A Year in Review

women of cincy 2021

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A letter from the Executive Director

I've put off this letter for so long, mostly because I just couldn't figure out where to begin. When thinking through how to start this off, in true '90s kid fashion, I just keep hearing Smash Mouth sing, “My world’s on fire, how about yours?”

Most days I look at the world and feel… distance. It’s hard to put into words, but I see ideological distance between neighbors; the massive gap between the Cincinnati we live in and a true, equitable city; and the physical distance separating friends, colleagues, and family entering our third year of a global pandemic. Sitting alone at my dining room table, I realize that I desperately miss the small talk around the coffee maker, a couch full of friends drinking wine, and the deep conversations that happen while looking at someone face-to-face. With so much distance, it’s easy to see how empathy is missing from so many of our conversations.

More times than I’d like to admit, I thought 2021 was our last year of Women of Cincy. The beauty and downfall of our work is that it’s hard to measure. Creating empathy: What does that look like? What kind of impact does it make? In a world where everything has to be assigned a justifiable dollar amount, our mission – connection, storytelling, celebration – is a hard sell to grantmakers, businesses, etc.

Despite the setbacks, we’re still here today because of you and the absolute joy that your stories create for so many everyday people just making life work. There are so many people who saved us, even though they didn’t know it. Time and time again, we were pulled out of dark moments by a kind comment left on a story, a donation in the middle of the night, a T-shirt order from a name I didn’t recognize, a story that moved us to tears, or watching our volunteers continuously go above and beyond when bringing these stories to life.

“Well, the years start coming and they don’t stop coming…”

Looking back, I can’t believe what we’ve accomplished since we began as an Instagram account back in 2017. My 24-year-old self had no idea how much love, loss, and life were ahead of her, and how much impact Women of Cincy would have on her and our city. Three hundred and ninety five stories later, we’re entering 2022 with big dreams, a kickass team, and stories that give us hope, insight, and gratitude.

In 2022, our words to live by are balance and sustainability. We’re striving for balance in our everyday lives; the opportunities we take and times we say no; and keeping our voice, independence, and mission alive when the world tells us it isn’t enough. And sustainability: building a stable foundation we can learn and grow upon so that we can create a long-term plan for Women of Cincy in the next five, ten, twenty years.

These words to live by apply to my own life too. Finding the balance between being a new mom, running a nonprofit, and paying the bills; remembering the things I love and taking time to plan my garden; and teaching my daughter that the distance we feel is fixable when we center empathy in every decision we make.

“All that glitters is gold, only shooting stars break the mold…”

To Zoey, Tia, Kristyn, Jillian, Katie, Rubina, Emily, Zaria, Cheneiece, Zoe, and all of our other interviewees in 2021 – thank you for sharing your story so authentically. Your words make a difference and we are forever in your corner.

Together, we’re taking a different approach to media and shifting narrative power to the people who make our city work everyday. And while all that glitters isn’t always gold – with enough passion, love, and open-mindedness, there’s a lot of gold left in the world.

Gratefully,
Chelsie Walter
Executive Director
Women of Cincy

“...the distance we feel is fixable when we center empathy...”

–Chelsie Walter

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What is Women of Cincy?

Mission

Women of Cincy is a nonprofit media organization dedicated to creating more connected, empathetic, and inclusive communities by centering the diverse voices that represent our city.

We shift narrative power from traditional media and influencers to the everyday people who live in our communities. We believe lived experience has power and wisdom. The community changemakers whose stories we tell are the key to creating better systems and a more just future for all.

Women of Cincy is committed to mentoring the next generation of civically engaged storytellers and sharing local stories told by local women. The diverse voices of mothers, teachers, healthcare providers, and frontline workers are the kinds of voices we amplify.

The Big Three

We enact our mission through three pillars: storytelling, community building, and mentorship.

Storytelling: Our stories consist of long-form Q&As, Community Mix pieces, and in-depth special series on topics including entrepreneurship, Black women’s economic mobility, housing insecurity, and more. All of our stories are centered around the Cincinnati region.

Community building: We amplify local leaders, organizations, and initiatives that strengthen communities, and we connect like-minded people who can leverage one another’s strengths to work toward a common goal. We also build community within our team, with more than 40 volunteers and residents who are more like family than acquaintances.

