

THE CIVIC SOUNDTRACK

How Public Radio Music Stations are
Connecting Listeners, Strengthening
Communities, and Forging a More Civil Society

A REPORT BY
Public Media Company & VuHaus Group

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FOREWORD

Thanks to the generous support of the Wyncote Foundation, Public Media Company and VuHaus Group conducted an in-depth exploration of how public radio music stations support and strengthen their communities. This work took place in the spring and early summer of 2025 and was inspired by the leadership of Brenda Barnes (CEO, Classical KING) and Bill Johnson (General Manager, WRTI), whose stations exemplify the civic and cultural impact public music stations can have.

More than 60 stations participated in our initial survey, with ten providing in-depth interviews that offered deeper insight into their community engagement and impact. These stations represent a diverse cross section in terms of size, revenue, geography, and music format. They shared how they collaborate with local businesses and organizations, create educational and economic opportunities, and offer listeners meaningful ways to connect.

With federal funding for public media stations now eliminated, this study underscores the essential civic and cultural role public music stations play—and the many ways they enrich the communities they serve. Most rely on a mix of listener memberships, local business sponsorships, and grants to sustain their work. For some, the loss of federal support could mean a reduction of up to 30% of their annual funding. Now more than ever, these stations need the financial backing of those who value their ability to connect neighbors, foster education, and strengthen the cultural fabric of their communities.

AUTHORS

Erin Moran Sr. Managing Director, Public Media Company	Chris Kirchner Chief Operating Officer, VuHaus Group
Dominic Garzonio, PhD Ops. & Comms. Manager, Public Media Company	Mark Abuzzahab Program Director, VuHaus Group
Mike Henry Brand Strategist, VuHaus Group	Michelle Conrad Marketing Director, VuHaus Group
Sara Schueller VP Research, Paragon	

CONTRIBUTORS

Zac Altheimer Sponsorship & Partnership Coordinator, VuHaus Group	Bill Johnson General Manager, WRTI
Brenda Barnes CEO, Classical KING	Tim Isgitt CEO, Public Media Company

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