



**Planet
Detroit**

2024 Impact & 2025 Priorities

Informing and
Empowering Detroit's
Environmental Future



LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Dear Readers, Supporters, and Partners,

What does impact mean to us at Planet Detroit? It means holding power accountable, highlighting solutions, amplifying community voices and inspiring action through journalism.

In a time marked by unprecedented challenges and rapid change, we've worked tirelessly to deliver stories that matter to Detroiters and Michiganders.

The past few months have brought a dizzying new reality — from federal regulatory rollbacks to the wholesale disappearance of federal agencies and programs that protect health and the environment and work on climate change. Public health crises have intersected with environmental hazards, exposing vulnerable communities to even greater risks. Meanwhile, the accelerating impacts of climate change — record-breaking heat waves, flooding, and deteriorating air quality — have underscored the urgency of our work.

Amid this chaos, we've sought to bring clarity and accountability. From investigating toxic discharges into the Detroit River to exploring the human toll of nonstop utility rate hikes, our journalism has shone a light on the issues that shape our region's future.

We're proud of the strides we've made over the past six years — from uncovering environmental injustices to expanding our team and growing our audience. In 2024, we hired Isabelle Tavares through Report for America to cover health and environmental issues in Southwest Detroit, focusing on bilingual reporting that connects directly with Spanish-speaking communities.

Our work is recognized by our peers, who honored us with 14 awards through

the Detroit chapter of the Society for Professional Journalists. Reporter Brian Allnutt was recognized by the American Society of Civil Engineers - Southeast Michigan chapter for his coverage of aging infrastructure. And we were also honored to receive the Financial Health Award from LION Publishers for our strong financial management and clear strategy for growth — recognition that underscores our commitment to sustainability as an independent newsroom.

These achievements are only possible because of your support. Looking ahead to the rest of 2025, we're excited to deepen our investigative capacity, expand community initiatives like the Neighborhood Reporting Lab, and keep experimenting with innovative ways to reach new audiences.

Already this year, we've strengthened our newsroom by hiring Dustin Blitchok as Managing Editor, whose extensive editorial leadership experience and deep knowledge of Detroit will help us amplify public interest stories. We've also welcomed Ethan Bakuli as Climate Solutions and Service Journalism Reporting Fellow, whose community-centered reporting will focus on climate, public health and environmental issues in Detroit and Michigan.

Together, we'll continue building a more informed community. Thank you for being part of this journey.

With gratitude,

**Nina Ignaczak
Executive Editor,
Founder &
Chief Financial Officer**





Our Mission

Our mission is to produce quality climate, health and environment journalism in the public interest that centers local voices, holds power accountable, spotlights solutions, and serves the community.

Our Approach

Our journalism is rooted in service, accountability, and solutions. We use these approaches to inform, engage, and empower Detroit and Michigan communities on the frontlines of environmental and public health challenges.

Community Service Journalism: Providing resources and guides for community empowerment.

HOW WE DO IT:

- From covering local food systems and air quality, to spotlighting residents restoring neighborhoods and fighting pollution — we’re telling the stories that inspire.
- Creating practical guides, explainers, and tools to help readers navigate issues like water affordability and housing safety.
- Hosting in-person community events and virtual webinars to share knowledge directly with readers, surface community-driven story ideas and grow our audience.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- Reported on Michigan’s PM 2.5 air quality designations, explaining EGLE’s proposed nonattainment areas and their implications for public health.
- Expanded in-depth democracy coverage and election guides, analyzing the role of Michigan voters in the 2024 elections, with impacts on environmental policies at both state and federal levels.
- The “Living with PFAS in Metro Detroit” series not only explores the pervasive impact of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on public health, but also offers a guide on testing your own water.

HOW WE KNOW IT WORKS:

- We engaged with more than 1,000 community members via virtual and in-person community events in 2024.
- Feedback from Neighborhood Reporting Lab participants shows they feel equipped to tell their own stories about their neighborhoods.
- Our 2024 audience survey showed readers are using our guides to advocate for water affordability, environmental justice and more in their communities.



Accountability Journalism: Holding power to account through investigative reporting.

HOW WE DO IT:

- Conducting in-depth investigations into policies, corporations and institutions affecting Metro Detroit's environment and public health.
- Using public records, data analysis, and interviews to uncover systemic issues and amplify community concerns.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- Publishing in-depth reporting on Detroit's lead hazard ordinance, analyzing City Council delays and risks to children.
- Continued coverage of DTE's rate hikes, highlighting its impact on ratepayers and energy equity.
- Investigating BASF's toxic discharges into the Detroit River, uncovering allegations from a state employee that Michigan regulators failed to stop the chemical giant BASF from releasing toxic chemicals into the Detroit River from its Wyandotte facility over several decades.

HOW WE KNOW IT WORKS:

- Coverage of Detroit's lead hazard ordinance brought attention to delays that put children at risk, prompting community advocacy.
- Investigations into DTE rate hikes sparked conversations about energy equity across Metro Detroit.
- Reporting on BASF's toxic discharges into the Detroit River led to public outcry and increased scrutiny of Michigan regulators, who have increased their pressure on the company to expedite its cleanup.



