

**826LA**

**2018-2021 Strategic Plan**



## Our Mission

826LA is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students ages 6 to 18 with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write.

We provide after-school tutoring, evening and weekend workshops, in-school writing support, help for English language learners, and assistance with student publications. All of our programs are challenging and enjoyable, and ultimately strengthen each student's power to express ideas effectively, creatively, confidently, and in their individual voice.



## **At their heart, strategic plans are stories.**

**Stories about the future and our dreams. Stories of the students we serve and how we will better serve them. Stories of bold goals and how we will work together to achieve our mission.**

The story of the last three years, and the culmination of our last strategic plan, was about the students we reach in service of our vision and mission. We made tremendous strides in focusing on underserved students, a majority of whom are from Title I schools, and piloted our Writers' Room at Manual Arts High School to provide more in-depth programming. Over three years, we delivered close to a whopping 175,000 hours of programming with the help of 3,482 volunteers, and continued to grow our fundraising, brand awareness, and team.

We couldn't be more proud to unveil the story of our next strategic plan—the plan taking us all the way to 2021. It's a story of growth and empowerment, of new characters and ideas, but most of all it's a story of impact and the imagination of our students.

Read along as we tell you a tale of an exciting three years ahead.

**—THE STAFF & BOARD OF 826LA**

## **This plan is all about the students.**

We feel immensely proud of the achievements we've made as an organization over the last three years. By and large, the priorities we set in 2015 continue to be 826LA's core priorities today. The staff and board have made great strides in many aspects of our previous plan, and also uncovered ways to strengthen and refine our approach to best achieve our goals. Though serving as many students as we can each year will always be our ambition, the guiding focus for the next three years is building the foundation for sustainable growth and deepening our impact. This strategic plan puts forth our ambitions and plans for achieving both.

**Underlying all four of these strategic priorities is a priority to embed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into every facet of our strategic plan.**

### **PRIORITY 1**

#### **STUDENTS**

Expand Students Served with Increased Impact

### **PRIORITY 2**

#### **VOLUNTEERS**

Grow, Retain, & Diversify Volunteer Base to Support Growth Goals

### **PRIORITY 3**

#### **FUNDING & AWARENESS**

Grow Fundraising & Strengthen Brand Awareness to Expand Reach

### **PRIORITY 4**

#### **TEAM & BOARD**

Build a Thriving Team, Culture, & Work Practices to Enable Future Growth



## Can 826LA reach more students and have more impact?

**Yes! We're making a strategic bet on our Writers' Room model.**

Writers' Rooms enable both growth and depth of impact, and 826LA will scale the Writers' Room model across Los Angeles over the next three years and beyond.

## A Look Back

An 826LA Writers' Room is a place on a school campus where students can get support with writing and nurture their creative voices. Students gain confidence as they articulate their compelling stories and dreams, seniors write their personal statements for college applications, multiple publications are created each year to showcase student writing, and teachers are supported through in-class projects connected to writing assignments in their curriculum.

826LA launched our first in-school Writers' Room in 2013 at Manual Arts High School, and has since served 3,338 students and 66 teachers. With the help of 361 volunteers, we have created 10 publications featuring 476 student writers.

In 2018, 95% of the graduating class used the Writers' Room and 89% of the students will attend a four-year college worked in the Writers' Room at Manual Arts.



## A Look Ahead

Writers' Rooms expand the ethos and value of writing into more pockets of the vast city of Los Angeles. We're working hard to make writing a value for students through deep, repeated exposure to creative and expository writing and overall support in developing school-wide literacy.

