



This Is Nashville is a truly collaborative show. Left to right, technical director Mikayla Elias, executive producer Andrea Tudhope, digital lead Anna Gallegos-Cannon, senior producer Steve Haruch, multimedia producer Tasha A.F. Lemley (front), host Khalil Ekulona, multimedia producer Rose Gilbert (back).

Try these six tips to reinvent your public media talk show

Andrea Tudhope was the senior coordinating producer for America Amplified in 2020. She's now the executive producer of This Is Nashville, a live daily show and podcast of WPLN and Nashville Public Radio. Email her at andrea@wpln.org, and follow her on Twitter [@andreatudhope](https://twitter.com/andreatudhope).

Over the past year, I had the privilege of launching Nashville's first local public radio daily show, [This Is Nashville](#), from scratch. Recruiting and hiring a diverse and talented team of seven, and building community engagement into the process from the start.

Whether your show has been on the air for years or hasn't launched yet, whether you're a small team of three, or you produce a pre-recorded show or a short-run series, you can implement these tips to transform your show.

Check out our [debut episode](#), which highlighted the months of community engagement leading up to our launch March 1. Listen to This Is Nashville at thisisnashville.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.

1. Create a community engagement survey

Ask questions that you feel will resonate most with your local or regional communities. As you're forming those questions, turn them back on yourself — how would *you* answer this? If that's hard to imagine, edit it. Keep it grounded, keep it simple.

These are the questions we ask in [our survey](#):

- What do you want people to know about you and your community?
- What do you want out of our daily show?
- What are your hopes, for yourself or your community? What about your most urgent needs?

2. Convene a listening session

This can sound like a lofty endeavor, especially if you're a small team. But opening it up to the public and getting the word out to a brand new audience isn't your only option. If that idea is feeling intimidating, turn to the sources you're already building relationships with. And ask each one to bring someone new from their community. This approach also allows you to be even more intentional about diversity and inclusion. And remember, it doesn't have to be a large group. Sometimes smaller groups lead to more enlightening, open discussions.

In our virtual listening session this past January, with about 30 attendees, we broke into small groups, each led by a show team member, and asked the following questions:

- What are your questions and concerns about the future of our city?
- What do you think local media coverage is missing, or doing wrong?
- What would inspire you to listen to our show every day?
- Where do you get your news and information?

Whether your show is brand new or decades old, there's never a *wrong* time to ask: what do you want us to cover, and how? This could be a good way to facilitate a refresh. On air, you can tell the community — "We're revamping. Help us! Send in your ideas to our website/email." You could even produce special on-air promos.

3. Set source diversity goals and track your progress

Create a source diversity survey. ([Here's ours!](#)) Include it in your guest confirmation emails so they fill it out before the show. Include it in your thank you emails in case they didn't. Make asking your sources if they're comfortable sharing that information part of your pre-interview process, and manually log that in your source tracking spreadsheet.

4. Prioritize lived experience over traditional expertise

The typical public radio talk show format tends to center the most public, official and accessible sources. Flip that script. Make space for community members to share their lived expertise. And keep coming back to those sources.

You can and should still make space for your elected officials, though. Try convening a community panel, then invite your representatives and public officials to answer the community questions directly. At *This Is Nashville*, we do this at least twice a month in our special called [Citizen Nashville](#). We tackle topics with a public service mindset, by soliciting community input via Hearken and Twitter, and then inviting a panel of folks with lived experience and officials to answer questions live.

5. Meet people where they are

I know it's hard to find time to leave the studio, especially if you're a small team. But being present out in the community can mean more than you know to our communities — especially sources we've never met before. You can make the most of it, too. Try pre-interviewing an upcoming guest out in the field. Let's say you're doing an episode about accessibility and you want to bring on a guest who is blind to share their experience navigating the city. Meet that guest on a busy street corner and record their experience. Conduct a quick pre-interview and jot down the notes later. This way you've got some audio for a scene and a guest for your show. Not to mention, you probably ran into some passersby on that street corner... tell them about the show and how to tune in! (Guess what... we did this! [Check out the episode.](#))

6. Close the feedback loop

Invite your guests to share their feedback in your thank you email after the show. If they had criticism, take another stab at that topic with their feedback in mind (like we did with this [episode exploring our indigenous roots.](#)) Keep in touch with your guests and sources. Looking for ideas? Call one you haven't talked to in a while, and just ask — “what's going on in your neck of the woods lately?”

You don't have to have a live show, or a robust digital team, to engage with folks outside of your standard listening audience. And, you don't need to use every option available to solicit input or interaction. Try one at a time (Hearken, a [speakpipe](#) or voicemail box, a community engagement survey) and be creative about how you get the word out. Let's say you've decided to create a survey. Make it easy to find on your website. Pin a tweet at the top of your account. Send the survey link to community leaders (neighborhood leaders, pastors, youth group leaders), and explain that you want to partner with them to elevate the perspectives of their community. Direct your listeners to it throughout your script every day. Incorporate the responses you get on air, and give a shout out to those folks by name on air.

If you can, show the community how you're using their input. Designate a few minutes of your show once a week to address feedback. At *This Is Nashville*, every Thursday, we round up listener comments and feedback and address it live on air in a [segment called @ us!](#)