



## Young Storytellers Strategic Plan 2022-2025

At Young Storytellers, we believe in the power of storytelling. For 25 years, we have empowered young people to use stories to explore their identities, impact the people around them, and create a more just and equitable world. We've reinforced our programs with educational expertise and a DEIB/AR lens, adapted to a changing world, and see clearly where we can make an impact on young people nationwide. As we look to drive the next 25 years of impact, we have identified **three values-driven strategic directions for the next three years** that will ensure the success of our programs, reach a broader audience, and increase our organizational sustainability. We will:

1. **Focus the number of direct service programs we provide each school year so that we can continue to ensure high-quality programs, invest in staff, and sustainably rebuild a robust volunteer community.** Since 1997, nearly 15,000 young people have written their own stories and seen them brought to life in their communities, all with the help of thousands of volunteers. However, we have gone from a volunteer community of thousands to hundreds - a decrease that reverberates throughout the entire nonprofit sector. As we all adjust to life post-COVID, we are intentionally investing time and energy into sustainably recruiting, training, and building up our volunteers.
2. **Establish comprehensive school selection criteria to drive maximum impact in historically marginalized and under-invested communities and schools across Los Angeles.** As we set constraints on the number of direct service programs we will provide each school year, it is crucial to ensure that we are reaching the communities, schools, and students who will benefit the most. This selection criteria will help determine which schools and communities we will prioritize to receive our direct service programs.
3. **Create toolkits and resources so that communities regionally and nationally can inspire their young people to raise their voices through stories in many forms.** We want to share our knowledge and best practices in an accessible way, making it easier for our work to be replicated and adapted throughout the country. Our goal is to establish

a national network of Young Storytellers program partners who, with our support, will learn, adapt, and facilitate our programs in their communities.

All internal organizational work—staff and board development, volunteer cultivation, funding strategy, marketing—will support these three strategic directions. As we embark on this challenging but exciting journey, we are certain that these steps will both further our impact and deepen our connections to our students, volunteers, and partners across the country. We remain dedicated as ever to raising voices, one story at a time.



## Narrative by Year

### **Year 1 - Research and Creation of Tools**

The first year will lay the foundation to scale our impact: researching, creating programmatic tools, establishing organizational systems to accommodate changes, and communicating our plans with our community.

### **Year 2 - Pilot and Initial Feedback**

In year two, we will test the tools we've created in year one with a select group of partners, gather their initial feedback, and integrate any relevant changes as necessary. We'll also begin preparing our well-resourced schools to transition from providing direct service to a supportive toolkit model.

### **Year 3 - Implementation and Rollout**

In the third year, we'll launch our toolkits and resources on a broader scale with a broader group of partners, gathering data and feedback along the way. Our learnings from this year will inform our next strategic plan.



# Team Narratives and Key Milestones\*



## Internal Structures

### Internal Staff Development

We are committed to creating clear and sustainable workplace structures that further organizational goals while nurturing the team members that carry them out. Over the next three years, Young Storytellers will continue to build an organizational and team culture built on trust, healthy communication, personal and organizational sustainability and capacity, and opportunities for connection, growth, and learning.

#### Key Milestones:

- Create annual staffing plan based on annual budget, strategic plan, and keeping in mind current staff growth and capacity.
- Develop a YS accountability process to address harm.
- Codify intern program and processes that is supportive of YS team members goals and systems.
- Assess compensation plan and ensure it is up to market standards and as progressive as possible within YS budget.
- Continue Intern program with an eye toward accessibility.
- Create structures that support an executive director succession plan.
- Hire toolkit consultant to support buildout of YS toolkits and scale.
- Invest in holistic staff wellness, including the creation of a monthly staff wellness stipend.
- Create Fellowship Program in partnership with area community colleges.
- Hire for FT toolkit management position to manage toolkit rollout and support.

### Board Development

Over the next 3 years, our Board of Directors will commit to securing the financial and strategic resources needed to achieve the outlined objectives in this plan. Additionally, it will recruit new members representative of our community and possessing skills to support our strategic direction, will create tools to increase Board impact through peer-to-peer accountability, and will invest in belonging strategies to strengthen the culture of the Board and its connection to the broader Young Storytellers community.

## Key Milestones:

- Complete a Board Matrix to identify skills gaps.
- Invest in activities that lead to a sense of belonging among Board Members.
- Invest in activities that lead to connection & mutual respect between Board & Staff.
- Engage 6 New Board Members to move strategic efforts forward.
- Create a system for Board Members to set goals and be assessed on their impact.
- Create multiple pathways for Board Members to move strategic & DEIB goals forward.

## Volunteer Engagement & Cultivation

In addition to preparing volunteers to best support our students, Young Storytellers is dedicated to fostering a sense of belonging and personal connection to the mission, values, and strategies of our organization within the volunteer community. To achieve that, the next three years will focus on both rebuilding and strengthening our existing volunteer base; and designing values-aligned, sustainable outreach and onboarding strategies for new volunteers to fulfill our programmatic needs.

## Key Milestones:

- Build and implement a retention plan, utilizing data from the volunteer community.
- Re-engage existing volunteers to support rebuilding the volunteer community through outreach strategies and engagement events, including the creation and communication of intersectional affinity-based spaces to build community and belonging through engagement.
- Upskill volunteers with more trainings and workshops.
- Continue building out Spark Squad. Onboard new members each year in accordance with training and engagement needs.
- Hire a Volunteer Outreach and Engagement Strategist.
- Create a solid plan for ongoing volunteer outreach to communities that we want to be involved in volunteering/mentoring our students.
- Create an onboarding process that includes organizational and programmatic training and is aligned with YS values and DEIB/AR goals.
- Refine placement systems and strategies.
- Engage families in schools as volunteers.
- Find methods to expand the volunteer base beyond the entertainment industry.
- Continue work on DEIB/AR metrics for volunteer base and head mentors.