Solutions-Based Journalism: Highlighting positive actions and solutions.

HOW WE DO IT:

- We know how overwhelming climate news can feel. But at Planet Detroit, we believe in reporting that reveals what's wrong — but shows how to make it right.
- Reporting on innovative solutions to climate challenges, such as community-driven clean energy projects or sustainable waste management practices.
- Collaborating with local organizations to showcase success stories that can be replicated elsewhere.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE:

- A special report and webinar on holiday waste and consumerism offers solutions for reducing environmental impact during the season.
- [Reporting on Eastern Market's food waste problem](#) explores solutions like food rescue partnerships and composting initiatives, offering a roadmap for reducing waste and environmental impact at large urban markets.
- Ethan Bakuli, our new [Climate Solutions and Service Journalism Reporting Fellow](#), spotlights Detroiters' creative responses to environmental and public health crises, elevates grassroots solutions, and explores lessons from other communities to inspire local action.
- As a founding member of the [Climate News Task Force](#), Planet Detroit collaborates with 10 other newsrooms to share solutions-focused stories, develop tools for measuring impact, and amplify local innovations and environmental justice models for broader replication.



HOW WE KNOW IT WORKS:

- Readers tell us they've adopted waste reduction practices due to our coverage.
- Readers tell us that coverage of grassroots environmental initiatives has given them ideas for ways to get involved in their communities.
- Partnerships and collaborations with peer local and regional newsrooms have amplified solutions-focused stories across broader audiences.



The Team



Nina Misuraca Ignaczak

Executive Editor, Founder & Chief Financial Officer



Nina Misuraca Ignaczak is an award-winning Metro Detroit-based journalist. She is the founder, publisher, and executive editor of Planet Detroit, a digital media startup focused on producing quality climate, health, and environment journalism that holds power accountable and spotlights solutions. Planet Detroit has received awards and recognition from the Society for Professional Journalists Detroit, the Institute for Nonprofit News, and LION Publishers since its establishment in 2019. Prior to her journalism career, Nina worked in urban planning in local government and nonprofit sectors, holding a Master of Science in Natural Resource Ecology and a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Known for her adventurous spirit, Nina is not afraid to try new things, embracing challenges with enthusiasm. Her deep connection to Detroit began with her Sicilian great-grandparents who immigrated to the region in the early 1900s.

Dustin Blitchok

Managing Editor

Dustin Blitchok brings extensive editorial leadership experience, having served as an editor at Benzinga and Metro Times, and got his start in journalism at The Oakland Press. As a longtime Detroit resident and journalist, he has covered a wide range of public interest stories, including criminal justice and government accountability. Dustin prides himself on his sharp news judgment, leading with an aggressive curiosity that drives him to uncover compelling stories. He also brings a sense of humor to his work, recognizing the importance of levity in the pursuit of impactful journalism.





Ethan Bakuli

*Climate Solutions and Service Journalism
Reporting Fellow*

Bakuli joins the team after covering education and community issues for Chalkbeat Detroit and working as a freelance journalist reporting on race and labor issues. Before launching his career as a reporter, he taught high school students how to produce audio and visual stories about their communities, an experience that cemented his belief in the power of community-led journalism.

Brian Allnutt

Senior Reporter

Brian Allnutt is a senior reporter and contributing editor at Planet Detroit, where he covers the climate crisis, environmental justice, politics, and open space. Well-networked, particularly in Southwest Detroit, Brian brings valuable subject matter expertise and lived experiences to the challenges surrounding utilities and air quality. He prides himself on his strong news judgment, consistently identifying and developing stories that captivate readers and spark meaningful conversations.



Isabelle Tavares

Community Reporter, Report for America

Isabelle Tavares covers environmental and public health impacts in Southwest Detroit for Planet Detroit with Report for America. Working across text, film, and audio, she is a Dominican-American storyteller who explores themes of identity, generational time, and ecology. Fluent in Spanish, Isabelle has lived in numerous places, which informs her nuanced approach to community storytelling.

Martina Guzmán

Community Journalism Director



Martina Guzmán is an award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker renowned for her work on race, justice, and systemic inequality. She serves as the Director of Community Journalism at Planet Detroit, where she leads the Neighborhood Reporting Lab and mentors residents to tell impactful community stories. Born and raised in Detroit, Martina has witnessed significant change in her hometown, bringing a deep understanding of its complexities to her work. She is fluent in Spanish, which enhances her ability to connect with diverse communities. Martina also possesses a gift for mentoring and supporting emerging writers, fostering their growth and development in the field. A 2023 John S. Knight Journalism Fellow at Stanford University, she is the founder of the Race & Justice Reporting Initiative at the Damon J. Keith Center for Civil Rights. Committed to supporting independent and freelance journalists, Martina holds a degree from the Journalism School at Columbia University.

