



# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE:

A TOOLKIT FOR REPARATIVE LISTENING AND STORYTELLING

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Introduction and Production By M. Simone Boyd

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# FUNDERS AND PARTNERS

## PRESENTING PARTNERS

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## FRIENDS

Amber Banks, Tina Beck, Lathram Berry, Elke Hoffman, David Kleinfelter, Meridith Krebs, Toland Lawrence, Linda Messamore, Beth Hannon Penny, Valene Reese, Jesse Strauss & Shay Rojas, Rebecca Selove, Isabel Tipton-Krispin and Alice Williams

## IN-KIND PARTNERS

Frist Art Museum  
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# INTRODUCTION

## DEAR READER,

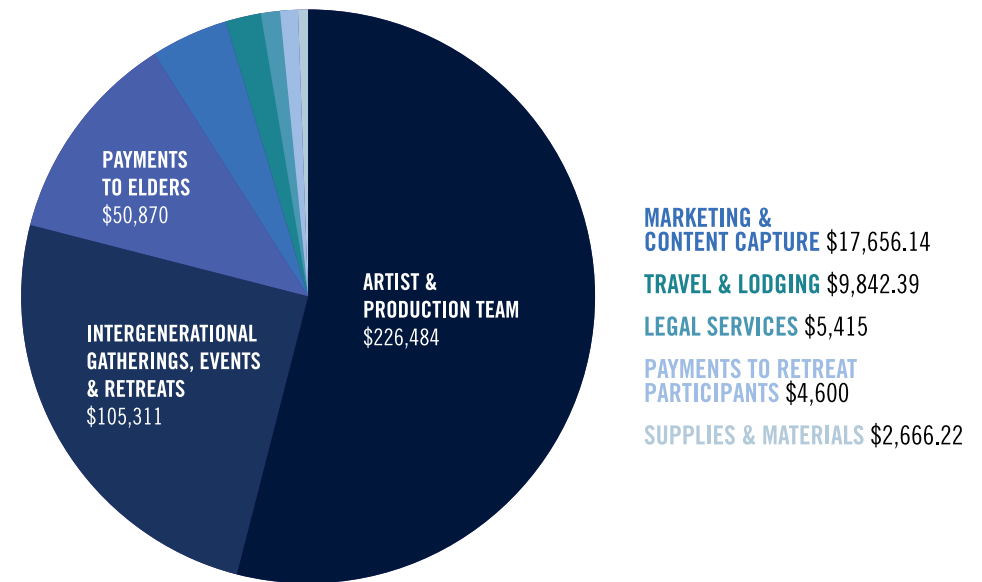
As the two-year production phase of We Are North Nashville (WANN) began winding down, I began to think about all the invisible labor, care and energy that went into this project. I knew we needed to capture some of the lessons and behind the scenes of the artistic process that made this project beautiful. But I also knew that I was too exhausted, overwhelmed and too close to the work to have the necessary perspective.

So, I reached out to my dear friend and collaborator, Nikiko Masumoto, and asked her to put together “something.” I didn’t know exactly what I wanted, but I knew Nikiko’s heart as an artist and memory keeper. I knew that with her being a fourth-generation Japanese American and farmer she would bring the necessary reverence for the elders. And as a poet, I knew she would weave these words and lessons with beauty and clarity.

And that is what you hold in your hands: a work of art. I invite you to find your comfy socks, grab a warm drink and settle in for a backstage tour of We Are North Nashville and the lessons we’d like to put into the world.

Oftentimes, storytelling, oral history and research projects are extractive of their subjects. But from our very first conversation—as the We Are North Nashville team—we all agreed we wanted the project to be imbued with reverence and deep care for the elders. We wanted them to feel good about sharing, and we wanted to honor their contributions to North Nashville.

One way we did this is by committing to redistribute ten percent of every dollar raised back to the elders, and we did that! To the tune of almost \$51,000. In total, we raised a little over \$500,000 for this project. Above is a simple pie chart, that illustrates how we spent the money.



Another piece of the project, that is somewhat invisible, is the work of our team members at Unmanageable: Celine Thackston and Carissa Stoltz. Having them come on board, share our values, write grants, manage paperwork, send gift letters, 1099s, handle contracting, advocate with funders, secure partners and project manage...freed us up—as creatives—to fully focus on the elders, the storytelling and how we wanted the elders to feel. I’ve never worked in such a fully supported way before: where someone else took care of the businessy stuff.

I wish that all community-based artists had the opportunity to create with this type of freedom, support and alignment. While we deeply appreciate all of our funders and partners (listed on page 2), I want to issue a personal heartfelt thank you to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for funding the role of Unmanageable in this project.

Many hearts and hands made this work possible, and I’m eternally grateful.

Love, Peace and Hairgrease,  
MSB | MSIMONEBOYD.COM

# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE TEAM



M. Simone Boyd,  
Creator



Andrea Tudhope,  
Executive Producer



Steve Haruch,  
Producer



Celine Thackston,  
Unmanageable



Carissa Stolting,  
Unmanageable

# COUNCIL OF ELDERS



Reverend Margreat Smithson



Dr. Patricia Streator Jackson



Cheryl McReynolds



Thomas Wilson Jr.



Larry Turnley Sr.



Larry Turnley Jr.



Melvin Gill



Leitha Carter



Barbara Jean Watson

# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE: TOOLKIT

## DOCUMENTING, UPLIFTING AND CELEBRATING THE TREMENDOUS JEWELS OF THIS PROJECT

By Nikiko Masumoto, at the invitation of M. Simone Boyd

### BACKGROUND

I have never physically been in North Nashville; I have never been to the Nashville metro area either. And yet, because of listening to the multi-media We Are North Nashville (WANN) project, I hold deep in my heart images, sounds, stories and wisdom from the 9 elders and the team behind WANN. This project has impacted me personally, professionally, and as a citizen of this country. Though it might come as a surprise to find me, a total outsider in a role to reflect upon a project such as We Are North Nashville, I sincerely hope that by listening deeply and writing here, I can illuminate and amplify many of the important and brilliant contributions this project offers not only to North Nashville and Nashville, but also to our country and world.

My first awareness of WANN was from an email invitation to attend a zoom launch of the project. It was immediately reserved in my calendar because the invitation came from someone I admire, M. Simone Boyd. We were connected through a national network of artists gathered and funded through the Center for Performance and Civic Practice to support each other, learn from each other and share in our community engaged work during the pandemic. Through this network, Simone and I had the chance to get to know each other's creative practices over the course of several years.



Nikiko Masumoto

Very similarly to the relationships between Simone and some of the elders in the WANN project, anything that Simone is involved with is something I want to know about. Her work is so vital, so resonant, and so profound. So I jumped at the chance to learn about Simone's upcoming project in that zoom meeting in May of 2024.

During the virtual meeting, members of the production team, administrative team, and a funder introduced the project, We Are North Nashville. The multimedia project involved in-person neighborhood convenings and events (both neighbor to neighbor and also public), story-gathering and audio recording, and the intention was to roll out a podcast. I devoured listening to the first episodes. Listening alone deepened many of the questions, curiosities, and thoughts I had about remembering past harms as one important piece of healing in community and in our country. So when Simone sent another email invitation for me to take part in documenting the project, I was totally honored and still feel that way.

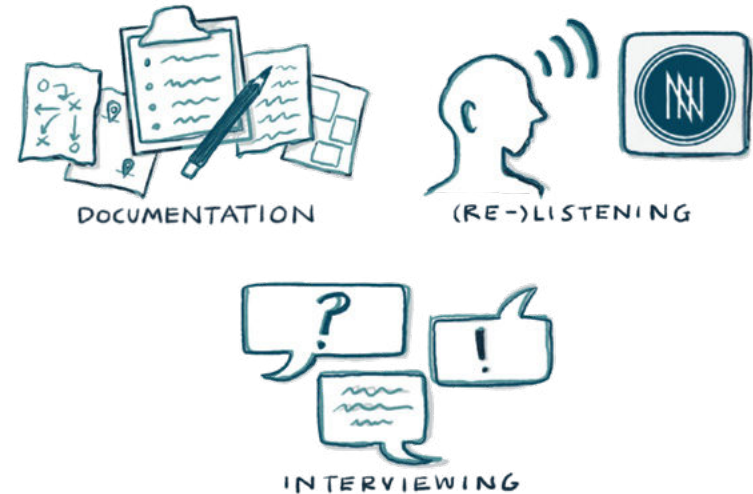
## PURPOSE AND METHODS

I hope this toolkit creates another record of the incredible work of We Are North Nashville and details some of the specific, transformative, and powerful practices and processes that went into making the podcast and the events that surrounded it. I see some of my purpose as a human mirror: reflecting back the beauty, honesty, and uniqueness of We Are North Nashville. The ways I reflect are informed by the wholeness of who I am and my lived experiences, the lineages that have shaped me, and my relationship with Simone. This report is not intended to be a single narrative about what this project was (I don't believe in single narratives), but one additional resource for anyone who cares about this type of community work.

We wanted to create this form of documentation primarily for folks who are interested in or are already currently engaged in similar types of community-centered projects. We hope there are useful frames, questions, and observations captured here about We Are North Nashville that might inform and enhance other projects.

At the invitation of Simone, I focused my listening around three strategies:

1. documentation by creating a list of the gatherings, events and processes around and through the creation of the project
2. (re-)listening to the podcast
3. interviews with key folks involved in the project's making and events (\*though my interviews were not comprehensive as I was not able to interview 100% of the team, I did speak to a majority of core participants)



The three parts of this methodology are grounded in the ethics of “deep hanging out” described by D. Soyini Madison in *Critical Ethnography*. Madison encourages methods that acknowledge points of departure, differences, and embodiment as expertise in lived experience. I approach this work through consciousness of the ways I inhabit an outsider position (never having been to North Nashville, being mixed race Japanese American), and also how I can look through my identities and experiences as portals to build towards understanding.

My work took place from November 2024 - May 2025. I re-listened to the podcast on numerous occasions, learning more and more each time and reaching for the tissue box in many moments. I took notes from those listenings to organize my comprehension and add another level of seeing connections between episodes, across stories, and through the whole arc of the first season. In between re-listening, I prepared for each individual interview by revisiting elders' contributions to the podcast, paying attention both to what they said, how they said it, and also the non-verbal audible clues that give context and full humanity to communication (things like tone, pace, silence and pauses, laughter and breathing). I was trying to understand as many pieces and parts of the context from which these stories sprung.