The unique model of being embedded inside a school creates a two-fold opportunity within each Writers' Room:

**1** Our Echo Park and Mar Vista centers have reached maximum capacity, and are limited to those geographic areas. New Writers' Rooms can expand to new neighborhoods currently not reached by 826LA, to enable us to maintain a location and regular programming with a new community of students. **This means more students served.**

**2** Having a Writers' Room directly on a school campus enables 826LA to have consistent, long-term touch points with students on a regular basis while working in collaboration with school faculty to address school-wide literacy goals. This creates repeated exposure to the value of writing, direct support on key writing projects, and the opportunity to support a group of students over many years. **This means deeper impact for students.**

**Combined, these two outcomes provide a strategic path forward that supports 826LA's desire for both increasing DEPTH OF IMPACT and BROADER REACH. Who says you can't have it all?**

# Priority 1: Expand Students Served and Increase Impact



**“Being a published author feels like  
you can do anything in the world.”**

**—ANDRES, AGE 14, 826LA WRITERS’ ROOM STUDENT**

## Expand to three Writers' Rooms in three years.

The main push for this strategic plan is to have three thriving Writers' Rooms by 2021.

To achieve this goal, we will develop a Writers' Room success framework to audit and refine Writers' Room programming, and a detailed plan to sustainably expand Writers' Rooms.

In order to ensure the ongoing success of each Writers' Room, we know our staff capacity and must be laser-focused. This means slowly and strategically sunseting other In-Schools programming over the next three years. But fear not! We are committed to redirecting those students to other 826LA programming such as Personal Statement Weekend, as capacity allows, so no student is overlooked in this strategic shift. We will focus on building sustainable models of growth across staff and programs.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Student racial/ethnic diversity and school need will be a major contributing factor in choosing new Writers' Room locations (alongside which site provides the greatest holistic opportunity for success and impact).

## Deepen programming impact, outcomes, and writing focus.

826LA serves a tremendous amount of students annually — close to 9,000! As we shift our focus to using Writers' Rooms as our core growth driver, we are eager to maximize the impact of our other programming offerings through workshops, field trips, and after-school tutoring. We will continue our ongoing effort to elevate and support a stronger writing pedagogy and process through tools like the Analytic Writing Continuum and National Writing Project.

To give 826LA staff and volunteers the breathing room to focus on strengthening programming, we are looking to stabilize the number of students served to a level that is sustainable for staff and can support deeper impact outcomes. This will result in some fluctuation, with a net result of 6050 students served in 2021 (not including those students served in our Writers' Rooms and other In-Schools programming). With the growth of our Writers' Rooms and Contracted Services, we will still reach close to 10,000 students in 2021 in a far more sustainable way in order to measure impact.

Tactical shifts to our programming calendar and reducing the number of student publications to focus on quality and engagement in the writing process will also support this focus on impact.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Programming will be strengthened by a focus on culturally-relevant curriculum and resources.

## Expand contracted services with partners.

826LA has been fortunate to partner with other educational and creative institutions to deliver programming, including the Hammer, College Track, and the Broad. This "contracted services" approach is our way of delivering 826LA programming through other partners and institutions in the city, reaching different audiences, and new geographical locations without the constraints of our physical location and staff bandwidth.

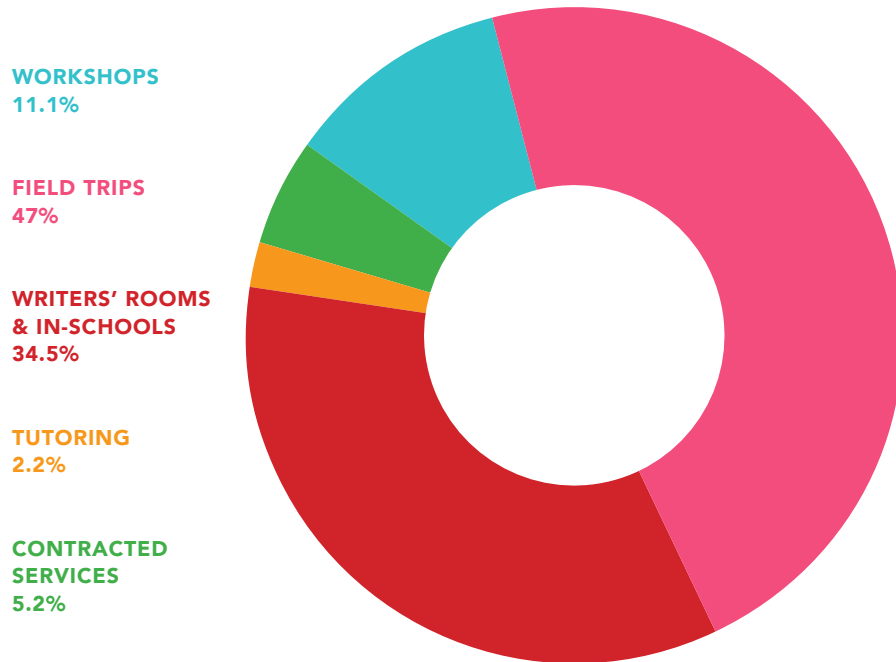
As we look to increase our number of students served without greatly increasing costs, contracted services offers a unique strategic approach. We will use the success of our current partnerships with the Hammer and Broad Museum to develop a framework and set of tools to explore future partnerships. Over the next three years we will pilot at least two new partnerships.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

