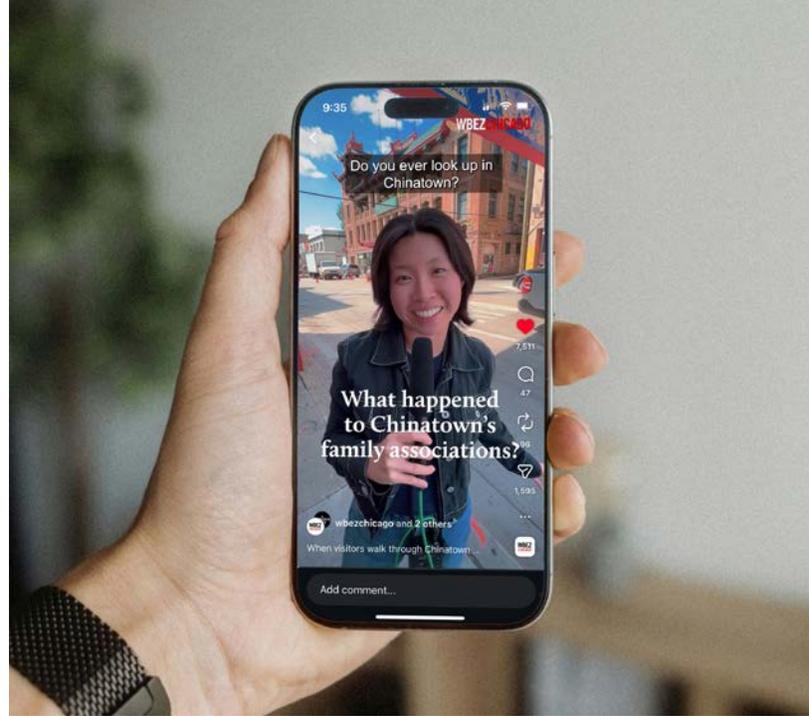
To get our best news and information out to the audiences who need it, Chicago Public Media produces 15 e-newsletters, each focusing on a different topic to make sure you get the news you want delivered to your inbox.



Photo Credits: Left to right: Reporter Brett Chase. Tyler Pasciak LaRiviere/CST | Amy Qin reel on Instagram. | Award Ceremony. Jennifer Tanaka/WBEZ | A Conversation with Hakeem Jeffries and Mary Dixon at the Studebaker Theater. David Kindler/WBEZ

1.5 Million Social Media Followers

Chicago Public Media reaches audiences where they are, including platforms like TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram, to ensure that our journalism is accessible to all.