## OVERVIEW OF WANN

On the website for We Are North Nashville the podcast part of the project is very clear: the first season has 5 episodes plus 1 trailer. But the project itself is so much more—it included:

- a launch party
- a celebratory photoshoot
- numerous Council of Elders meetings to seek guidance from the elders on the direction of the project
- a media lunch for Nashville journalists and elders to discuss news coverage of North Nashville
- A Good Neighbor Gathering for new residents of North Nashville to learn the history of North Nashville, share stories and learn what elders value. A beautifully designed one-page Good Neighbor Guide and yard signs were distributed.
- an intergenerational dinner party to connect elders with other Nashville residents and caring community members
- an intergenerational rest retreat (primarily for Black women in North Nashville)
- and a month of intergenerational fitness classes for residents of North Nashville.

One of the production team members articulated it like this, “The podcast is a vehicle, but it is not the work in itself.” There are clues of practice within the stories shared on the website, references to public gatherings like a photo shoot with the elders (episode 4) and the September 2024 podcast launch. The more time I spent in conversation with folks who participated in WANN, the more I understood: in a way, there is no discrete beginning (and possibly no concrete end) to WANN because it reflects a way of being together and working together.

REFLECTING ON THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS –

I LIKE TO HAVE THE LAST WORD AT MEETINGS.  
IT IS A PRIVILEGE FOR ME TO BE AMONGST  
PEERS, MY AGE AND OLDER. I TAKE PLEASURE  
AND I LEARN SOMETHING.

—THOMAS WILSON JR.

### THEMES IN THE PODCAST:

*elders’ stories, community memory, African American stories as American history, intergenerational sharing, addressing intersection of past / present / future : racism, dispossession and removal, rupture, resilience, community care and love, survival, pride, repair*

We Are North Nashville work unfolded in three overlapping spheres: the production team (the We Are North Nashville core team and Unmanageable fundraising, logistics and project management), the Council of Elders, and community gatherings. Some of these gatherings were public (such as the podcast launch), some of them were community-centered with curated local guest lists (like the intergenerational dinner party and rest retreat), some were co-hosted in partnership with other organizations (like the Tennessee State Museum and the National Museum of African American Music), some of them were conducted privately (like the interviews) with explicit consent for sharing and all elements were protected and centered on the care of the elders’ stories.

Prior to the storytelling project, Simone asked several elders in the community to join a “Council of Elders” to guide community work surrounding the repair and lighting installation of an interstate overpass in North Nashville. Most of this council participated in the podcast directly offering more than just their stories, the WANN team consulted the Council of Elders throughout the entire project. The storytellers of the podcast were not ‘subjects’ in the conventional sense of journalism, they were revered co-creators of knowledge and their input shaping everything from the logo to giving feedback on early iterations of the podcast were essential.

MY DREAM IS FOR OTHER ELDERS'  
STORIES TO BE HELD IN A GENTLE  
AND INTENTIONAL WAY.

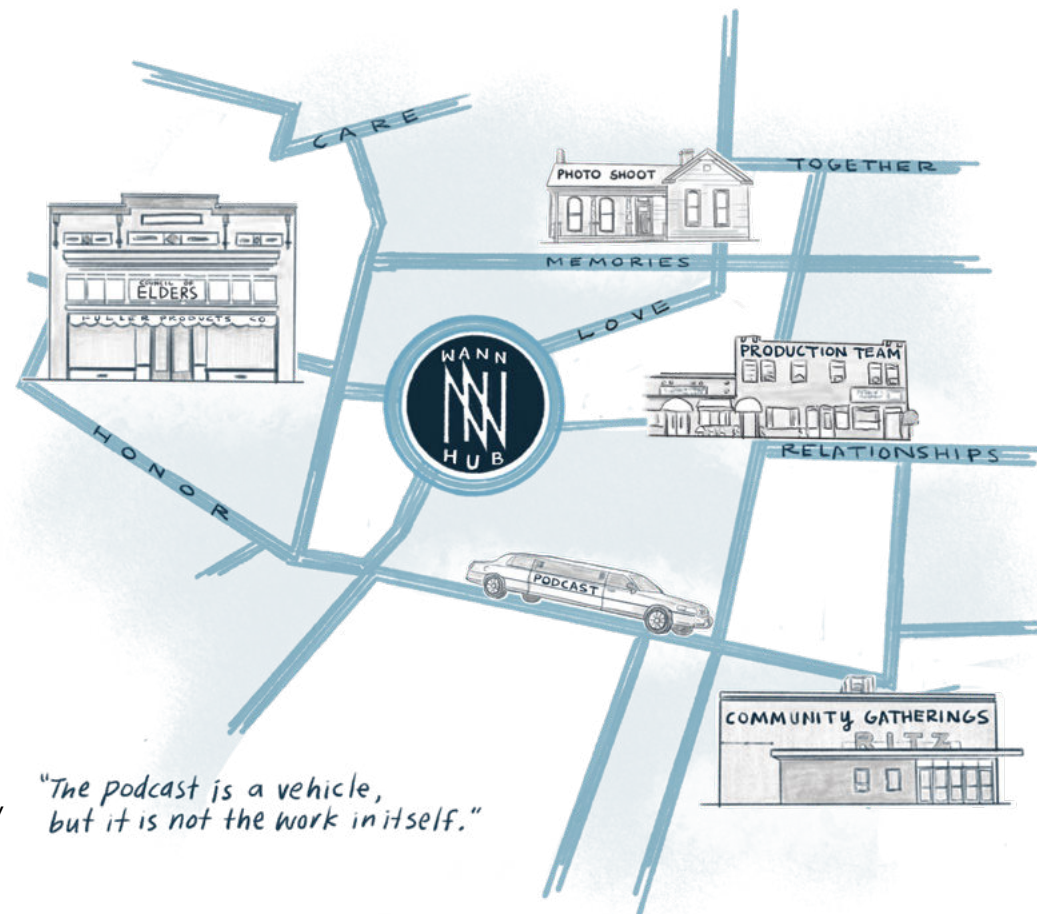
— M. SIMONE BOYD

We Are North Nashville is a storytelling project about a neighborhood and people who live there. Relationships, authentic, caring and earnest were as important to all the production team as the 'product' of the podcast. One team member articulated, "It would have been a problem if the 'product' was prioritized above the people... The process is not separate from the thing you're making." I understand this to mean that how people were treated was a top priority.

This point of departure is crucial to understanding how special the methods and practices of the WANN team and participants are. The podcast made visible parts of the process that grew from relationships, and there were also many methods around and leading to the WANN podcast that weren't explicitly defined in the episodes, but implicitly felt in the profoundness of the podcast.

WANN is a set of principles in action, behaviors, practices and specific gatherings and a deeply moving podcast. WANN continues to unfold as this report is being written. In the following pages, I will highlight what I found to be the most transformative ways of working. There is so much to learn from We Are North Nashville.

**CORE WANN METHODS:** *listening well, intention, honor of elders, community care, opportunity for profound connection*



# INSIGHTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, I want to amplify several of the qualities of working that I heard articulated across interviews. These qualities of work are north stars for anyone wanting to engage in community centered creation. After summarizing each insight, the section is followed by a list of questions labelled “considerations.” These questions are specifically tailored to practitioners like artists and community leaders. But they can hold value for many of us in multiple scenarios. The insights are organized by numbers for ease of reference, and do not reflect any particular hierarchy.



PEARL HIGH SCHOOL

# INSIGHT #1

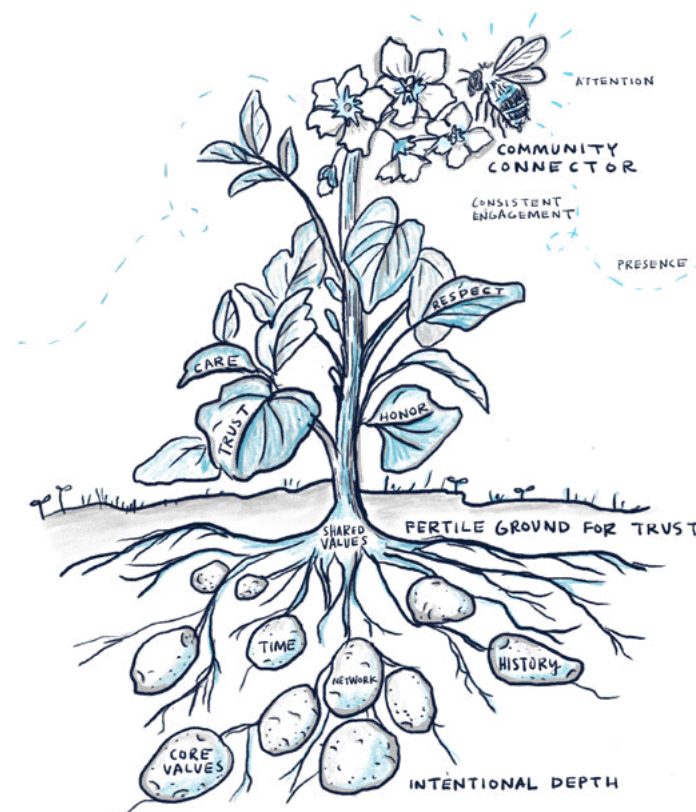
## BUILD ROOTS OF TRUST AND FIND A COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

Cultivation of relationships through time and values alignment builds roots of trust. These roots nourish human experience both within the project and in life in general. For core WANN participants, the pre-existence of this root system was a key portal into creating profound experience.

In all interviews with team members of WANN on the production side, administrative side, and with the elders themselves, I asked each person, “why did you say yes to this project?” Nearly all answers shared a core response: because I knew Simone. For example, one elder shared, “I wasn’t expecting this, I agreed to do this because I trusted Simone.” People went on to point out that it wasn’t that they just knew her in passing or were loosely acquainted, they knew her. They knew her because of the way she shows up in community, whether at church, in public meetings advocating for the community, in other arts projects in the neighborhood, or through many long walks and/or previous collaborations with Simone. One elder responded with joyous laughter, “I’ve done things that I never thought I would [because of Simone]. Simone made you feel like you were special, you had something to offer, you matter.”