Jennifer Hack Wolf

Audience Growth Strategist

Jennifer Hack Wolf is an independent newsroom consultant and Planet Detroit's audience growth strategist. She is passionate about engaging diverse audiences through strategic insights and cultivating strong team cultures that drive success. With a background rooted in media, journalism, and community engagement, Jennifer has held a variety of roles in newsrooms, bringing a comprehensive understanding of their inner workings. She is also deeply interested in mindfulness techniques, which she integrates into her approach to foster balanced and productive teams.





Looking Ahead:

Priorities for 2025 and Beyond



Sunflowers from documentary film on environmental justice in Detroit in partnership with Reel Clever

Growing Our Team & Investigative Capacity

- Hired Dustin Blitchok as Managing Editor, bringing extensive editorial leadership experience from roles at Benzinga and Metro Times. A longtime Detroit resident, he has covered public interest stories, including criminal justice and government accountability.
- Hired Ethan Bakuli as Climate Solutions and Service Journalism Reporting Fellow, focusing on in-depth, community-centered reporting on climate, public health, and the environment in Detroit and Michigan.
- Advancing newsroom innovation through participation in the AI J Lab: Leadership Fellowship at CUNY-NYC, exploring AI's role in supporting local climate and environmental journalism.
- Will participate in no-cost, highly competitive Total Newsroom Training through Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Expanding Our Reach & Physical Presence

- Moved into the Green Garage in Detroit, marking Planet Detroit's first-ever dedicated office space and fostering collaboration among our staff and with other environmentally oriented businesses.

Investigative & Solutions Journalism Projects

- Partnering with Great Lakes Now on a reporting series examining Great Lakes economic stability and climate change.
- Participating in the MIT Climate Solutions Fellowship, focusing on climate solutions related to food waste and methane emissions.
- Producing a documentary film on environmental justice in Detroit in partnership with Reel Clever Films, highlighting grassroots activists and community-led solutions to pollution, climate change, and systemic inequities.

Community-Driven Initiatives

- Relaunching “[Ask Planet Detroit](#),” a reader-driven initiative answering climate and health-related questions.
- Growing our [webinar series](#) to further engage audiences, expand reach, and deepen coverage on critical climate and public health issues.

Financial Sustainability

- Expanding reader revenue through new membership and donor engagement strategies and tools.
- Participate in the [Climate News Task Force](#) as a founding member, collaborating with 10 other climate-focused newsrooms to enhance the impact of climate journalism through shared resources, content sharing, and a unified funding roadmap.
- Developing an [advertising and sponsorship program](#) to create sustainable earned revenue opportunities.
- Strengthening [Impact Partners partnerships](#), engaging mission-aligned businesses and organizations to support independent climate journalism.
- Strengthening [advisory board engagement](#) and leveraging expertise to enhance editorial strategy, partnerships, and financial sustainability.
- Implementing recommendations from [LION 360 Sustainability Audit](#) process.



Key Impacts

Lasting Change

Climate activists cite Planet Detroit hazardous waste reporting to activate community around legislation

Behavior/Attitude Shifts

Our stories about environmental businesses lead to new customers for local retailers

Collaboration

New organizations became Planet Detroit Impact Partners, saying that they see us as a bridge connecting different communities

Speaking Engagements

We presented to audiences at the Michigan Climate Summit, Wayne State University, the 2024 Collaborative Journalism Summit, Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action (MiCCA), the Arab Health Summit (ACCESS), The Midwest Building Decarbonization Coalition, Poynter, the New York-Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative and more.

We were broadcast media guests on programs including Michigan Public's Stateside and WDET

Strengthening Journalists

We hosted Zimbabwean journalist Moses Matenga as part of an exchange program through the International Center for Journalists to bring journalists from the Global South to the United States to observe the 2024 U.S. Presidential election. Our journalist Isabelle Tavares will now travel to Peru to learn from a public health-focused newsroom as part of the program.

Advancing the Business of News

We presented about our Impact Partner program during a session on innovative revenue streams at the LION Publishers Independent News Sustainability Summit.

Amplification

Michigan Public pursued our story on EPA layoffs, noting the reporting Brian Allnutt produced.

Local landlords told us they shared our reporting about changes to lead inspection ordinances with other landlords.

Spotlight on Reporting:

Our Most Read Stories

We center human stories like these — stories too often overlooked — and make the connections between local crises and the larger forces driving them. By remaining present and responsive long after the headlines fade, Planet Detroit’s on-the-ground reporting not only brings crucial resources to residents but also spotlights overlooked voices, prompting public discussion about systemic infrastructure gaps, and empowering community members to advocate for solutions.



DTE Rate Hikes

When DTE Energy requested another rate hike just months after a \$217-million increase, we asked why — and who would pay the price. When GLWA proposed a nearly 6% hike on water rates, we talked to residents pushing back. And CBS News followed up on our coverage of energy equity and ratepayer impacts.

When our reporting revealed that [DTE ghostwrote public comments](#) from businesses in support of its \$456 million rate hike, it exposed how the utility shaped the narrative to manufacture support for higher energy bills — prompting scrutiny from both regulators and advocacy groups and bringing new transparency to the rate-setting process in Michigan.

Our reporting helps Detroiters understand how these decisions affect household budgets, public health, and climate resilience.