Mentorship: Our residency program is aimed toward college students with interests in journalism, communications, and multimedia. We believe in investing in young people by giving them an active role in creating work that exemplifies integrity, quality, and social good.

“Craft your own story and craft your own path. It won’t always be easy, but it will always be worth it.”

– Jillian Harrison-Jones
A look back at 2021

Thinking back through 2021 feels a bit like déjà vu. Still in the throes of COVID, we worked hard to make the best of Zoom meetings, limited outdoor events and get-togethers, and reminisced about the days when we laughed and sipped coffee with our interviewees without masks or worry. And while the year threw challenge after challenge our way, we also discovered more about ourselves and found ways we could bring empathy to our community in an attempt to close that ever-present distance we all felt.

In 2021 we produced 41 stories, reached over 34,000 people, graduated seven students from our residency program, and launched UPLIFT: a directory of women-led products and services.

We kicked off the year featuring a local fiber artist, followed by: a pediatrician, entrepreneur, floral farmer, and a nonprofit founder focused on helping formerly incarcerated women. The stories we tell are diverse in so many ways because of you. Our Feature stories are selected by the community and as of today, there are 357 nominations and growing. In 2021, our Feature interviewees were 72% women of color with a majority of those features centering Black women. In 2022, our goal is to hit 75%.

We launched Feature after Feature week after week from January to November highlighting awesome Cincinnatians in their own words. Women of Cincy also produced nine editions of Community Mix on the first Saturday of each month. Community Mix is a place for us to explore the people, places, and events that make Cincinnati sing. In Community Mix, we published: local gift guides, a collection of books about Cincinnati history authored by Black Cincinnatians, chatted sex with our favorite local librarian, interviewed some of our badass team members, explored gender identity and music, and so much more.

In April, Women of Cincy launched UPLIFT: a directory of women-led products and services to help our community access local business and nonprofits led by women-identifying individuals. Since the directory launch in April, it has been viewed over 1,000 times. Thirty local businesses and nonprofits have signed up and we continue to explore ways to grow this cohort, encourage our city to shop local, and share stories of the women who drive our local economy.

We also moved outside of our typical content to help readers get to know candidates for the Cincinnati City Council and Mayoral races, explored Ohio’s current issues with gerrymandering, and reminded our readers of important voting dates.

When the weather warmed up, we got outside and shared a few moments in the sun with our community. We threw our first-ever silent auction fundraiser and raised close to $3,000, chatted with folks at Second Sunday on Main, and shared a charitable brew at Rhinegeist and Brink Brewing.

As a team, we welcomed SO many new babies (Nora, Izzy, Griffin, and Clay) and our spirits were lifted. We also worked together to bring stories to life and sharpen our craft, poured as much wisdom as we could into our residents, and created long-lasting friendships.

And finally, YOU. You were such a huge part of our success this year. From sharing our content, to donating to support these stories, to flooding us with nominations, to buying merch, and thoughtful conversations – we can’t thank you enough. Incredible things happen when people support each other. And together in 2022, we’re going to make huge, positive ripples throughout our city. Let’s go!!!
COVID threw quite a few curveballs into our editorial calendar, but our team and interviewees made it work. In addition to our typical stories, we also launched a women-led business directory, covered the mayoral and city council races, and produced a social media series on gerrymandering.

**Readers**
- In 2021: 34,636
- Since 2017: 170,553

**Stories**
- In 2021: 41
- Since 2017: 395

**Residents**
- In 2021: 7
- Since 2017: 29

**Pageviews**
- In 2021: 52,676
- Since 2017: 297,891

**Volunteers**
- In 2021: 45
- Since 2017: 120+

“We [Women of Cincy] don’t just honor CEOs; we celebrate everyday people who are doing incredible things in our region.”

– Sandra Okot-Katber, Women of Cincy Communications Director

“When I interview women, I learn about their lives, their experiences, and their passions. Their stories and their voices build empathy in new and wonderful ways every time.”

– Suzanne Wilder, Women of Cincy writer

“We [Women of Cincy] has highlighted the stories of people who are dedicated to making Cincinnati a better city. Even as a Cincinnati native, I learn so much from these interviews, and they have inspired me to tune in more to my city, and to do what I can to improve my part of the world.”