New partnerships will focus on serving a diverse, underserved set of students, and deliver culturally-relevant curriculum.

## A Look Ahead: Students served per program in 2021.

In total, we will still reach close to 10,000 students, in a far more sustainable way with a focus on depth of programming.



## By the end of 2021, we will recruit 35% of new volunteers from traditionally underrepresented communities.

Including older adults and communities of color, with an emphasis on matching 826LA's student demographics.

## Go above and beyond to serve the needs of our community.

Our mission is focused on offering writing support, but through the strategic planning process we heard great demand from our students and community for connections to other much-needed resources that enable students to thrive. Over the coming year, we will work to offer support tools and connections to programs and resources in a light-touch way, including resources about immigration, housing, scholarships, coping with trauma, and much more. We always strive to listen to the needs of our community, while also remaining true to our writing-focused mission.

# **Priority 2: Grow, Retain, & Diversify Volunteer Base to Support Growth Goals**



**Volunteers are the heart and soul of 826LA.  
Since our last strategic plan, 3,482 volunteers  
worked with 826LA students—an amazing feat!**

## Grow capacity and efficacy of the Volunteer Team.

With our Writers' Room growth and continual push to reach more students, we recognize the need for increased capacity on the volunteer team to be able to secure the high numbers of volunteers needed on a daily basis. We've already brought on an additional role supported by Public Allies so we could hit the ground running as the school year kicks off, and will closely monitor future staffing needs on the Volunteer Team.

Clear roles and strategies are just as important as increased capacity, and so the volunteer team will undergo an intentional realignment process to best leverage all Volunteer Team staff members' time and recalibrate how the programming team interplays with volunteer needs and workflow.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Our aim is to have a volunteer pool that reflects our students and the students we wish to serve; an important step in accomplishing this is hiring staff members that reflect our desired volunteer pool. We are also developing intentional pathways to bring student alumni into our internship, Public Allies, and AmeriCorps programs. We will continue to broaden our recruitment and retention of senior volunteers by providing them with tools and trainings to deepen their connections to our students and programs.

## Optimize for sustainable ways to recruit, diversify, retain, and train volunteers.

With multiple Tutoring, Workshops, In-schools, and Field Trip programming sessions happening each day, over 1,200 volunteers are needed every year. Our previous strategic plans brought up the immense importance of volunteers in being able to achieve our growth goals. Even given the tremendous strides made by the Volunteer Team over the last 3 years, we still have much work to do to have a fully sustainable volunteer arm of 826LA that can meet the needs of more Writers' Rooms and more students. To act on this insight, 826LA will undertake a full audit of everything related to our volunteers to deeply analyze all of our practices, systems, communications, partnerships, and beyond. Out of the audit will come a set of greatly refined tactics, programs, resources, and tools to recruit and retain volunteers in a more strategic, data-aligned way.