Living with PFAS

Planet Detroit's series on PFAS impact on public health and ecosystems series shone a light on the far-reaching impacts of PFAS contamination in Michigan, chronicling its effects on residents' daily lives. Through original reporting, we clarified the science, amplified the voices of those affected, and explained what's at stake for families and policymakers in Metro Detroit, an area where PFAS has been uncovered. The series helped raise public awareness and advance discussions on solutions to one of Michigan's gravest threats to clean water and health.



BASF Toxic Discharges

Planet Detroit's rolling investigation revealed how, for 43 years, Michigan regulators failed to hold chemical giant BASF accountable for toxic discharges into the Detroit River. By exposing systemic regulatory failures and centering the voices of impacted residents, our coverage spurred renewed attention from state agencies, leading to long-overdue enforcement action. Our reporting helped drive a crucial shift: after decades of inaction, the state is now poised to finally act on BASF's violations, demonstrating the power of persistent, community-centered journalism.



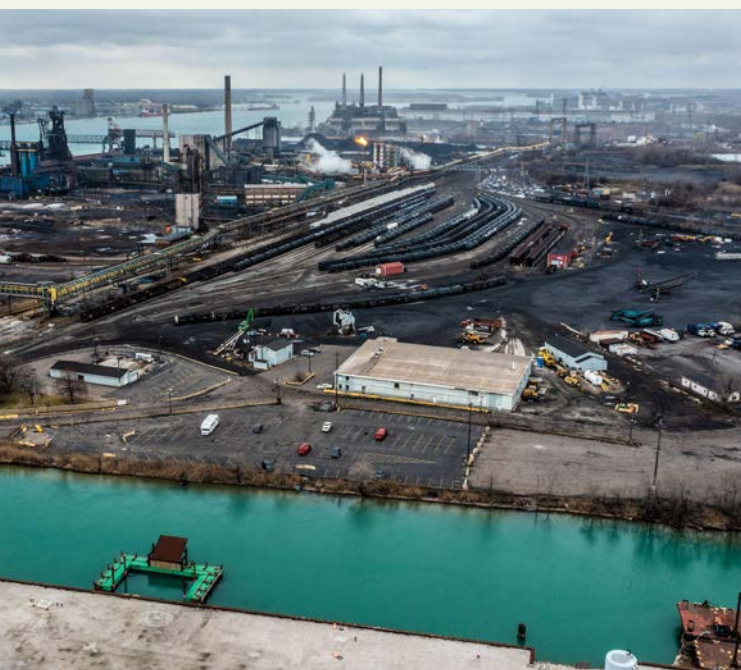
Data Centers

Our comprehensive reporting on the environmental impact of new data centers in Michigan brought critical facts and questions into public view — so much so that the Michigan Sierra Club cited Planet Detroit's work in its official position statement. By highlighting the climate and water usage concerns surrounding these developments, we informed both advocates and policymakers, supporting a more informed debate about sustainable technology, tax incentives and community impacts.



Planet Detroit's Ballot Initiative Investigation

When a shadowy anti-renewable energy ballot committee tried to influence Michigan's energy future, [Planet Detroit's investigative reporting](#) uncovered potential violations of campaign finance law. Our story prompted swift action: soon after publication, officials issued a campaign finance violation against the committee. This direct result demonstrates how watchdog reporting can protect the democratic process and foster political transparency.



Southwest Detroit Air Quality

Planet Detroit was first on the scene covering air quality threats in Southwest Detroit, including the [EES Coke facility](#) and the persistent problem of [industrial odors](#). Our early, sustained coverage drew praise from environmental advocates and provided critical information to residents. Community members reached out to thank us for elevating their concerns and keeping air quality in the conversation, while environmental groups have cited our coverage.



Detroit Water Main Flood

Our reporting on the [devastating water main rupture](#) in Southwest Detroit shows how infrastructure failure intersects with environmental contamination, housing insecurity, and climate resilience. After other news outlets moved on, we stayed in the community — talking to residents about the long-term consequences and challenges they faced. When reporter Isabelle Tavares encountered resident Juan Del Angel, 75, clearing his driveway, she told him about city programs available to help him deal with the ice and flooding around his home.



Partnerships & Collaborations

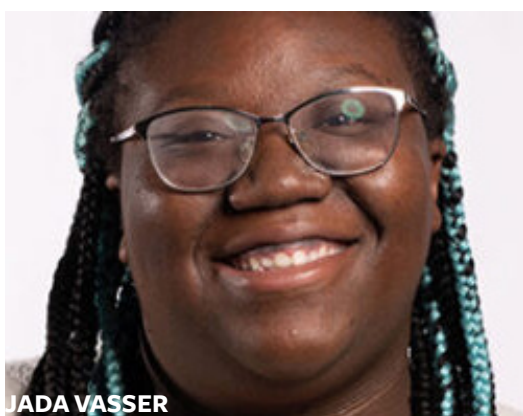


Executive editor, Nina, at the Ecosystems Conference with partners



Our Detroit News Hub partnership with Next City, BridgeDetroit and Chalkbeat Detroit explored the intersection of public safety, environmental health, and community well-being, leveraging shared resources to address pressing issues while amplifying solutions. The project was made possible by a grant from The Kresge Foundation.