29 Awards

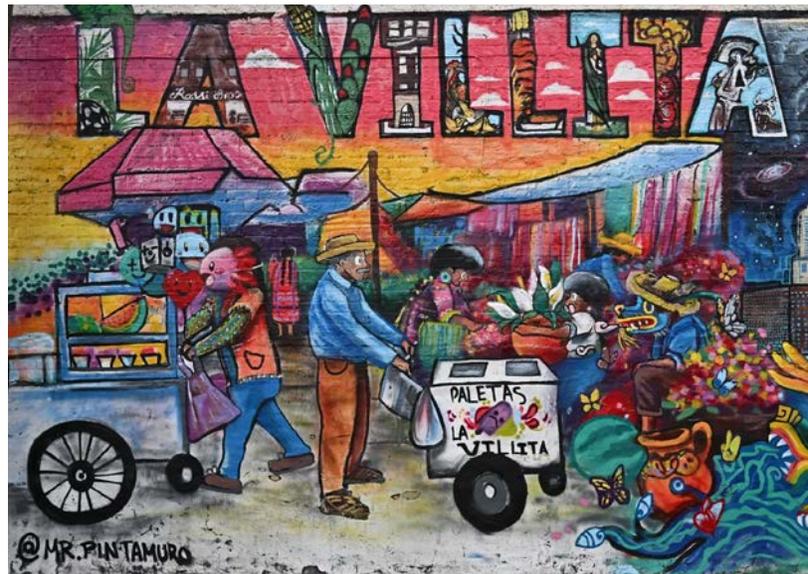
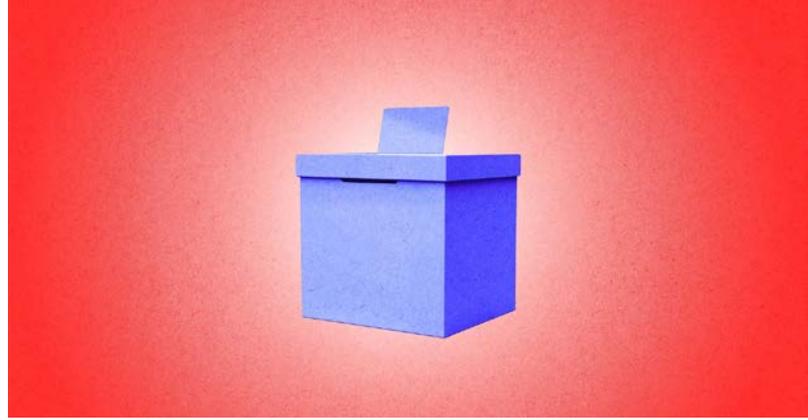
Last year, Chicago Public Media won 29 awards from esteemed organizations, including the Public Media Journalists Association, National Society of Newspaper Columnists, Online News Association, Illinois Press Association, Education Writers Association, Edward R. Murrow Awards, National Association of Black Journalists, and National Headliner Awards.



17,619 Community Members Came Together in Person

CPM presented 23 events, ranging from community listening sessions at neighborhood venues to a live conversation between Mary Dixon and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries.





Our voter guide received the Education Writers Association's top prize for Data Reporting & Visualization, with one judge noting,

“Every voter should be so fortunate to have such a smart, comprehensive, and well-designed guide to help them make sense of the candidates and issues at stake.”



Journalism in Action

In our busy lives that can, at times, feel oversaturated with information, public service journalism can serve a vital purpose: to provide practical, digestible information that helps people make informed decisions.

One of the biggest stories of the year was Chicago's first-ever school board election. After decades of mayoral control, this shift was the result of years of activism by residents who wanted a stronger voice in the future of their schools. Thirty-one candidates ran for 10 seats representing districts across the city, and our newsroom helped Chicagoans make sense of this historic new process.

In collaboration with Chalkbeat Chicago, we produced a free School Board Voter Guide in English and Spanish to help voters understand who the candidates were, [what the school board does](#) and [why the change to an elected board matters](#). In addition to the widely used digital guide, we distributed more than 10,000 bilingual paper copies of the guide across Chicago, including to dozens of CPS schools and to voters incarcerated at Cook County Jail.

A fall 2023 poll showed that half of Chicago voters weren't aware the city was moving to an elected school board. By Election Day, nearly 80% of those who voted selected school board candidates, making it one of the [most popular down-ballot races of 2024](#). After the election, our reporters followed up to introduce Chicagoans to their new school board through [in-depth profiles of both elected and appointed members](#).

We brought the same service-driven approach to our immigration coverage. Early in President Donald Trump's second term, we began to see a spike in immigration raids, deportations and profound fear in our community. In February 2025, we launched an [Immigration Resource Guide](#) to serve as a centralized hub for people seeking information about legal rights, public benefits, housing and local policies affecting immigrants' daily lives. The guide was published in English and Spanish, and we utilized WhatsApp to connect Spanish-speaking Chicagoans directly to resources.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Rhymefest' Smith, 10th district, as he files his paperwork for the school board nomination petitions to appear on the Nov. 5 ballot. Anthony Vazquez/CST | 26th St. mural in Little Village by Pintamuro. Victor Hillitski/CST | Collage of the School Board Voter Guide by Mendy Kong/WBEZ | Newly renovated board chambers. Ashlee Rezin/CST | Photographer Rich Hein/CST

Inviting the Public into the Conversation

At Chicago Public Media, we strive to produce stories that reflect the needs, interests and hopes of our region.