– Ayana Rowe, Women of Cincy editor

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– Ayana Rowe, Women of Cincy editor
Residency program

The next generation

There’s no path toward a bright, more connected and equitable future that doesn’t involve the next generation of storytellers. When we talk about progress, we’re talking about generational work that centers empathy and a deep respect for our neighbors. Investing in the talents, passions, and experiences of young people ensures that our city is able to become a city that all citizens are proud to call home.

Women of Cincy is mentoring the next generation of civically engaged storytellers and sharing local stories told by local women. In 2021, seven students participated in Women of Cincy’s Residency program and built their skills through storytelling and media creation.

Throughout two college semesters, our residents build their skills in writing, communication, problem-solving, and empathy building to create social media posts, stories, research projects, and more. In 2021, our residents surpassed the stereotypical “intern” role to produce high-quality work and directly advance Women of Cincy as an organization.

“As a resident in my second semester, something that makes Women of Cincy special to me is their trust and confidence in their residents. I became a resident in May of 2021 and I knew at my first meeting that this was not only a place, but a family, that made me feel heard, respected, and appreciated. I’m not just an intern grabbing coffee for my supervisors. I am constantly given tasks like editing features, writing social media posts, and building our website. Women of Cincy even gives their residents an opportunity to be a part of the hiring process, which is one thing that truly made me realize how valued I am as a resident.” –Sally Bishop

“As a resident, I’ve had the opportunity to have a peek into how these stories are put together, and the care and attention that goes into each and every one of them is an amazing thing to see every time. I feel so lucky to be a part of the Women of Cincy team.” –Hailey Semchee

Last year, all seven of our Residents received academic or internship credit by working with Women of Cincy. Our Residents also wrote and produced their own stories about rape culture at their universities, public art, farmer’s markets, profiles on Women of Cincy volunteers, and gerrymandering. The students also produced a whopping 238 social media posts and 26 newsletters for the organization.

We strongly believe we must include young people in hard conversations. We know we must engage and uplift growing storytellers. We see first-hand the importance of nourishing their passion, skills, and potential. Bolstered by their experiences at Women of Cincy, our students finish the residency program and move into careers in journalism, communications, community advocacy, and more.

Our students are the next generation to promote sustainable and equitable change and enrich our community through telling stories.

“We strongly believe we must include young people in hard conversations.”

Olivia Taylor  
Residency Director  
Former Resident

Hailey Semchee  
Summer/Fall 2021

Karley Cappel  
Spring/Summer 2021

Sally Bishop  
Summer/Fall 2021

Aaron Sary  
Spring/Summer 2021  
Fall 2020/Spring 2021

Natalie Galle  
Fall 2018/Spring 2021

Emma Segrest  
Spring/Summer 2021

Dani Delaney  
Spring/Summer 2021

Karley Cappel  
Spring/Summer 2021

Sally Bishop  
Summer/Fall 2021
Looking ahead to 2022

In 2022, we're shooting for the stars – but with hearts grounded in empathy and community.

With your help...

• We can fund a part-time executive director and hire a part-time editor and content manager – capacity building is crucial to maintain our current workload and future growth
• Continue to raise funds to support our Residency program with the goal of moving the residency to a paid position and funding a residency director
• Launch new revenue streams to support our growth as an organization
• Increase the number of stories published
• Expand our business directory, UPLIFT, and continue to find new ways to connect Cincinnatians to their local business community
• Reach 65,000 readers
• Produce another in-depth sponsored series
• Continue to build strong ties with our community and train the next generation of civically minded storytellers

How can you help?

This belongs to you.

• We need funds! This work takes time and resources – no ifs, ands, or buts about it. To give, head to womenofcincy.org/give. Women of Cincy also offers a variety of sponsorships to local businesses who align with our mission. Email chelsie@womenofcincy.org for more information.
• Know a business that might be interested in participating in our business directory? Send them our way! Businesses can sign up at womenofcincy.org/uplift.
• Tell your friends and family about Women of Cincy and share our stories each week.
• Nominate awesome folks in your community for us to interview. Head to womenofcincy.org/nominate.
• Volunteer your time. Are you a writer, photographer, or editor? Consider joining our team. Learn more at womenofcincy.org/join.

“We are documenting the lives of unsung heroes and celebrating their voice, lived experience, and hopes for the future.”

–Chelsie Walter, Executive Director
Thank you!

To our Team:
Without you, none of this would be possible. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you!

To our Donors:
Your financial support keeps this publication running. Every story, photograph, and connection made is possible because of you.

When people support each other, incredible things happen.