In other words, the “work” of the project (before any money had been raised, before the word podcast had even been uttered) began over years and years of being part of the community. The depth of these relationships was not only singularly tethered to Simone – there were even longer connections across multiple decades between elders, in one case obviously someone’s entire life as a parent-child duo were both elders in the project. On the production team, people had worked together closely for years and articulated enthusiastic trust and belief in how each other brought their values to life. This project was stewarded by everyone involved and they each expressed deep reverence for each other.

## BUILD ROOTS OF TRUST AND FIND A COMMUNITY CONNECTOR



Not everyone involved in WANN had prior long-existing relationships. Members of the production team who shared a less direct prior relationship with Simone invested time at the beginning of working together to clarify shared values and discuss meaningful working culture. The team used a strategy of intentional depth to discuss philosophies, core values and working norms before launching into the logistical lift of the project.

<sup>1</sup> One of the elders who did not have a lengthy relationship with Simone before entering the collaborative process still held deep trust for Simone. Because she was brought into the project by a reference from another elder who had known Simone for years.

What I heard over and over, this project was special because of its depth, intention, and care. Several people used the same word to describe their participation: honor. They felt honored to be part. This feeling of honor reflects trust, respect, and care. The pre-existing relationships provided fertile ground for deepening connections and new relationships thrived because of the conscious cultivation of trust and taking the time to explore how people wanted to work together.

This project didn't deploy relationship building in order to gain access to stories, the people in this project deepened relationships because they saw intrinsic value in being in community together.

THE WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE PROJECT WAS A REAWAKENING FOR ME. IT PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH INDIVIDUALS WHOSE LIFE STORIES PARALLELED MINE IN MANY WAYS AND IS EVIDENCE THAT OUR STRUGGLES, WHEN LAID BARE, ARE THE MANY LINKED ACCOUNTS (WOVEN THREADS) OF THE BLACK MAN, WOMAN AND CHILD'S LIVES IN WHITE AMERICA.

IT AFFIRMED THAT THESE STORIES MUST BE TOLD AND KEPT ALIVE FOR ALL OF US TO KNOW THAT WE CANNOT EFFECT CHANGE WITHOUT EVERYONE KNOWING OUR RESPECTIVE EXPERIENCES WHICH HAVE SO MANY SIMILARITIES. WE MUST CHALLENGE THOSE WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING LEGISLATIVE DECISIONS THAT CAN RESULT IN POSITIVE CHANGE WHICH CAN ONLY BE DONE BY AN AWARE ELECTORATE. THIS GETS ME BACK TO SIMONE BOYD. I SEE HER AS A CATALYST, THE LIKES OF WHICH WE NEED SO MANY OF TO BRING ABOUT POSITIVE CHANGE.

-MELVIN GILL

#### CONSIDERATIONS:

- How do you already show up in community?
- What do you listen for to indicate you've built significant trust?
- How do you talk about your values and intentional ways of collaborating?
- What would it look like to further front load values and meaningful communication questions in your projects?
- What do you need to show up more fully in relationships with people you want to work and/or create with?
- What timeline do you map your projects onto? What might it look like to elongate the timeline of relationship and trust building?
- With whom do you already have established trust?
- When and how do you show up in community as a leader, as a follower, as an active participant, as an advocate, as a listener, as a volunteer?

## INSIGHT #2

### CENTER LIVED EXPERIENCE AND SHARE DECISION-MAKING POWER

The creative motivation of this project (to collect, document and honor elders' stories) led the production team to decentralize power in the creation process.

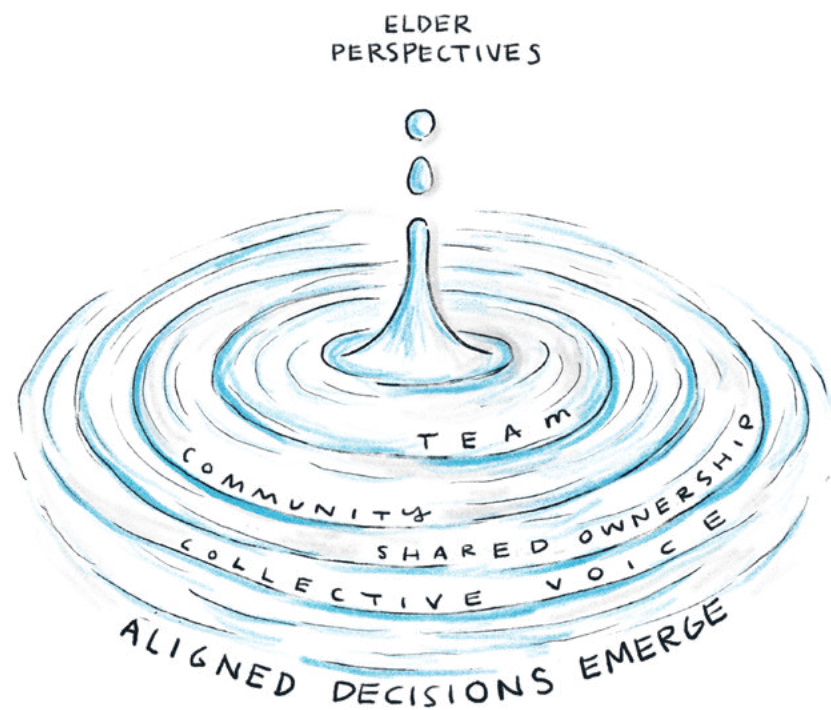
In the field of equity and inclusion work, the term “centering” is used often, but what does it actually mean to center people you say you seek to center? WANN offers an example of deliberate and honest centering.

In conversations with the production team, there was clear alignment in purpose: to honor the elders and their stories. In conversations with elders, when I asked about the impact of the project for them, many of them shared that they felt heard, important, and proud. They felt that WANN was preserving important stories in such a beautiful manner, they felt a profound connection with each other as elders. These responses echo just how integrated honoring the elders and their stories was in every activity of WANN.

One could imagine a similar sounding podcast might emerge only from one-on-one interviews with the production team and individual elders. While there were lots of recordings in two-on-one sessions (Andrea and Simone with one elder), these were not the only form of story-sharing. WANN's animation of a ‘council of elders’ placed respect and power in the elders’ hands.

The ‘council of elders’ wasn’t just a container or a convenient name, the production team consulted the council at multiple stages and phases in meaningful ways. When feedback was offered, even if it meant altering course, the production team earnestly worked to integrate and/or adapt to fulfill the elders’ wishes. One example of this is the We Are North Nashville logo. The Council of Elders were asked to review early drafts of the logo, and the elders said they did not want the color red to be included. The final logo was the result of their feedback.

A lot of similar arts and storytelling projects use language of ‘community engagement,’ some do this wonderfully and others deploy this terminology while masquerading with their own goals and self-import at heart. WANN truly enacted a community driven ethic. The “we” of We Are North Nashville was respected. The people - whose lived experiences were the motivation and expertise in the podcast - were not just sources, they were cared for and listened to. One of the production team leaders shared “it is important to understand what people want out of a story.” In other words, for them, creating the project wasn’t just about how to extract and construct the most compelling stories, it was also about what the people sharing stories desired for themselves and their narratives. WANN is a successful example of shared power and decision-making.



It's not that every person was part of every single moment of the work. For example, Andrea edited the podcast. Steve is leading the effort to write a book and produce a short-film documentary. And Simone curated and designed most of the events. However, the ethos of shared ownership and respecting the elders as whole humans (not just passive subjects) was carried throughout the project. The production team created meaningful feedback loops so that the direction of the work was not determined by the lead artist or the main podcast producer. Another example of this feedback loop is the media lunch. During multiple Council of Elders meetings, elders shared about the impact of negative media coverage about North Nashville. In response, the production team organized a media lunch and invited local journalists to listen to the elders' perspective on North Nashville news coverage.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

- Who does the thing you're working on serve?
- Do the people involved have power over the process and product that emerges?
- How are people invited into shared decision-making?
- What is a fitting way of gathering input?



JONES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## INSIGHT #3

### KALEIDOSCOPIC LISTENING / CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF LISTENING

WANN gives us techniques of profound listening. These model listening practices are paradigm shifting and defy individual disciplines.

One of the core practices woven throughout all the constituent parts of We Are North Nashville (WANN) is a profound kind of listening, a type of listening for which I believe we do not yet have a comprehensive term. The closely related practices of storytelling and oral history share some common aspects of meaningful listening, but WANN does something beyond these methods. There is so much to say about the listening practices woven throughout WANN that I've divided this Insight into sub-sections.

#### DEFYING DISCIPLINES

In the realm of the arts, we often use the word storytelling to describe projects like WANN. This term invites us to envision a single person or group of people and the flow of their stories through any number of mediums (written word, film, play, podcast, etc.) outward to a real and/or imagined audience. Storytelling implies that craft and editing have been deployed to shape the flow of truth in service of cohesion and impact. In this scenario, the audience is the intended recipient and listener.

In the realm of history and documentary scholarship, the gathering of interview-based narrative and first-person histories often falls under the umbrella term oral history. Oral histories have been used as a method and tool to capture and document the lives of everyday people. Traditional techniques often approach capturing the stories of people's lives through chronological structure, from birth to the point in time of the interview. In this approach, there tends to be

less emphasis on contextualizing the gatherer of the oral histories, even though that role serves as the first immediate listener and can have significant impact on what is shared by their questions and guides for the conversation. Documentation of the person's lived experiences is the core focus with the added longevity that the archiving of the oral history will make it available to future readers or listeners. The future listeners in this model can feel distant and unspecific.

There is much evidence that WANN is doing essential recording. Participants reported that when they recounted parts of their lived experiences in North Nashville, it was the first time they had shared some of their stories with anyone. (I invite you to pause for a second and sit with the relevance and importance of that observation: some of the elders had NEVER recounted these incredibly profound moments of their lives to ANYONE. I just have to exhale the depth of that.) Several elders commented that listening to each other's stories also conjured more memories for them, memories of things they had not recalled in many decades.