As a member of the New York & Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative, we work with other news, academic and community organizations to cover chronic problems in our communities with a solutions lens.



Planet Detroit is among 11 climate-focused newsrooms joining forces to launch the Climate News Task Force, a new initiative aimed at enhancing collaboration in climate journalism and increasing its impact. The task force seeks to address the growing public demand for accurate, solutions-focused climate reporting at a time when media resources for covering the crisis remain limited.

Planet Detroit partnered with the Associated Press to expand access to critical content during the 2024 U.S. presidential race. Supported by funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, this collaboration aimed to bolster local newsrooms in battleground states.

With support from the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism and a grant from the Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessment/National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration at the University of Michigan, Jada Vasser, an MSU journalism major with a minor in documentary production, served as a 2024 summer reporting intern, focusing on health and environmental impacts on the Black community. Planet Detroit welcomes a new intern through the program in 2025.

Planet Detroit
partnered
with Great
Lakes Now

on The Great
Lakes Promise:

Cost, Resilience, and Refuge, a reporting series highlighting how the shared connection to freshwater among Great Lakes cities and states impacts our economic, public, and environmental health.



EL CENTRAL HISPANIC NEWS

Planet Detroit partnered with El Central, a bilingual newspaper serving Southwest Detroit's Latino community, to ensure critical environmental and public health information reached Spanish-speaking residents through republished stories in print. Additionally, a listening session hosted in the newspaper's newsroom uncovered residents' urgent concerns about air pollution and its impact on children's health, as well as the importance of voter engagement in addressing systemic challenges.



A grant from the Great Lakes PFAS Action Network supported a series of articles documenting PFAS contamination in Detroit and the metro area to help Detroiters better understand their local PFAS exposure risks and how they can take steps to protect themselves. We convened a webinar with decision-makers and community members to speak and answer questions.

Planet Detroit is partnering with the Detroit Writing Room and its nonprofit arm, Coaching Detroit Forward for the 2025 Summer Journalism Camp. Held at Wayne State University, this two-week immersive program brings together high school students passionate about storytelling, climate, health, and social justice reporting. Scholarships are made possible by the Kresge Foundation, the Michigan Environmental Council and additional donors.





Neighborhood Reporting Lab



The Planet Detroit Neighborhood Reporting Lab is a six-week program designed to empower community members with the skills and tools needed to tell impactful stories about their neighborhoods.

Participants learn the fundamentals of journalism, including researching, interviewing, and writing, before publishing a story on one of the issues that matter most to their communities. Through mentorship, instruction, and hands-on experience, participants publish meaningful stories that amplify voices and bring attention to both the vibrant lives and challenges within Detroit's neighborhoods.

“The Neighborhood Reporting Lab is one of the highest examples of community engagement I’ve ever seen,” says Martina Guzmán, Planet Detroit community journalism editor. “Planet Detroit basically has ambassadors in every neighborhood in the city.”

Led by experienced instructors and mentors, the program offers participants one-on-one guidance and fellowship that crosses boundaries. Participants who successfully publish their work receive a stipend as recognition of their efforts. In 2024 and 2025, 35 individuals participated in the lab.

We believe community voices are powerful and should be at the center of any coverage about their neighborhoods. By equipping residents with journalistic skills and amplifying their perspectives, we aim to foster greater understanding, accountability, and lasting change within Metro Detroit.



“People want to be a part of what Planet Detroit is doing,” Guzmán says. “Now we have people across the city who know us and trust us, who have gotten to know us. These relationships feed our journalism.”

SPOTLIGHT

**Akilah Russell shares her writing journey:
'I want to make people think twice'**

"I am excited about the exploration of it all," Akilah Russell says of storytelling. Meet Planet Detroit's 2025 Neighborhood Reporters in this Q&A series, written by Neighborhood Reporters.



SPOTLIGHT

**Is lifelong learning the key to success?
This Detroit teacher says yes**

Deborah Jenkins, a Detroit educator, champions collaboration between parents and teachers to secure quality education for children, while pursuing her own lifelong learning.



SPOTLIGHT

**Meet the man who has been cleaning the
Rouge River for 35 years**

For over 35 years, Bill Craig has championed the Rouge River's restoration, mobilizing volunteers to clean its waters and inspiring future generations to safeguard the environment.