To do that well, our journalism cannot be a one-way street. Instead, it's an ongoing conversation with you. Over the years, we're proud to have pioneered reporting and storytelling formats built entirely on community listening – programs like [Curious City](#) and [Vocalo](#) that have since inspired similar initiatives across the country – and we're committed to continuing to center you in all that we do.

This year, our ["Ask the Mayor"](#) series hosted by Sasha-Ann Simons gave residents the chance to pose live questions to Mayor Brandon Johnson, creating real-time dialogue on issues that matter most. Similarly, a new Money Desk initiative provided opportunities for audience members to pose their questions about personal finance topics. As we saw increasing interest in local stories, we also launched two new morning shows, [In the Loop with Sasha-Ann Simons](#) and [Say More with Mary Dixon and Patrick Smith](#), designed to bring more local stories and voices to people's daily routines.

Outside of the newsroom, our team hosted seven listening sessions in schools, coffee shops, and community spaces across the city, meeting Chicagoans face-to-face to learn what issues most impact their lives and to hear their thoughts on what stories we should tell and how best to tell them. Those conversations directly shaped our reporting and continue to guide us towards stories that reflect the realities and aspirations of our neighborhoods.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Mayor Brandon Johnson in studio for the monthly *In the Loop's* Ask the Mayor series. Brian Ernst/CST | We Hear You Series. Anthony Vazquez/CST | Mary Dixon and Patrick Smith hosts of *Say More*. Brian Ernst/CST | Vocalo interviews Hiroko Yamamura. Morgan Ciocca/Vocalo | Sasha-Ann Simons host of *In the Loop*. Manuel Martinez/WBEZ





Holding Power to Account

Local journalism also shines light where it's needed most to ensure powerful people and institutions serve the public interest.

In some instances, it takes months of investigative reporting to uncover hidden truths, while other cases require real time fact-checking to stop misleading narratives from spreading.

In a [collaboration with Chalkbeat](#), for example, we reported that while Chicago Public School leaders often celebrate the district's record high graduation rate, that single data point obscures a more troubling trend: that one in four high school students missed more than a month of school last year. In fact, the number of CPS high schoolers missing at least 35 days in a school year has nearly doubled since 2019. The story went on to explain why CPS students miss so much school and how schools are addressing chronic absenteeism, providing actionable insight for families and policymakers.

We also documented the aftermath of the killing of Sonya Massey, who called 911 for help at her home in Springfield. A deputy first claimed she threatened him, but [body cam footage](#) later revealed the true story of an unarmed woman shot and killed inside her own home. In the subsequent months, we followed the story as Massey's family, joined by civil rights leaders, pressed for national reform. Ultimately, public awareness of the tragedy spurred numerous policy changes, including the [Sonya Massey bill](#), which requires stricter vetting before the hiring of law enforcement officers statewide, and a [plan](#) to send clinicians to mental health crises instead of police.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Students arrive at Farragut Career Academy High School in Little Village. Manuel Martinez/WBEZ | Supporters gather outside the Peoria County Courthouse while jurors deliberate over the case of Sonya Massey. Candace Dane Chambers/CST | Attorney Ben Crump helps Donna Massey, mother of Sonya Massey, to the podium at New Mount Pilgrim Church. Tyler Pasciak LaRiviere/CST | The front steps of Sonya Massey's home during a vigil on August. 6. Mawa Iqbal/WBEZ

Finding Connection through Arts and Culture

We know the news can be fast, heavy and even overwhelming. While we are committed to telling the difficult stories, we aim to offer more.

In a city brimming with culture, creativity and innovation, Chicago Public Media lifts up emerging talent, celebrates artistic expression and serves as a gathering place for Chicagoans of all ages, backgrounds and neighborhoods to discover, reflect and connect.