*YOU LIVE AN EXPERIENCE, UNLESS  
THERE IS A REASON FOR YOU TO RECOUNT,  
THEY JUST GO UNTOLD. MY DAUGHTER  
SAID TO ME, YOU NEVER TOLD ME THAT  
YOU SAW A CROSS BURNING AT SIX YEARS OLD.  
IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME TO TELL HER.*

— MELVIN GILL

By not siloing the elders and instead, creating many opportunities for the elders to gather together and share their stories across and between themselves, We Are North Nashville strengthened memory keeping and listening across and between the circle of elders. The project thus did not only document

individual lived experiences, the process also seeded more memories. This is beyond traditional oral history methodology. The WANN leadership team gave attention to the relationships between storytellers.

Several elders commented with awe and deep reverence for the chance to listen to each other's stories. The choice to create lots of opportunities for elders to gather and share together (whether in private, community, or in public) reinvigorated the collective community care spirit that many of the elders so lovingly spoke about from their youth in North Nashville. By designing the gathering process so intentionally to bring people together and foster collectiveness, WANN contributed to repairing the strength and love network of North Nashville. The production team decentered themselves. They prioritized relationships and collectivism, incorporating listening and togetherness throughout every step of making the podcast and launching the podcast.



REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS OF WANN:  
THAT'S LOVE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.

—REV. MARGARET SMITHSON

The methods of We Are North Nashville overlap with the two general approaches of storytelling and oral history. But WANN does something beyond each, something magical. The development of the podcast deployed many skills of storytelling such as editing, arranging, writing, weaving, original music and composing narrative arcs for impact. The medium of podcasting (now permanently part of the Tennessee State Archives) itself allows for access to the stories around the world with as little as an internet connection. While all of this is already tremendous work, WANN offers something more—a reparative kind of listening.

Listening is a practice of kinship.

Several people described part of the core practices behind WANN in terms of love and kinship.

One elder concluded that the production team is now part of her family. These descriptions of how the elders experienced the creation of WANN points to the quality of presence the production team embodied. They did not singularly listen to document, nor singularly listen to create an impactful story (extraction); they were not listening while pretending to be anonymous or falsely objective, they were not listening only for facts and historical timelines. The WANN team listened so profoundly that they created emotional validation as deep as connection of kin.

Most of the core participants in We Are North Nashville described “feeling heard” through the project. It is worth pausing to think about what this signifies. Each of the elders recounted stories that were both intimate,

joyful, caring, and heavy, full of grief, experiences of violence, expressions of wishes and longing, as well as pride and accomplishment. One of the production team members articulated listening well as a means of “opening the door wider for someone else to be seen, heard, and understood.”

WHILE THERE ARE STILL PEOPLE HERE  
IN THEIR 80s AND 90s WILLING TO SIT  
AND TALK ABOUT THEIR PARENTS AND  
GRANDPARENTS, IT CAN SERVE AS INSPIRATION.  
IF PEOPLE DON'T CONTINUE [TO SHARE]  
WE WILL NEVER LEARN. PEOPLE ARE AFRAID  
IF WE TALK ABOUT SLAVERY, THE TRAIL OF TEARS,  
THE BATTLE OF WOUNDED KNEE - THAT YOU  
DON'T LOVE THE UNITED STATES. [TALKING  
ABOUT THESE THINGS] IT'S NOT ABOUT HATE -  
IT'S ABOUT SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH. YOU  
CAN MAKE A BETTER COUNTRY, YOU CAN LEARN.  
IF WE LEARN, WE CAN MAKE A BETTER FUTURE.

— THOMAS WILSON JR.

As we, the podcast listeners, get to listen to the firsthand experiences of the elders, Simone and Andrea both model active and engaged listening. This is evident in the stories of the elders, the weaving of additional narration from Simone and Andrea and also the audio recording and editing choices made.

For example, in both recording and editing, Andrea recognized the importance of including how people responded and related to each other during conversation. Andrea shared that in traditional audio journalism, interviewers often aim to get “clean” audio. (I find it fascinating that the term “clean” is used.) “Clean”

audio implies that the recording is of high quality with little background noise and just one person speaking at a time. I think of this as the equivalent of a “talking head” in a documentary film. Andrea shared that in the very first interview, she realized part of the story would be missing if “clean” audio was the priority goal. Instead, Andrea welcomed overlapping dialogue, laughter and other responsive listening sounds. For example, in episode two when we get to spend time with Ms. Cheryl McReynolds, we hear the story from Ms. Reynold’s point of view of how she first met Simone. Ms. McReynolds’ recollection of their first meeting is essentially a recollection of how Simone listens. Here is the exchange:

**Ms. McReynolds:** I remember the first time I met this lady.

**Andrea:** Yes? Tell me that story.

**Ms. McReynolds:** mmm, well we were at a community meeting. It was one of the local churches down there on 9th avenue. There for a community meeting, and uh, it was in reference to some zoning.

**Simone:** Right here!

**Ms. McReynolds:** Yeah, it was right here

**Simone:** It was right here!

**Ms. McReynolds:** ...and I couldn’t see Simone. Because we were in the church, so you know you know, the pews will limit you, where you can see people. But all I could see was the top of her hair and all I saw was du-du-du-du-du-du-du.

**Andrea** [post-interview added narration]: Ok I have to jump in and illustrate this for our listeners. Cheryl’s head is bobbing like she is making some very valid points.

[Simone is laughing in recognition.]

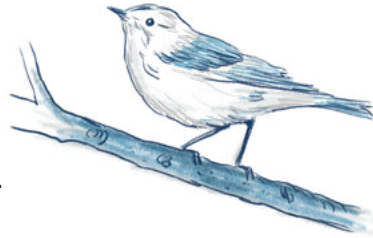
**Ms. McReynolds:** And that’s all I could see and I’m like...I’ve got to go see who this is.

[Simone: joyous laughter]

Right after this exchange, they go on to discuss that zoning meeting and

play audio clips from public record. The topic is germane because their first meeting was in their shared effort to shape the future of their neighborhood. They were advocating in the local government process of zoning to make sure a proposed development structure took into account the existing character and people of the neighborhood. In addition to progressing our understanding of the gentrification pressures on North Nashville today, this exchange does something else subtle and playful; it showcases a soundscape of connection.

In the editing process, Andrea could have cut out the shared laughter of this first meeting, or asked either Simone or Ms. McReynolds to re-record the exchange in “clean” audio. But instead, we not only understand how both Simone and Ms. McReynolds met through shared neighborhood advocacy work, we also are introduced to the quality of their relationship in shared joy and laughter. Their respect for each other in fond recollection lives alongside the hard day-to-day grind of neighborhood advocacy.



We also get a real life example of how Simone shows up as a listener in community spaces and the way those encounters have blossomed into deeper relationships. The podcast is just a portal into the on-going neighborly way of working and living for the production team, as well as the elders. The editing choices made in moments like this in the podcast showcase and signal toward meaningful civic work beyond the scope of the podcast alone.

## TEACHING LISTENING THROUGH SURROGATES

What strikes me as particularly incredible is the way in which legible listening skills seemed to effortlessly flow in multiple directions. In the first episode of the podcast within the first minute, the creators give us clues that there are different levels of listening happening at the same time. We are first greeted by the sounds of the neighborhood and Simone’s voice. She begins by describing

the borderlands between North Nashville and a neighboring area of Nashville commenting upon how the sidewalks are well maintained on one side, and not on the other. She asks with a laugh, “Why is it like this? On this side it feels like the birds are chirpin.’ [laughter] ...like...why isn’t it like that on the other side?” More subtle, but still present, Andrea’s voice comes into conversation with Simone, echoing her point “Where ARE the birds?”

In this brief introduction to the podcast, we are given a map of concentric circles of listening. Andrea’s voice is a stand-in for us, the podcast listener. It’s not assumed that we’ve ever been to North Nashville, and even if we have,

we may not have heard or paid attention to the differences between where the birds are chirpin’. The rich description of the landscape clues us into a method of listening: a simple act like paying attention to birdsong can signal unequal distribution of resources. We understand this is a core chasm between North Nashville and its counterparts.

We also understand from this exchange that Simone is a liaison for us, she is cluing us into inequity, she is calling our attention to her own neighborhood and asking us to go with her on a journey to the past so that we might imagine a new future. The tone set by this beginning exchange, underscored by the inclusion of laughter, also signals that this is not a single story of despair, but rather an energetic questioning of how we came to the inequities suffered by the people of North Nashville.

Simone is positioned both as a neighbor and our generous guide, she and the elders know we are listening. They are inviting us into their shared, overlapping and unique worlds. Andrea is positioned as chief surrogate listener; she demonstrates how to ask for more information and what it sounds like to reach a deep understanding of someone else’s experience through her narrations which act like gentle thread guiding us toward the whole picture of the intertwining stories.

ALL HISTORY IS A WRITTEN RECORD OF  
LIVED EXPERIENCE-WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SEEN,  
SPOKEN OF AND EXPERIENCED. WE ARE  
SHARING OUR EXPERIENCES IN HOPES OF IT  
BEING ANOTHER RECORD OF WHAT HAD  
HAPPENED. I DON'T CARE AS MUCH WHAT  
PEOPLE THINK OF ME AS I GET OLDER.  
I DON'T WANT TO WITHHOLD THE TRUTH.

— THOMAS WILSON JR.

Code-switching is not just for speaking, it's for listening too.

In poetry and linguistics, code-switching is a term used to describe the movement between different linguistic forms, switching cultural contexts. Usually code-switching is used to describe expressions. In the case of WANN, we hear code-switching also as an act of listening.



In episode four, we hear Larry Turnley Jr. reflect on spending summers with his father's family in North Nashville. He describes how his grandmother was very strict with him and his sister. He says "She used to make us just sit in this one chair." He goes on to describe the house and his voice starts smiling toward laughter, we can hear Simone begin to laugh too. A few moments later, Simone's voice emerges in narration to contextualize Larry Turnley Jr.'s recollection of strictness. Simone says "and a lot of time strict was really a show of love and protection."

If you were to only read the transcript of the exchange, it might sound shocking. "She used to make us just sit in this one chair" could be read as harsh and extreme. But in the context of the story, the shared laughter and Simone's

narration act as a code-switching interpreter for us (the anonymous listener). She's offering a cultural translation for those of us who might not immediately understand that the description of sitting in a chair is not to be understood literally, it's to be understood as an example of an actively caring grandmother who wants to keep her grandkids safe.