Program Participants, 2024-2025

Aderonke Ibironke - MORNINGSIDE

Akilah Russell - BARTON-MCFARLAND

Carissa Welton - GOLD COAST

Carole Hawke-Diop - BRIGHTMOOR

Heidi Ausgood - GRIXDALE

Larissa Diem - CASS CORRIDOR

Marcia Spivey - REGENT PARK

Oscar Chapa - SOUTHWEST

Perry Sylvester - UTICA

Shannon Mackie - ELMWOOD PARK

Shayla Zimmerman - NORTH VILLAGE

Sonja Stuckey - CODY ROUGE WARRENDALE

Tamia Davis - EASTPOINTE

Thomas Obioha - ROSEDALE PARK

Yara RedaBrent Collins III - MORNINGSIDE

A J Johnson - HUBBARD-RICHARD, D6

Jade James-Gist - EAST VILLAGE

Aya Fayad - DEARBORN

Andrea Meza - ROMULUS

Susmita Dash - STERLING HEIGHTS

Alex Schultz-Spradlin - FITZGERALD

Meghan Rutigliano - LAFAYETTE PARK

Sarah Sparkman - WOODBRIDGE

“birch” Andrew Kemp - POLETOWN EAST

Zachary Lassen - REDFORD

Clayton Cortez Smith, Jr. - SOUTHWEST

Estefania Arellano-Bermudez -
MELVINDALE

Jessica Shields - DOWNTOWN

Ambirr Momon - DISTRICT TWO

Yvonne Price - DOWNRIVER

Mikehl Hafner - LAFAYETTE PARK

Kendal Kuneman - NORTHWEST DETROIT

Sarah Craft - SOUTHWEST

Princess Brown - DETROIT DEEP EAST

Fatima Nelson - WYOMING

Maia Regman - BELMONT

Owolabi Aboyade - DETROIT

Program Mentors/Editors

Dustin Blitchok - PLANET DETROIT'S MANAGING EDITOR

Martina Guzmán - PLANET DETROIT'S COMMUNITY JOURNALISM EDITOR

Nina Misuraca Ignaczak - FOUNDER AND EDITOR OF PLANET DETROIT

Charlotte Morgan - COMMUNITY JOURNALISM TEACHER

Ken Paulman - ENERGY NEWS NETWORK (NOW CANARY MEDIA)

Leah Samuel - VETERAN JOURNALIST SPECIALIZING IN HEALTH, SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND RACE REPORTING

Detroit Writing Room Mentors

2024-2025 Program Metrics

Hours of Mentorship
and Guidance Provided
over Six Weeks:

150+

Number of
Neighborhood
Reporters:

35

Number of
Stories
Published:

32
and counting!

This transformative initiative is made possible through the generous support of the Kresge Foundation and Americana Foundation.



Café y Chisme: Listening to Southwest Detroit



Café y Chisme with Detroit City Councilmember, Gabriela Santiago-Romero

We believe journalism should begin with listening. Café y Chisme, a bilingual, community-driven initiative, demonstrates this philosophy, highlighting personal stories and making sure lived experiences shape our reporting. Held on Fridays at local cafés and community spaces across Southwest Detroit, these discussions provide an informal yet impactful setting for community members, primarily Latino, to share their concerns, and ideas.



“I wanted to get to know sources on a deeper, more personal level — particularly people I see over and over again at events,” said Planet Detroit reporter Isabelle Tavares. “I would see people on a weekly basis and it felt transactional. I wanted a space to get to know them in a casual environment. And I wanted to show the community that I’m there for them.

Whether speaking with truck drivers, teachers, or healthcare workers, Planet Detroit reporter Isabelle Tavares has built trust, created space for

open dialogue about environmental and public health challenges and uncovered the stories that matter most to Southwest Detroit.

“People sign up to sit with Isabelle and she’s been able to positively engage a community,” says Martina Guzmán, Planet Detroit community journalism editor. “And the coverage of Southwest Detroit has really made Planet Detroit a resource like no other.”

Un chisme

One conversation that meant a lot to Tavares was meeting Miguel Caudillo, who shared his vision for addressing healthcare barriers in Southwest Detroit. With no dialysis facilities in the neighborhood, residents like Miguel’s grandmother must travel miles for treatment — a challenge compounded by high rates of diabetes and limited transportation options.



“Living in Southwest, there are very few medical places that you can go to,” said Miguel’s childhood baseball coach, Ismael Ledesma. “People have to call off work.”

Miguel hopes to establish a comprehensive health and wellness center offering dialysis treatment, transportation services, nutrition programs, and job training. The facility would be named D.E.G Dialysis in honor of his late mother, Dora Elliot Garza. “I almost cried because that’s affirmation, right there,” Miguel said about finding a potential property once used by Detroit Cab to transport dialysis patients.

“So this story is a tribute to his grandma and it’s cool that this story brings his message to more people,” Ledesma said.



The Road Ahead

As we plan for the rest of 2025, Café y Chisme will continue fostering dialogue across Southwest Detroit while expanding its reach to new audiences. By listening first and reporting second, Planet Detroit remains committed to amplifying the voices of those most impacted by environmental and public health challenges.



Poetry and Prose for the Planet



Poets gather at Book Suci for a poetry reading

At Planet Detroit, we believe storytelling has the power to connect, inspire, and drive change. That's why we host Poetry and Prose for the Planet, a contest and live event inviting community members to explore their relationships with the environment, environmental justice, and climate change through writing.

Our 2024 contest drew entries from Hamtramck, Macomb, St. Clair Shores, Rochester Hills, Alpena, Eastpointe, Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids, and, of course, Detroit. Six winners were selected to perform their work at a live showcase held in September at Book Suey in Hamtramck.