One story profiled a [teacher in Bronzeville](#) who led a renowned a capella choir at Wendell Phillips High School. Under Mr. Andrew Duncan's direction, the group won city-wide choral competitions, performed at the request of Richard J. Daley, toured internationally and perhaps most importantly, sparked joy and connections that have lasted generations. After our initial reporting, the school invited members of its alumni choir, including those we interviewed, to perform for current students during a Black History Month assembly. The performance [reignited pride](#) among the choir's alumni and inspired the school's current music teacher to pursue a revival of the school's legendary choir program.

We take pride in celebrating Chicago's vibrant creative scene. Our [guide to 100 summer concerts](#) provided an easy, filterable guide to Chicago's best summer performances, while our weekly text messages featuring interviews and event updates kept fans in the loop all year long. Beyond coverage, we also brought that energy to life through live events. In September 2024, Vocalo and WBEZ presented a Summer Finale event at Millennium Park to showcase local music and bring people together for a free community event. Approximately 4,000 people of all ages and backgrounds gathered to enjoy live performances from some of Chicago's greatest talents.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Alumni of the Wendell Phillips High School a cappella choir. Anthony Vazquez/CST | DJ Lady D and headliners Pivot Gang perform at Millenium Park for WBEZ's Presents: Vocalo's Summer Finale. Maunel Martinez/WBEZ | 100 days of Summer Concerts collage by Andjela Padejski /WBEZ



The Chicago Reader
called the Summer Finale

“one of the best
free lineups of live
Chicago music
you’ll ever see.”





24 ★★★★★ DNC 2024 AUGUST 22 ★



Chicago on the National Stage

When national headlines turned to Chicago this year, we did more than report them.

Our coverage showed how the city and its people experienced each moment. From major political moments to urgent social issues, WBEZ and the Sun-Times prioritized local voices, vital context and authenticity that flows from being a part of the community we serve.

In 2024, the [Democratic National Convention](#) returned to Chicago for the first time in nearly thirty years. Through [live blogs](#), text alerts and copious reporting, our journalists offered both locals and visitors real-time insights and deeper context to understand the convention and its impact on Chicago. We highlighted [Chicago entrepreneurs](#), shared practical [visitor tips](#), covered [protests](#) and community responses and documented how the convention reshaped [daily life](#) across the city. Both [before](#) and [after](#) the main event, we also explored the DNC's economic implications, like who paid for it and how much revenue it generated.

Chicago also became a focal point of large-scale immigration raids and deportation efforts this year. With approximately 1.7 million immigrants living in Chicago, about 18% of the city's population, the stakes are high. As anxiety and uncertainty spread, our team focused on the real life impact on everyday people, from [families](#) and students to [business owners](#). We documented how increased immigration enforcement was affecting [residents](#), explored [responses](#) from immigrant communities, documented [protests](#) and provided actionable information alongside in-depth context on evolving policies. With little sign that the federal pressure is slowing and the potential for [National Guard deployment](#), the WBEZ and Sun-Times team continue to closely track and report on the widespread, evolving impact of ongoing ICE raids, arrests and community responses across our city and the surrounding region.

Photo Credits: Left to right: 2024 Democratic National Convention at the United Center. Zubaer Khan/CST | Kharim Rincón and his wife, María Uzcátegui in Chicago's Hermosa neighborhood. Anthony Vazquez/CST | Jose Rivera at his stall in Little Village amongst the Immigration raids. Anthony Vazquez/CST | A trans migrant came to Chicago to escape violence. Now she's afraid of deportation. Illustration Mendy Kong/WBEZ | Collage of the DNC coming to Chicago. Collage by CST & WBEZ

Shining a Light through Investigative Journalism

Our reporters don't stop at headlines.