This small moment is an example of the production team anticipating gaps in understanding. It showcases how Simone as a guide and Andrea as a weaver offer us a helping hand to understand the context that is being described. It also signals that the audience is intended to be a multi-racial audience.

There are countless other examples in the podcast and the live events that demonstrate how this project offers a pedagogy of listening. If we pay attention, we, too, can learn how to listen better, how to shift between content we clearly understand and make room for the edges and ways we may not understand. We see and hear how connection can bring us closer to comprehension of someone else's lived experience. What more profound gift could be offered?

#### CONSIDERATIONS:

- What does it mean to you to listen well?
- What are signs and signals of the quality of your listening?
- How can you tend to multiple audiences at the same time?
- What does it look like in your practice to prioritize understanding above technical production norms?
- How do you imagine your relationships and contact with participants beyond the life-span of the specific creative project?

## INSIGHT #4

### HONOR WITH ABUNDANCE

We Are North Nashville gives us a model of intergenerational honoring. There are lessons from these practices that could be extended to wider reparations work.

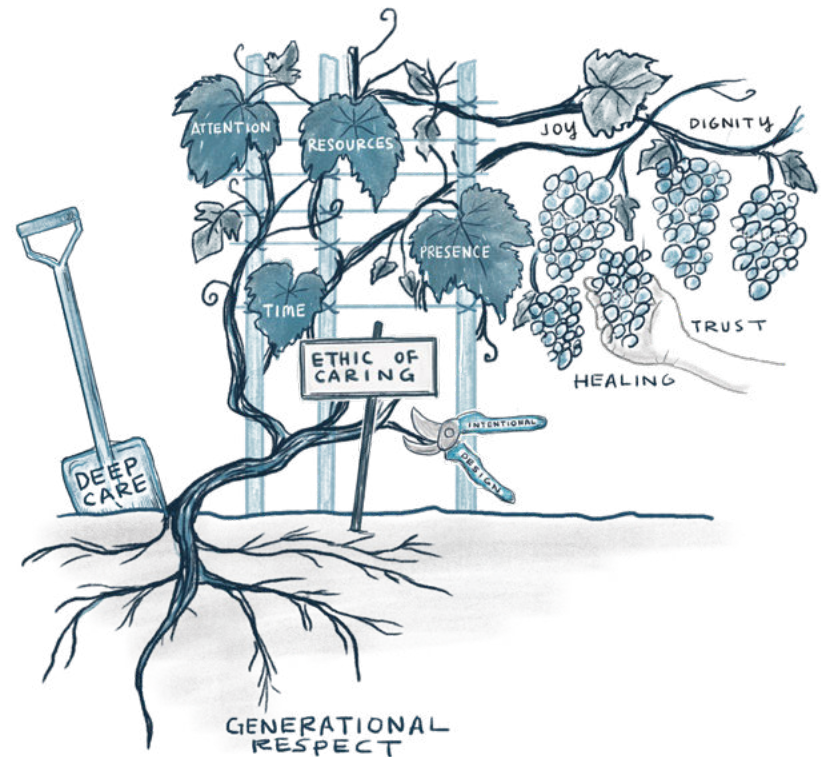
In conversations with the production team, the phrase ‘honoring our elders’ surfaced repeatedly in descriptions of why WANN was important. This phrase is likely not a surprising one given the stated objectives to “gather, document and share the sacred wisdom of North Nashville community elders.” But how the honoring was designed and brought to life is extraordinary and an example of a remarkable kind of civic creativity.

*I WEAR THE TITLE OF ELDER LIKE A CROWN.  
MY KIDS ARE NOW LEARNING MY HISTORY,  
AND IT IS GIVING THEM A LEGACY SO THAT  
THEY CAN UNDERSTAND WHERE I GREW UP.  
SO THEY CAN UNDERSTAND AND HAVE A  
SENSE OF PRIDE. I'M REALLY PROUD  
FOR THEM TO KNOW.*

—DR. PATRICIA JACKSON

By referring to the core storytellers as elders, there was an immediate conceptual framing of respect and admiration. It is clear the term ‘elders’ was intentionally deployed as an honorific title. Two of the ‘elders’ in the project were a father-son duo. By linear chronology, it might seem surprising to refer to both as elders, but in the case of WANN, the reference is a choice that moves us away from defined age categories, and towards a way of relating to the storytellers. This is a key departure from journalistic or documentary norms. By naming the

### HONOR WITH ABUNDANCE



storytellers as elders, we as a wider public audience are also invited into the same way of relating to the core participants.

Simultaneously, we are introduced subtly to the idea that there is urgency to this work. The framing of elders is explicitly a reference to the wisdom and long-life experience of the storytellers, but it is also a gentle reference to one of the universal truths of our existence: all of us are in an unknown timed relationship with life and death. An elder is someone who is perceived to be closer to the end of life than the beginning. This may seem dark, but

I believe it is full of love and care. Acknowledging the ephemerality of all of our mortal lives is part of what makes urgent our work of both capturing and witnessing our elders' stories.

As an Asian American, the term elders is used often and is part of my everyday world-view. When I'm in a mixed generation environment, it automatically necessitates specialized behavior surrounding elders. For example, at a potluck family gathering, it is an unspoken rule that elders eat first. And if anyone is unable to carry their plate down the serving line, someone younger volunteers to fill their plate for them. This is an act of love, care, and respect toward elders. It is an acknowledgement of the responsibility for younger generations to take responsibility for the well-being of elders. While there is no explicit reference to intergenerational dynamics in WANN's public vocabulary, I believe it is a core part of the conceptual framing that led to incredible exercises of creativity to fully inhabit multiple practices of honoring.

There were several striking examples of how honoring elders was brought to life in We Are North Nashville. It is important to note that many of these practices and methods are less visible in the podcast, but integral to the entire methodology of We Are North Nashville. For example, many of the photos on the website were taken in a special photoshoot designed for honoring the elders. If you were to imagine collecting photos of storytellers for a podcast, you could easily imagine someone asking folks for headshots or to submit photos of themselves. You might envision a photo from a studio. We Are North Nashville did none of this. Instead, they turned the desire to include images of the elders in the We Are North Nashville media into a gathering built around honoring.

The production team intentionally created a photoshoot with hopes the elders would feel seen, beautiful and admired. The photoshoot took place at a

meaningful physical location in North Nashville, the North Branch Library of the public library system. (One of the elders' childhood memories of the library was featured in episode one).

For that photoshoot, the production team hired a photographer and make-up artist who share the same values and understood this was not just a job to capture professional images, the photoshoot itself was a chance to honor and "love on the elders."



Part of the interview process for the photographer was answering the question, "How have you honored elders in your life?" The photoshoot involved bringing large props and pieces of furniture borrowed from a Ballet company in order that the elders might feel regal in their chosen poses in the chair. A simple act of creating photography was transformed into a meaningful gathering in direct service of the overall purpose of WANN through tending to the details of the photoshoot. It also created a joyful neighborhood spectacle as neighbors passed by.

There are countless other examples of an exceptional attention to detail and creative deployment of resources in service of honoring the elders. At the launch party of the podcast, the production team arranged for limousines to pick-up and escort the elders to the launch party in Nashville. In the story-development process of WANN, an intergenerational dinner was organized at the Germantown Inn. One elders recounted, "The way it was set up was so beautiful...I started realizing, this is a big deal, which made me even more proud." As one of the production team noted, this was not the cheapest venue for this event. But it was essential in the ethic of caring.

The questions and conversations that were core to We Are North Nashville asked elders to share both joys, hardships and deep losses in their experiences living in North Nashville. The production team was very conscious that asking

folks to open themselves so deeply was not a frivolous nor cost-free process. Some of the elders revisited experiences of violence and trauma, some of them recounted the scariest experiences of racism in their whole lives, some of them recounted grief and loss that they had not accessed nor spoken about in decades. Understanding the energetic and spiritual toll that this sharing required, the production team thoughtfully deployed as many resources as they could to nourish the elders. It was very important for Simone that the elders also receive some kind of literal compensation for their labor of remembering and recounting. The total redistributed to the elders was, collectively, \$50,870.15.

I suggest that WANN's 'ethic of caring' and creative deployment of resources could be a core strategy for much larger projects of reparations in the United States. When we understand the way racism has functioned by design (example: intentional harm and exclusion of particular groups of people from public resources and public life) and how it is experienced in real life scenarios (the physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual violence and loss racism enacts) it is easy to see that any attempt to repair and tend to the wounds of the past requires us to creatively deploy resources not only to address the material losses of surviving racism (example from the podcast, the loss of property from the force demolition of houses to make way for the interstate) but also all to restore the heart and spirit side of what it means to be human. We Are North Nashville points us in the direction and gives us a model. Does the limousine ride to a special night of the podcast launch uplifting and honoring elders' stories FULLY compensate for the losses detailed in their stories? No. But it does something for the human spirit; it expresses love and caring in abundance.

#### CONSIDERATIONS:

- What does it mean to do artistic and civic work through and with love?
- How do you enact honor as a verb?
- What language furthers the big purpose of your creative work?
- What does respect and admiration look like when it is animated in your work?
- When does deploying a little 'extra' or 'luxury' serve a larger purpose of repair?
- How can the logistical choices for an event align with the values of your work?



## INSIGHT #5



### HOLD SPACE WITH INTENTION

What the elders think is essential to replicating a project like WANN.

Following the principles and values of We Are North Nashville, in my time researching for this report, I had the honor of speaking to most of the elders. I wanted to ask them directly what advice they would offer to an imagined reader with the curiosity and motivation to replicate a project like this one. I asked: If someone else were doing a similar project, what guidance would you give them? What would you want them to do?

There was one common thread throughout all their responses: many elders spoke about the quality of character and the community-centered values that the core production team embodied in their everyday life both within the WANN project and outside of it. Several elders spoke about the selflessness of the core team and their talent and professionalism.