“Through this project, we’re creating space for people to reflect on their connection to the environment and express how it shapes their lives,” says Nina Ignaczak, Planet Detroit’s founder and executive editor. “We want to highlight voices that might not always be heard in traditional environmental conversations.”

One of the 2025 honorees, LaFarra R. Hemphill, shared how writing has become a powerful tool for her advocacy work. “My foundation is helping individuals who need acute mental health care. Connecting with those who are underprivileged, invisible to the majority and devalued has motivated me to explore writing as a voice for them and myself,” she said.

Her winning poem is a powerful call to acknowledge health inequities as we confront environmental changes in our community.

Breathing and Peace

by LaFarra R. Hemphill

To have a breath of fresh air is laughable

To breathe and have it turn into asthma,

turn into COPD then turn into lung cancer

is reality for me.

There is no peace of self, family nor community,

if there is no fresh air.

The fresh air where I breathe it in and my whole body say ahh.

Fresh air where I can walk, run, jog, sit, lay without a cough,

grasp of air or sneeze.

I am fearful I will never get that fresh air.

My family, my future family nor I will never have that ahh fresh air.

It is a human right for breathing and peace.

As Poetry and Prose for the Planet continues to grow, we look forward to hearing more voices from across Michigan who are ready to share their stories about our environment—and our future.

“This event is an extension of our mission to center community voices,” Ignaczak says. “By bringing people together to share their poetry, we hope to inspire a sense of collective hope and responsibility for our environment.”



Planet Detroit Documentary Films: Stories that Inspire Change



At Planet Detroit, we believe in the power of storytelling to highlight grassroots solutions, amplify underrepresented voices, and drive conversations about climate, health, and equity. Our documentary films bring these stories to life, creating a lasting visual record of the challenges and triumphs facing Detroiters.



Claiming Connections (2023)

Claiming Connections explores the grassroots efforts of Detroit-based groups working to connect BIPOC families with the outdoors in Michigan. This film, created by Nina Ignaczak, Thaad & Eden Sabolboro, and Amanda Tingley, showcases Black-led initiatives that foster access to nature as acts of liberation.

In the film, organizers share how their work helps communities of color reclaim their connection to nature and equips a new generation of environmental activists.

The film was honored with the 2023 Insight Award for Visual Journalism (Micro Division) from the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN).



The Healing Soil (2024)

The Healing Soil tells the story of Detroit's longstanding challenges with food access and the ways urban farming empowers residents to reclaim control over their food supply. This film, created in partnership with Outlier Media and supported by the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, highlights the physical and emotional benefits of gardening for Detroiters.

Reaching New Audiences

OUR STORIES WERE REPUBLISHED BY:

Michigan Public Radio

Bridge Detroit

Bridge Michigan

Great Lakes Now

Detroit Metro Times

El Central

Expanded Distribution Channels

PLANET DETROIT IS NOW DISTRIBUTED THROUGH:

NewsBreak App

Google News

Apple News

Audience Growth By the Numbers

ACHIEVED

139%

YEAR-OVER-YEAR GROWTH

in new users, reaching 242,000 visitors in 2024

INCREASED TOTAL WEBSITE SESSIONS

121%

compared to 2023

EXPANDED DISTRIBUTION

to open-source platforms like BlueSky, where we now have over

13,000

followers, broadening our audience beyond traditional social media

DOUBLED

ORGANIC SEARCH TRAFFIC

demonstrating the impact of our SEO strategy

DIRECT TRAFFIC GREW BY

100%

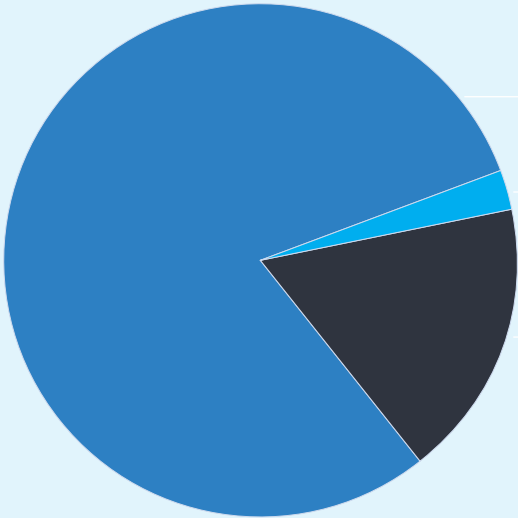
and email engagement increased by 69.5%

Newsroom Development & Financial Growth

OVERALL REVENUE 2024

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31

\$783,617



Foundation Operating, 79.8%

Earned Revenue, 2.6%

Project Grants, 17.6%

YEAR-OVER-YEAR REVENUE GROWTH:

Planet Detroit more than doubled its total revenue in 2024, with significant gains from individual giving, philanthropic grants, and Impact Partners contributions.

Secured \$500,000 in new philanthropic revenue from the MacArthur Foundation to bolster climate journalism in Michigan.

Secured \$100,000 in new philanthropic revenue from Press Forward to support investigative and solutions journalism focused on climate and public health.

Secured \$225,000 in new philanthropic revenue from the Patti K. Aaron Foundation to support our operations.