They follow the threads that connect individual experiences to larger systems, giving the public the information it needs to hold institutions accountable. Investigative journalism demands persistence and time. Our Watchdog Team looks at long-term trends and data to explore complex stories that help us better understand how Chicago's interconnected services and systems impact each other and the greater public.

This year, our investigation [“Failure to Treat, Failure to Protect”](#) exposed how long-standing failures in Chicago's mental health and criminal justice systems have left people with severe mental illnesses cycling between jails, hospitals, shelters and the streets, often without receiving sustained care. The series traced several preventable violent incidents downtown to these systemic breakdowns, revealing how the city's patchwork of services leaves both vulnerable residents and the broader public at risk. Following the investigation, state lawmakers introduced and advanced legislation to expand access to treatment for mentally ill defendants and reduce the time they remain incarcerated while waiting for care.

In another investigation, our reporters explored the escalating [housing crisis](#) in Chicago. The team collected data on median rent in every Chicago community area to trace how rents have changed in the city over the past century and created interactive maps to bring the data to life for readers. What they found was stark: Chicago has steadily become less affordable for many across a greater number of income brackets and communities, especially in the past several decades. By combining in-depth data analysis with on-the-ground reporting, the investigation shed light on the impact of policy decisions through the voices of tenants, advocates and policymakers.

Photo Credits: Left to right: Letonia Robinson tours apartments on the Southwest Side on Jan. 9, 2025. For the past two years, Robinson has looked for but not found an apartment she can afford. Manuel Martinez/WBEZ | Mark Heyrman, public policy committee member for the nonprofit Mental Health America and retired University of Chicago Law School professor. Brian Ernst / CST | Reporter Lauren Fitzpatrick. Ashlee Rezin/CST | The Rev. Steven Balke, pastor of St. James Episcopal Cathedral during the interview of “Failure to Treat, Failure to Protect.” Brian Ernst /CST



Chicago Public Media Leadership

Melissa Bell **Chief Executive Officer**

Melissa Bell joined Chicago Public Media as CEO in September 2024. She is the co-founder of Vox.com and served as publisher of Vox's parent company Vox Media from 2016 through 2024, overseeing the company's editorial publications, including Eater, The Verge and SB Nation. Prior to founding Vox, Bell worked as the Director of Platforms for The Washington Post, where she restructured the outlet's digital strategy and increased overall traffic.



Kimbriell Kelly **Editor-in-Chief**

Kimbriell Kelly joined Chicago Public Media as Editor-in-Chief in September 2025. She is a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist with over two decades of journalism experience. Kimbriell began her career locally before working at The Washington Post and later as Washington Bureau Chief for the Los Angeles Times.