NORTH BRANCH LIBRARY

- “We’ve worked with some of the masters, you need to talk to them to do a similar project. The way [the team] went about it was amazing.” It’s how they made you feel when they came in, their demeanor, the way they were so interested and it wasn’t anything they were putting on, they weren’t pretending to be interested. They really wanted to hear what we had to say and hear how we felt. When they shared bits and pieces of the podcast, we ended up sharing more things that we remembered, because of the people they are (Andrea/Simone). Because of their spirits and their expertise, they made me feel so comfortable. I never felt apprehensive. The very first time they met me, they recorded, they asked “if it was ok?” I felt like I could trust them, really from the very beginning. Once we got through the first interview, hey, they had me.”  
—Dr. Patricia Streator Jackson
- “You need to know the history of your community, from there, you can connect the dots as to why people are behaving the way they are. Go in with the community first and connect with people first”  
—Larry Turnley Jr.
- “Start talking to people, help people remember. Of course you have to be active in the community. People need to have seen you, trust you. It takes a lot of leg work, to do what Simone did, listen to people. Be willing to put time in—especially— with elders. Get a group together to start talking. You have to be a person that people can talk to. Simone made you feel like you were special, you had something to offer, you matter. Simone lives out her values. For another project, They need a Simone. Or someone with those qualities.”  
—Rev. Margreat Smithson

- “You have to be resourceful. You have to be in the community and look to those who remain with solid foundation in community.”  
—Cheryl McReynolds
- “I would suggest they start by listening to We Are North Nashville. Then there are state library archives and metro archives to do research. There’s also our global phones and computers to access records. After accessing archives, it is important to talk to people who live here, seeing what they have to share. Sometimes remembrances are lost or discarded, some people don’t want to talk about the past - these are challenges. The challenges could be great, you have to be patient, focused and self-disciplined to find answers and histories of North Nashville [or similar places].”  
—Thomas Wilson Jr.
- “The facilitator needs to be able to get the storyteller to tell the story in a compelling way. At least one person involved in the leadership team needs to reflect the people who are telling their stories. Part of repair work is making sure power is not shaped by [only] white people.”  
—Melvin Gill
- “You need a team that works together; no jealousy and competition.”  
—Melvin Gill

#### CONSIDERATIONS:

- Who are some of your core stakeholders in your project?
- How are you in relationship with them currently?
- What do they identify as essential behaviors that build trust and rapport?
- How could you search for feedback about the ways you show up in community?



# POIGNANT IMPACTS

## ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVE

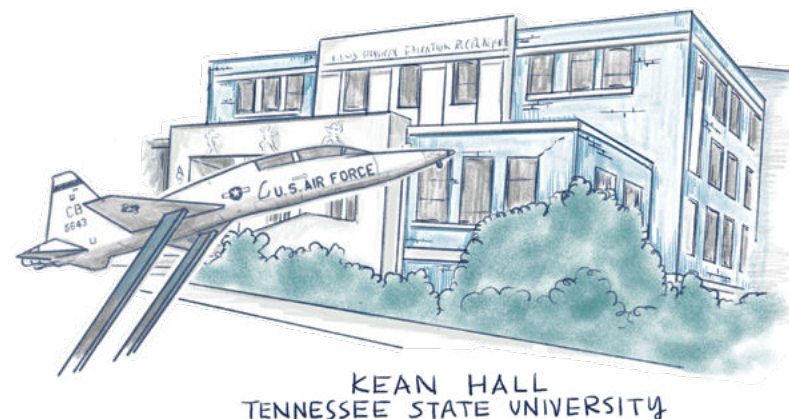
The most easily identifiable impact of We Are North Nashville is the archive it has created: the podcast is available to anyone world-wide who has access to the internet, and now, permanently, the stories of the elders will live on at the Tennessee State Archives. During an event hosted by the Tennessee State Museum, one of the elders, Mr. Melvin Gill, shared that before the recordings for this podcast, he had never been asked to recount and share his lived experience in Nashville. The triumph of this project cannot be understated: We Are North Nashville has gathered and documented the first-hand stories of elders from North Nashville for the public to access and listen to in perpetuity.

THIS IS THE LAST OPPORTUNITY  
TO MAKE WHAT'S LEFT OF MY  
LIFE MEANINGFUL.

—THOMAS WILSON JR.

## PROFOUND GRATITUDE

Every single person I spoke with from the production team and the elders each expressed profound gratitude for getting to be part of WANN. Listening to the elders, many of them used vocabulary of reverence and closeness to describe members of the production team and each other. Members of the production team were referred to as “new family members” and “passionate people” who carry and enact “selfless service.” Multiple elders also expressed nearly identical sentiments, sharing that they felt honored to share their stories alongside other elders who they hold in the highest esteem.



## DEEP(ER) RELATIONSHIPS

These expressions are important and not just because they are positive and laudable. These expressions capture feelings, observations, and relationships that bloomed during this project. It is apparent in how core participants speak about each other that the elders and production team members do not see We Are North Nashville as just an ad-hoc project; they truly developed deep(er) relationships with each other as whole human beings, as neighbors, as Nashvillians, and as people dedicated to using their time on the earth to make something meaningful and impactful of their lives. In other words, the impact for the people most intimately involved with creating We Are North Nashville is a revival of community care and is unending.

## MEMORY RESTORING RIPPLES

The vehicles of the podcast and the in-person gatherings surrounding We Are North Nashville also created memory restoring ripples. WANN was both personal for individuals directly involved, and impactful in relationships across families, neighbors, and community circles. Between the elders,

<sup>2</sup> For the timeline of this report, please read the following as a preliminary look at the impacts of We Are North Nashville. A fuller study of the impacts of We Are North Nashville would serve the field of arts and civic work to capture how We Are North Nashville continues to impact the elders, North Nashville, and the potentially global audience of the podcast. Nevertheless, in my interviews with most of the production team and elders, there were many poignant impacts named and observed.

many had not met before, or had heard about each other; some did know each other in their youth but had lost touch. The gathering of the council of elders restored bonds across a shared generation. Several elders talked about how transformative and inspiring the council of elders gatherings were.



## TRAJECTORIES OF CURIOSITY

Both the podcast itself and the related Nashville news coverage prompted new conversations with people the elders already knew. For example, two (adult) children of an elders commented that some of what was shared in the podcast was unknown to them prior to listening to the podcast. One listener and neighbor illustrates this point, “The fact this project is being done now with the elders is so important. You can feel the power of the first person oral history and documentation. Each episode left me wanting to know more.” I find this to be remarkable; it means that trajectories of curiosity and understanding between family members and neighbors have been opened. We Are North Nashville helped fill in histories within and across family units and generations. We can only imagine the life-long impact of memory-keeping across generations that will be attributed to this podcast as the years unfold in families, in the neighborhood, in the city, and beyond.

## POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

As the project moved from the gathering and documentation phase toward the public launch of the podcast, there were other levels of impact. Alongside the release of the podcast, a wide range of media coverage amplified the elders in We Are North Nashville. Both independent and wide-reaching Nashville media covered the release of the podcast. The elders, along with different configurations of the production team, were featured in television interviews, podcast interviews, and print journalism.

One of the most impactful pieces of news coverage for some of the elders was the front-page piece in the Nashville Scene. Several of the elders described a surprise at seeing themselves front and center and named a swelling sense of pride they felt from witnessing their photo and stories held up as so important to the history of wider Nashville. One elder exclaimed joyously, “[WANN] gave us a lot of pride. I’ve always been proud, but now even more!” I did not interpret these comments as any reflection of a sense of fame for fame’s sake, rather, it felt like they were describing that being seen and heard on a stage, such as the Nashville Scene, gave them a sense of being witnessed and reinforced that their lives and stories mattered. We Are North Nashville deepened awe and admiration for the participants of their community and their own lives.

THE STORIES HAVE TO BE TOLD.  
THE HISTORIANS, THE MR. WILSONS OF THE  
WORLD, CAN TELL US HOW DATES AND  
HISTORIES HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE.  
PEOPLE CONGRATULATE ME AND SAY  
“I DIDN'T KNOW THIS ABOUT YOU.”

— CHERYL McREYNOLDS

## HEALING & REDEMPTIVE POWER

For others featured in the podcast, there was another level of meaning to being heard and understood. Mr. Larry Turnley Jr. brought to light some of the healing qualities of the podcast in my conversation with him and his father. Mr. Turnley Jr. described a joy in recognition of seeing his father get to tell stories about his life in North Nashville:

SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED  
FOR WHO YOU ARE, REJUVENATED FOR WHO  
YOU ARE AND ACCEPTED FOR WHO YOU ARE.  
WE LIVE IN THE SHADOWS AS CONVICTED FELONS,  
TO BE ABLE TO BREAK AND BUST THROUGH  
THAT AND SHINE WHO WE ARE, I AM SO  
HAPPY [MY FATHER] IS GETTING HIS FLOWERS.

—LARRY TURNLEY JR.

WHEN ASKED WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO BE CONSIDERED  
ELDERS TOGETHER (AS FATHER AND SON)?

LARRY TURNLEY SR.

WE HAVE BEEN APART FOR SO LONG,  
JUST BEING TOGETHER IS A GIFT.

LARRY TURNLEY JR.

IT'S BEEN AN HONOR TO BE IN THE COMPANY OF HEROES,  
PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE SO MUCH HISTORY. THE LAW OF  
ATTRACTION IS REAL. TO BE AROUND. GET THEIR WISDOM.  
TO SEE HOW THE COMMUNITY WAS BEFORE THE  
INTERSTATE, NOW I HAVE FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE.  
I AM AN ELDER TO YOUNG PEOPLE, I SHOW IN  
MY ACTIONS. IT IS AN HONOR TO BE AN ELDER.  
IN SWAHILI, GRIOT IS A KEEPER OF HISTORY.  
WE HAVE TO BE THE HISTORY KEEPERS,  
TO LOOK BACK TO HOW WE LOVE.

—LARRY 'FEVER' TURNLEY SR. AND LARRY TURNLEY JR

The Turnleys remind us that the power of gathering together is undeniable and that there is redemptive power in giving spotlight and power to people to share with their own voices.

## RENEWED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

People who interact with elders on a day-to-day basis have expressed to the elders that they heard the podcast and now know so much more about their lives and work. It is impossible to quantify these community-wide impacts. In a way, the podcast itself has strengthened and renewed the social infrastructure of the elders' lives. It gives neighbors another avenue to understanding each other more fully.