Raised \$65,398 in reader revenue and matches through NewsMatch, surpassing the \$60,000 goal with strong donor support, including:


- **\$20,603** from individual donors (31.1% of total revenue)
- **\$9,750** from Impact Partners
- **\$29,000** in matching funds from NewsMatch, Joyce Foundation, and Knight Foundation

IN 2024 AND 2025, PLANET DETROIT WAS SUPPORTED BY:

- Kresge Foundation
- MacArthur Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- Knight Foundation
- Report for America
- Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
- Michigan Health Endowment Fund
- Great Lakes PFAS Action Network
- Michigan Humanities Council
- LION Publishers
- Rotary Club of Detroit
- Rita Allen Foundation
- Patrice K. Aaron Family Foundation
- Google News Initiative
- Porter Family Foundation
- MIT Environmental Solutions Journalism Fellowship
- NewsMatch
- Google News Initiative

In Donors' Words: Why They Support Planet Detroit

"Planet Detroit is **so important** for Detroit!"

"Because I love you "

"<3"

"Your work is **essential to raising awareness** about environmental issues in Detroit."

"I want to help support journalism that **makes a difference.**"

"I believe in the **power of grassroots voices**, and Planet Detroit **amplifies** them."

"Supporting Planet Detroit feels like **supporting my community.**"

"The stories you tell **matter and make a difference.**"

"I want to **see Detroit thrive**, and your work is **part of that vision.**"

"Your journalism **gives a voice to the voiceless.**"

"I want to support **local environmental action.**"

"I **care deeply** about Detroit's future."

"Thank you for **spotlighting issues that matter.**"

"Your work keeps me **informed and inspired.**"

"I value journalism that **holds power accountable.**"

"Planet Detroit makes a **real difference** in people's lives."

"I'm inspired by your **commitment to justice and equity.**"

"Supporting Planet Detroit means **supporting positive change.**"

"I **trust you** to tell the stories that matter."

"Planet Detroit is a **tremendous resource** for Detroiters who want to pass on a clean and healthy environment to our children."

Recognition and Awards

- + Planet Detroit **Founder and Executive Editor Nina Ignaczak** was named a **2025 MIT Environmental Solutions Journalism Fellow**. Nina's project investigates how food waste and methane emissions in Metro Detroit contribute to Michigan's climate challenges, and explores community-driven solutions to reduce emissions and build climate resilience.
- + **Nina** was also selected for the **2025 The AI Journalism Lab** at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY. This is an international program to explore how AI can strengthen journalism and communities.
- + **Planet Detroit** was selected for the competitive **LION 360 program** to help us chart a course for sustainability.
- + **Financial Health Award: LION Publishers recognition for financial health and a vision for growth.**
- + Planet Detroit's Impact Partners program was named a **finalist for the Institute of Nonprofit News' 2024 INNovator Award** (small division).
- + Planet Detroit journalists won **four first-place awards** at the 2024 awards ceremony of the **Detroit Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists** and **two second place awards** in 2025.
- + The Southeast Michigan Branch of the American Society of Civil Engineers **recognized reporter Brian Allnutt with its 2025 Outstanding Media Coverage in Civil Engineering Award** for his insightful reporting on Michigan's aging infrastructure systems and their impact on local communities.

PLANET DETROIT IS A PROUD MEMBER OF:

The Institute for
Nonprofit News

Local Independent
Online News

Society of Environmental
Journalists

Association of Alternative
News Media

The Green Garage

Impact Partners Circle

Planet Detroit Impact Partners are locally rooted organizations and businesses that support community-powered, independent nonprofit journalism on the environment, climate, sustainability, and public health.

As a Planet Detroit Impact Partner, you help to keep our coverage free and accessible to all, especially those most impacted by the issues we cover.

Detroit Zoo	Elevate
Walker Miller Energy Services	JustAir
Alliance for the Great Lakes	Michiganders for a Just Farming System of Detroit
Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice	Make Food Not Waste
Great Lakes Environmental Law Center	Michigan Climate Action Network
Huron River Watershed Council	Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition	MI Environmental Justice Coalition
Path Consulting	Six Rivers Land Conservancy
Steelcase	Society of Environmental Journalists
Trent Creative	Michigan Environmental Council
5 Lakes Energy	Society for Environmental Journalists
Anese & Associates	Sticky Lab
Path Consulting	Twinkled Event Decor LLC
Clinton River Watershed Council	Walking Lightly
Detroit 2030 District Friends of the Rouge	We Reuse
Early Works	Michigan Green Muslims

Contact

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Planet Detroit is an independent, nonprofit newsroom dedicated to delivering impactful climate, health and environmental journalism for Detroit and Michigan. The vast majority of our funding supports reporting, editing and community engagement. Donations are tax-deductible.

Support Our Work

Your support powers independent journalism that informs, empowers and drives change in Detroit and Michigan.

Help us keep our coverage free and accessible to all — especially those most affected by environmental and public health challenges.

Donate today:

www.planetdetroit.org/support

Thank you for helping us build a more informed and resilient community.