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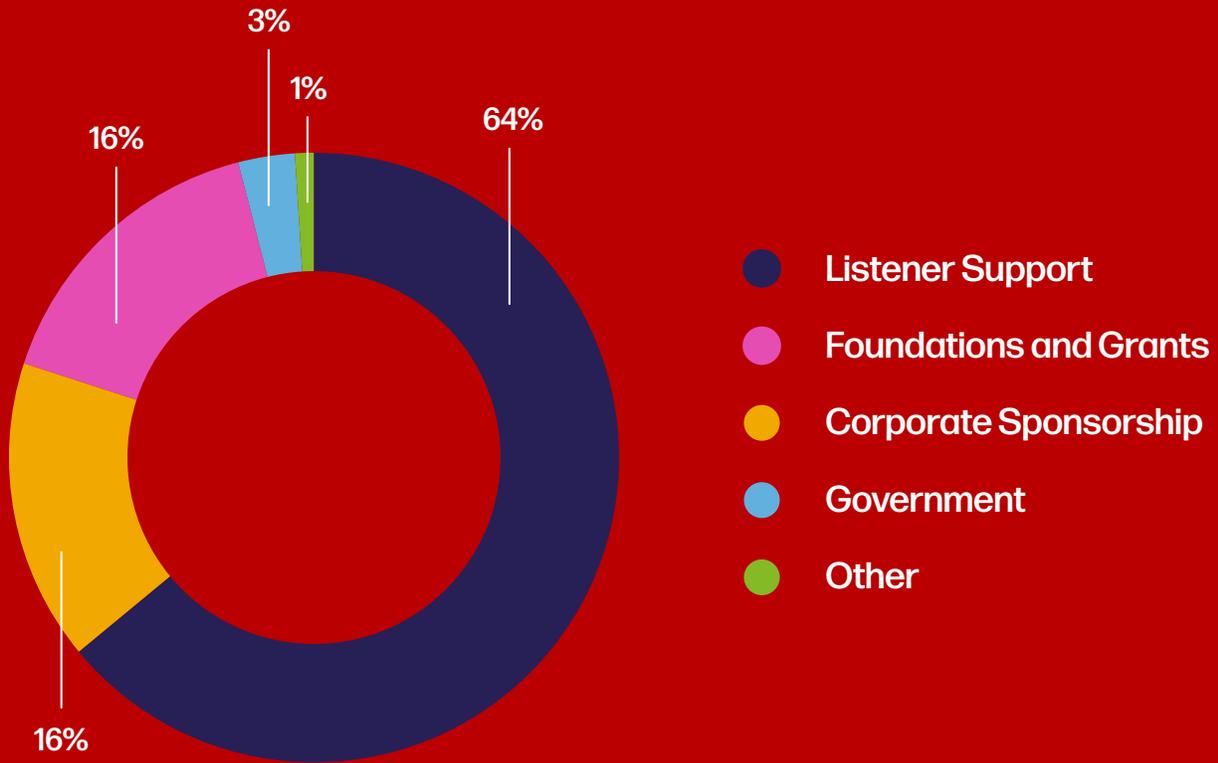
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Financial Sustainability

Total Operating Revenue: \$71 Million



Total Operating Expenses: \$67 Million

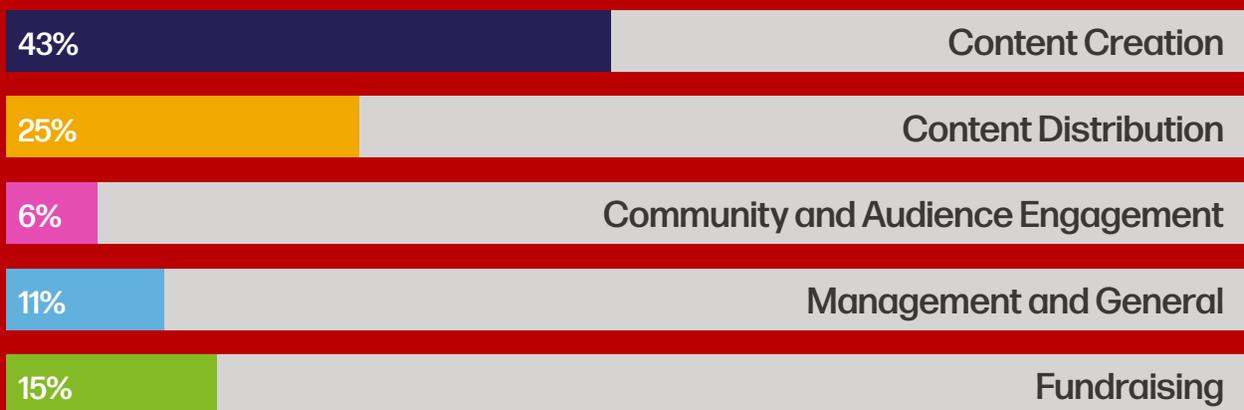


Photo Credits: Getty Images



Our Supporters

Chicago Public Media is deeply grateful for the generous contributions from donors who made gifts of \$5,000 or more in fiscal year 2025, spanning from July 2024 through June 2025. These supporters provide us with the critical resources that advance our mission.

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