The deep picture that we get of each elder from the podcast may lead to so many different connective benefits for both the elders and other community members. The community net of love that is described in the podcast is being re-woven through the listening of this podcast. While the podcast showcases how a strong sense of community mutuality and caring support was broken by the interstate, the podcast also shows that the interstate did not fully erase community care, and by remembering a more robust network of collective community care, we can remember what is possible in the future.

Clearly the community care was never extinguished, and We Are North Nashville is bolstering its comeback.

## DEEPENING SENSE OF HUMANITY

Beyond the neighborhood of North Nashville, the podcast and larger WANN project is also seeding profound impacts. People connected to the project, either by knowing someone or being part of the team, expressed how listening to the episodes has deepened their relationships with North Nashville. One

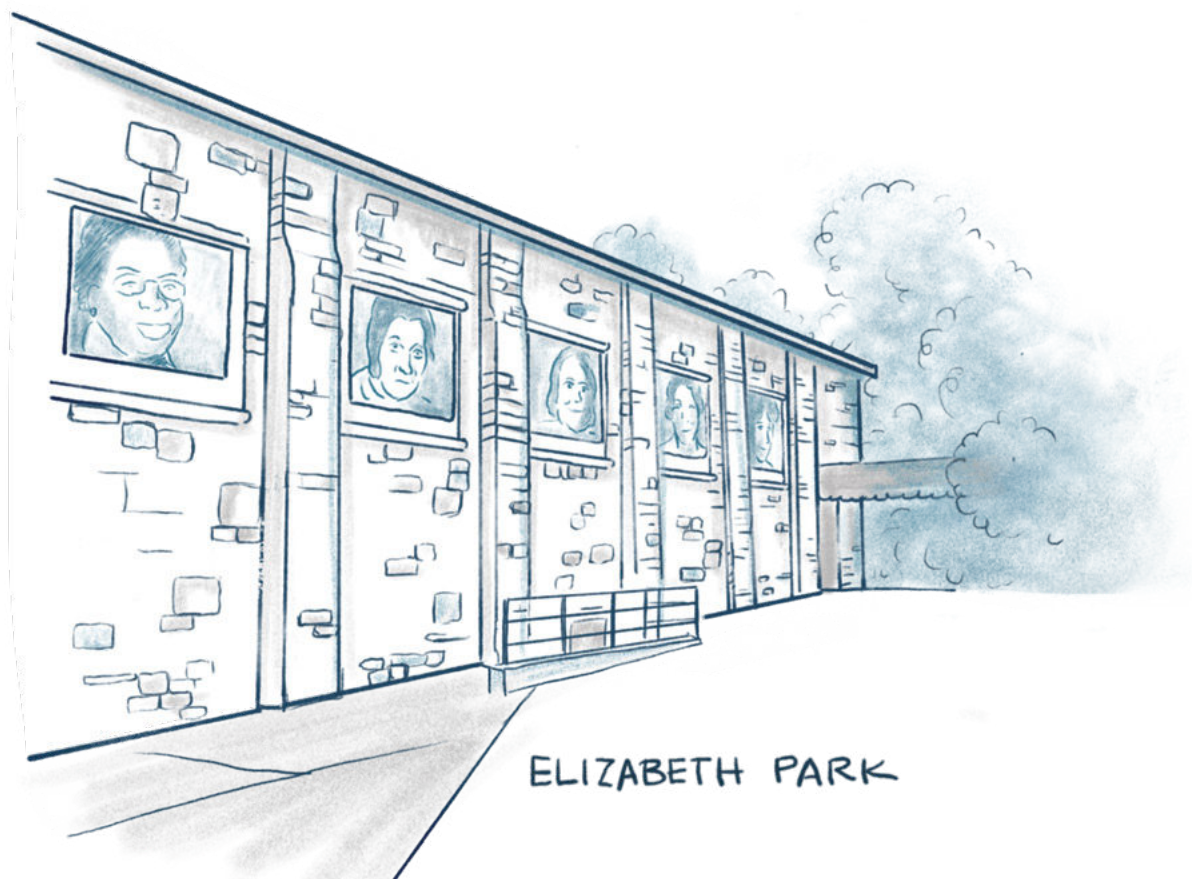
production team member who has lived most of their life in Nashville pointed out that they loosely knew about North Nashville but had never really spent much time there. Since working on this project, one of their core questions is how can I be an advocate and ally to North Nashville? Another Nashville community member commented that they were so grateful for listening to the podcast because it deepened their sense of humanity.

ON PROGRESSIVE MEDIA, YOU CAN  
HEAR THE STORIES, BUT THAT'S NOT THE  
SAME AS LISTENING DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE.

- DAVID KLEINFELTER

## DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

At the time of this report, the podcast has only been in existence for about 9 months. The impacts already articulated are priceless and rich in values and possibility. Even in my own individual life, I happen to live near a street named Jefferson. I can't drive past it without thinking about the lively Jefferson Street described in the memories of the elders and wonder and dream what a thriving Jefferson Street might look like both in North Nashville and in my home community too.



ELIZABETH PARK

## CONCLUSION

As a stand-alone project, We Are North Nashville is a jewel of memory-keeping. It glimmers with the joys of Black life in America and also honestly shines a light on the tarnishes, cracks and scars of racism in America. Behind the scenes of the podcast's creation are methods and practices that deserve so much attention and care. Even more so, than I've been able to devote in this toolkit.

For myself as a listener and audience member of We Are North Nashville, listening to the stories has opened entire new windows of questions about my family's history and connections with North Nashville. As a non-black, non-Nashvillian, the shape of my consciousness is permanently expanded and changed because of listening to this work. Getting to spend even more time understanding the practices and creative work which surrounded the creation of the project and its following public launch and sharing, has been a great honor for me.

I cannot overstate how many deep ripples I believe this project will have in the world. The stories connect with so many topics. All are beautifully woven together: themes of people's commitment to place, each other, and knowing their importance and worth against all odds. The practices that were designed with care and intention and fulfilled with whole-hearted humanness are exactly the kinds of methods we need to adapt in a million neighborhoods across this country and beyond.

After spending so much time with the podcast, getting to speak directly to core participants, and attempting to capture essential elements of how We Are North Nashville unfolded, like another listener, I'm left wanting more. Questions linger: what could it look like on a massive scale to care-give for stories and projects like We Are North Nashville? What are we willing to give and create to get there? A whole lifetime, I hope.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

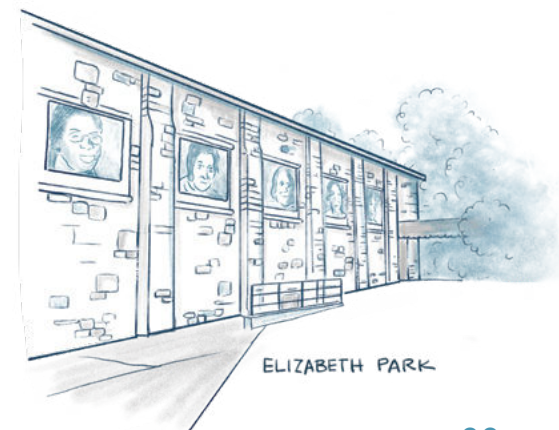
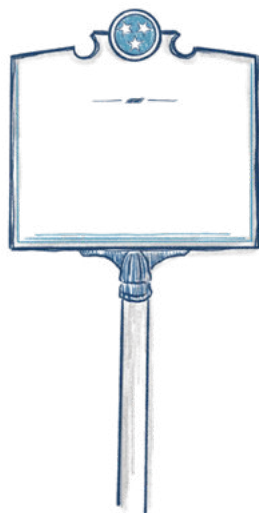
Nikiko Masumoto (she/her) is an organic farmer and artist. She is Yonsei, fourth-generation Japanese American, and stewards the same soil her great-grandparents worked in California where Masumoto Family Farm grows organic fruit. She's co-written a children's book, [Every Peach is a Story](#), with her father David Mas Masumoto. Nikiko is an arts-leader and co-founder of Yonsei Memory Project, an arts-based initiative to activate Japanese American history in the Central Valley. She served on USDA's State Committee, and volunteers on various non-profit boards. Her most cherished value is courage and most important practice is listening.



# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| 2016                                   | 2018                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 2019/2021                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 2022                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Simone moves to North Nashville</p> | <p>Simone gathers neighborhood feedback, “I kept hearing about the robberies, violence and difficulties with the bridge underpass.”</p> <p>In response to a neighborhood tragedy, Art Against Violence concept emerges from community meetings / work Simone is involved in</p> | <p>Open Streets festival / community engagement project, Simone part of an effort trying to get Nashville / local government investment in N. Nashville, and also create safe open public space for neighbors/community</p> <p><a href="#">National Endowment for the Arts Our Town Announcement:</a><br/>Nashville.gov</p> <p><a href="#">Public naming of street for Mary Watson</a><br/>(Barbara and Leitha’s mom)</p> | <p>Art Against Violence (one mosaic) expands into Women of North Nashville (five mosaics)</p> <p><a href="#">Women of North Nashville:</a><br/>News Channel 5</p> <p><a href="#">Women of North Nashville:</a><br/>Nashville Scene</p> <p><a href="#">Nashville Public Radio’s daily show,</a><br/>This is Nashville covers Mosaic Art Installation; Sparked connection between Andrea, Steve &amp; Simone</p> |



| 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | OCT 2023                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | DEC 2023                                                  | JAN 2024                                                                                        | FEB 2024                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Council of Elders was initially convened in Summer of 2023. There were seven elders, Simone didn't know Fever or Dr. Jackson at this time. The bridge repair began in September of 2023 and ended in February of 2024.</p> <p><a href="#">Dinner Under Arthur Avenue Bridge:</a><br/>News Channel 5, N. Nashville elders honored at this dinner, curated guest list of local leaders and community. Larry Jr. invited his father, Fever, to the dinner.</p> <p>From Simone: "The dinner under Arthur Avenue bridge in 2023 was related to the initial 2021 NEA Our Town grant."</p> <p><a href="#">As Metro Arts Turns: Metro Arts Drama:</a><br/>Simone's Blog – Arthur Avenue Bridge repair becomes entangled in local government departmental dysfunction and chaos.</p> | <p>(Personal: Simone's husband's mom's funeral: spark – catalytic moment to propel desire to document elder's stories)</p> <p>Andrea and Steve connect with Simone, Simone pitches WANN concept, immediate yes!<br/>(Note: Andrea and Steve had 2 years of professional work together from launching Nashville Public Radio's daily show This Is Nashville)</p> | <p>Core team planning meeting at North Branch Library</p> | <p>Unmanageable joins WANN as fiscal sponsor, project management and administrative support</p> | <p>Interview first elder, Rev. Smithson</p> <p>WANN core team first convenes council of elders for input and guidance</p> |