# Sustainability Supports

## Funding Strategy

Young Storytellers will build out systems that ensure sustainable funds in order to support its internal and external activities. These fundraising activities will reflect organizational values, including DEIB/AR priorities. In addition to creating bridges between donors and communities with clear partnership agreements, Young Storytellers will explore a fee structure for tool-kit based programs in well resourced communities.

### Key Milestones:

- Communicate equity values to all donors and partners; ensure DEI/AR work is reflected in funding strategy and activities.
- Maintain existing fundraising activities and pursue additional funding, including: grants calendar, corporate partnerships, individual and community donors.
- Increase base of individual and community donors.
- Keep board and staff regularly informed about our funding sources, strategy, and process.
- Develop process for giving stipends and community gifts according to partners' needs; communicate policies to stakeholders.
- Create a gratitude and cultivation strategy specific to corporate partners.
- Develop a fundraising plan and budget, tied to objectives laid out in the strategic plan.
- Assess needs of community, and goals and resources of corporate partners to determine alignment.
- Develop a transparent fee structure for well-resourced schools and community-based organizations.

## Marketing

Young Storytellers will tell our organizational story to a wider audience to attract values-aligned partners and supporters in our target communities while focusing on the universality of storytelling. We will establish our name as a brand and authority in storytelling to make our programs enticing to everyone; from volunteers who engage in our LA based direct service programs to community based organizations that would like to learn how they can bring our programs to their young people.

### Key Milestones:

- Tell the larger story of Young Storytellers' impact, focusing on DEIB/AR, social justice and an expanded definition of storytelling.
- Continue strengthening Creative Collective with an eye towards expanding our pool of contractors.
- Create new collateral about Young Storytellers; update internal documents to reflect changes.

- Develop a strategic marketing approach to market the Achievery and Story Time to new audiences.
- Explore new ways to celebrate student work & own organizational work.

## Partnerships

Young Storytellers will expand volunteer capacity and the scope of our work by creating tools to build intentional and reciprocal partnerships, with clear expectations. Partnerships will also create opportunities to expand the volunteer base in connection with our DEIB goals, in direct service schools.

### Key Milestones:

- With consultants, complete 3-year Partners Partners Roadmap initiative to create clear expectations. Begin implementation in fall 2022.
- Begin outreach/exploratory conversations with potential partners, confirm mentor-based partners to pilot formalized process.
- Reach out to community theater groups, theater affinity groups for BIPOC Big Show actors.
- Identify funds for actor and mentor stipends.
- Utilize partnerships for increasing existing volunteer capacity (mentors and actors) at direct service schools.
- Begin development of toolkits for mid-/light-/full-service programs.



## External Efforts

### Toolkit Accessibility

Young Storytellers aims to create a network of youth-serving institutions that can successfully and independently launch and sustain Young Storytellers programming to scale our impact. Over the next three years Young Storytellers will focus on building resources and infrastructure needed to support the expansion of a technical assistance arm of our work.

### Key Milestones:

- Research best practices in toolkit development and conduct a needs assessment of current school partners.
- Create Script to Stage Toolkit with the guidance of a consultant and support of YS staff.

- Pilot the first toolkit with at least two trusted partners.
- Expand research to identify and assess additional toolkit needs of potential community partners.
- Leverage learnings from previous years to launch a technical assistance partnership with school sites and/or out-of-school organizations outside of Los Angeles
- Identify and transition select school partners in Los Angeles from a direct-service partnership to a technical assistance partnership

## Program Accessibility

Young Storytellers will strengthen our commitment to justice and equity through expanding our direct-service programming to include broader geographic areas within Los Angeles. Additionally, we aim to assess all current and future program materials with an eye towards accessibility, including adapting models to be inclusive of students with disabilities and English language learners (ELL).

### Key Milestones:

- Complete a school selection criteria and apply the criteria to a select number of current and potential school partners to determine which schools are best suited for the Young Storytellers model.
- Conduct a relationship assessment with current school partners to better understand the programs' current strengths and opportunities for growth.
- Review current program curriculum and materials to assess opportunities for increasing supports for students with disabilities and ELL students.
- Create and integrate a training module for mentors that offers best practices for supporting students with disabilities and ELL students.
- Begin transition from well resourced schools using school selection criteria and toolkit implementation.

## Alumni Engagement

Young Storytellers will cultivate an alumni network for students that supports further engagement in authoring their own stories, provides access to opportunity pathways and increases donor investment for alumni development. In doing so, we hope to ensure that the power of storytelling lives beyond our programs and thrives within the lives of all those who participate.

### Key Milestones:

- Develop strong and consistent alumni communication channels that include a website, social media communities, and text and email networks.
- Continue to market internship, fellowship, and hiring opportunities to alumni networks.

- Create accessible opportunities for alumni to participate in YS events and programs.
- Actively seek out funding opportunities from individual donors and corporate sponsors to support a YS alumni network.
- Identify needs from older alumni in order to connect them to appropriate and available resources within our networks and partnerships
- Feature alumni in the Biggest Show and other community events
- Launch an alumni-led online platform that allows for interaction amongst alumni.
- Build a base of volunteers specifically interested in engaging with alumni.
- Consider creating an alumni advisory committee that has a relationship with the board and with staff

\*We are continually evaluating our work and effectiveness - these milestones may be subject to change.