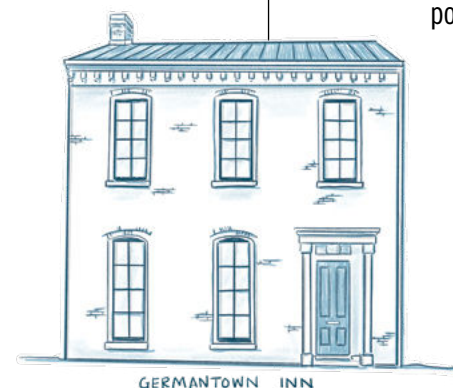


NORTH BRANCH LIBRARY

# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| MAR 2024                                                                                                                      | APR 2024                | MAY 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | JUN 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | JUL 2024                                                                    | AUG 2024                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Unmanageable posts<br/>WANN + <a href="#">link to donate</a><br/>- page has amazing photo from dinner under interstate</p> | <p>Interview elders</p> | <p>Zoom pitch/fundraising meeting for sponsors and supporters (Nikiko attend)</p> <p><a href="#">A Mile in Her Shoes, walk + story</a><br/>Barbara Jean Watson<br/>- host Nashville Civic Design Center</p> <p>Assemble Council of Elders for input and guidance</p> | <p>Library photoshoot with elders: reverence, honor (Simone not physically there, important leadership moment for team)</p> <p>Steve designs WANN logo, with feedback from the Elders</p> <p><a href="#">Artist Selection for Lighting Up Arthur Avenue:</a><br/>Nashville.gov Website</p> <p>Assemble Council of Elders for input and guidance</p> | <p>Interview Elders</p> <p>Script writing retreat<br/>Simone and Andrea</p> | <p><a href="#">Intergenerational Dinner Party in Germantown Inn</a></p> <p>Nashville Scene cover photoshoot @ Jones Paideia School – Barbara Jean's former school</p> <p>Announcement of Podcast launch: <a href="#">The Good, The Bad and the Glamorous</a></p> <p>Release <a href="#">audio</a> and video trailers</p> <p>Assemble Council of Elders for listening session/input on podcast before release</p> |



## SEP 2024

We Are North Nashville  
launch event - Frist Art  
Museum (limos / produced  
performance, gathering /  
celebration)

Release episode 1-4

## MEDIA COVERAGE SEP 2024

[The Nashville Scene coverage](#)

92Q Melvin, Dr. Jackson, Steve

[Nashville Banner news coverage + episode 1  
on Banner & Co.](#)

[Nashville Noise announce of launch](#)

[Nashville Scene Podcast  
\(Rev. Smithson and Simone\)](#)

[News Channel 5 tv coverage of launch  
\(Simone\)](#)

[Nashville Banner Sep 5 -  
daily list of things](#)

[Nashville Downtown Partnership  
- share Sep 5 launch](#)

[Nashville News 5 - Morningline \(Sep 23\) tv  
interview, Andrea and Larry](#)

## OCT 2024

Release episode 5

Assemble Council of Elders  
for feedback and reflection

Media appearance on WXNA -  
Andrea, Simone and Leitha

WXNA carries each episode  
once a week

Simone invites Nikiko to consider  
writing "something" to document  
learnings

## NOV 2024

Media appearance on WXNA -  
Steve, Pat and Vonnie (Pat's daughter)

[National Museum of African American  
Music](#) - panel with Pat, Larry Jr.,  
Leitha and Barbara Jean

Social Media Partnership with  
Carlos Partee through end of year

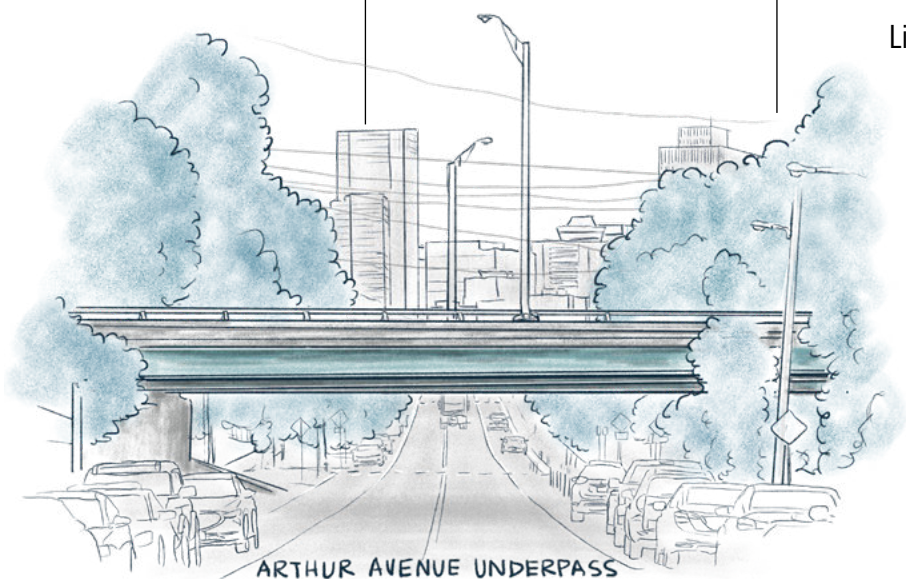
Team meeting and in touch with elders  
on a regular basis



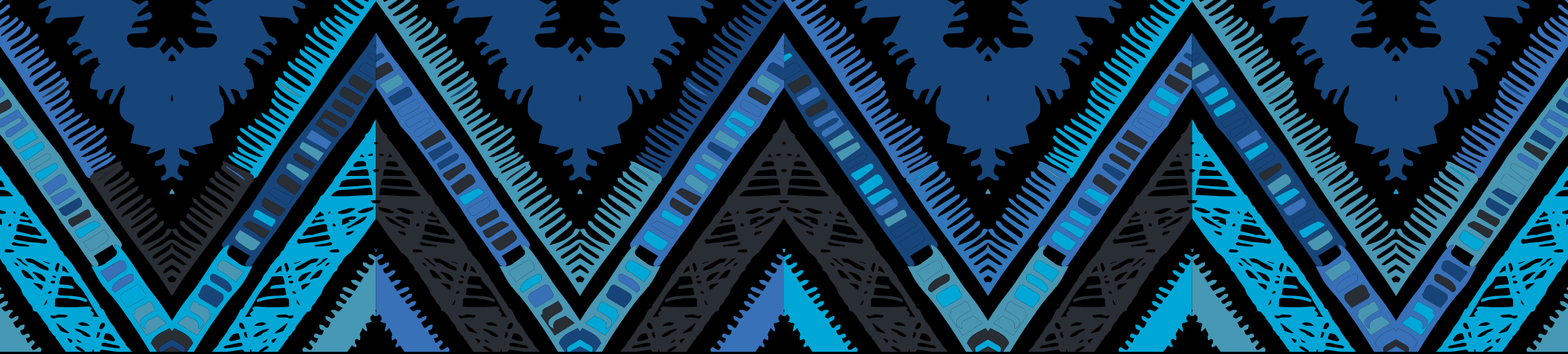
911 BUCHANAN ST.  
SLIM & HUSKY'S PIZZA

# WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| FEB 2025                                                                                                               | MAR 2025                                                                                                                                                                    | APR 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | MAY 2025                                                                              | JUN 2025                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Ch 5 News Coverage</p> <p>Event at TN State Museum<br/>“Lunch and Learn” (Simone, Andrea, Melvin, Barbara Jean)</p> | <p>Metro Council resolution honoring the elders and We Are North Nashville passes</p> <p>Announcement WANN audio + transcripts will be part of Tennessee State Archives</p> | <p>Assemble Council of Elders</p> <p>Appearance at American Press Institute summit to present our project - Andrea and Simone</p> <p>Media lunch for Nashville journalists to carry on positive coverage of North Nashville</p> <p>Arthur Avenue Underpass Lighting Walk Through with Alex Braden</p> | <p>Radical Rest Retreat Planning</p> <p>Receive Initial Toolkit Draft from Nikiko</p> | <p>Radical Rest Retreat for Black women, mostly from North Nashville</p> |



| JUL 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | AUG 2025                                                                                                                                                                                            | SEP 2025                                                                                                                  | OCT 2025                                                           | FEB 2026                                                                                                                                               | 2026                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Book Interviews and Filming Begin</p> <p>Initial Visit to Fisk Library</p> <p>Good Neighbor Guide and Yard Sign Production</p> <p>Review Nikiko's WANN Toolkit with We Are North Nashville Team</p> <p>Receive initial contract for Vanderbilt University Press Book Deal</p>                            | <p>Good Neighbor Gathering @ The Loading Dock</p> <p>Interviews for Bonus Podcast Episodes</p> <p>Metro Council Resolution Celebration Dinner @ Ed's Fish &amp; Pizza with Councilmember Taylor</p> | <p>Fisk Library Archives Visit</p> <p>Interviews for Bonus Podcast Episodes</p> <p>Production Begins for Sunset Event</p> | <p>Simone cancels Sunset Event for safety concerns (primarily)</p> | <p>Post- Production Year Begins: book, short film &amp; 70th Anniversary of the Federal Highway Act bonus podcast episode and toolkit illustration</p> | <p>The artistic lighting piece is scheduled to be installed in Summer 2025, end of year of 2025 Summer 2026 (this is also part of the 2021 NEA Our Town Grant).</p> |
| <div>    <p>ED'S FISH &amp; PIZZA HOUSE</p> </div> |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                           |                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                     |



# **WE ARE NORTH NASHVILLE**

is a project to gather, document and share wisdom and sacred knowledge from North Nashville Community Elders.

Listen to their stories at [wearenorthnashville.org](http://wearenorthnashville.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

Toolkit Graphic Design & Layout by Austin Gray