Looking ahead to 2021, these new strategies will include recruiting over 1,000 new volunteers per year, and retaining 45% of those annually. By giving the volunteer team the time and space to audit what is working, analyze what isn't, and optimize new approaches and partnerships, we see a bright future ahead—a future that can serve many more students as our Writers' Room model continues to expand.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

For the 2021 goal of 1,000 new volunteers, we are committed to reaching a more diverse volunteer pool—a full 35%—of people from traditionally underrepresented communities, including older adults and communities of color, with an emphasis on matching student demographics. The ability for a student to see themselves reflected in our volunteers is incredibly powerful, and can lead to stronger relationships and success for all. We also believe in the importance of building intergenerational bonds, and our older adult volunteers bring into our programs a depth of knowledge and experience that benefits our students in myriad ways.

# Priority 3: Grow Fundraising & Strengthen Brand Awareness to Expand Reach



Funding and the power of the 826LA brand are crucial in our ability to deliver programming and gain volunteers and donors.



### **Grow budget to \$2.5 Million by fiscal year 2021.**

826LA has consistently grown our budget 10% to 15% year-over-year since our founding. Looking ahead three years, we intend to continue this strong trajectory, with an anticipated budget of \$2.5 million by 2021. We feel confident in our ability to reach this ambitious target, especially with great excitement around new Writers' Rooms, the growing success of *Tell Me A Story* (our annual fundraiser), and 826LA's 15th anniversary coming up in 2020.

Part of our strategic expansion framework for sustainable Writers' Room growth includes sufficient fundraising to open each room. This strategic plan focuses on raising funds to open two additional Writers' Rooms, and set up the fundraising structures for future growth.

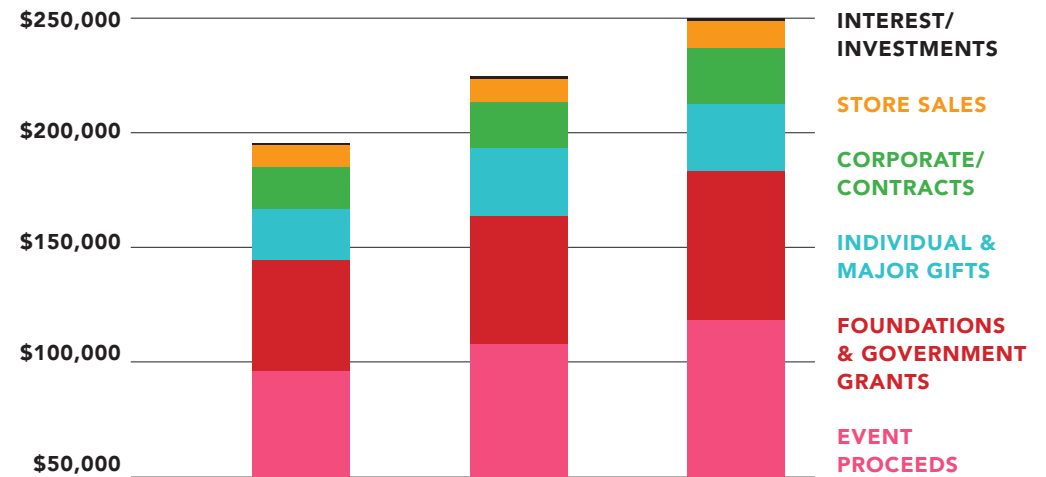
Individual giving, from both small-dollar and major entry-level donors, has incredible potential for growth. By 2021 we intend for (non-event) individual and major gifts to total \$385,000, a 25% increase over three years. We will refine our membership program, create an Associate Board comprised of individuals from a variety of ethnic and professional backgrounds, develop partnerships with strong fan-based communities (building on our past success with Critical Role), and focus on stronger donor recruitment, retention, and cultivation strategies.

In 2018, we raised over \$600,000 in donations at *Tell Me A Story* (thanks to all of you!). We will build on this success, and are setting a goal of fundraising more than \$850,000 in revenue from *Tell Me A Story* in 2021. Foundation grants and (non-event) corporate sponsorships will continue to be a focus of the development team, reaching a combined 35% of our budget.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Our *Tell Me A Story* event in 2018 had an ethnically-diverse roster of talent, and we are striving for even greater DEI-alignment with all of our fundraising events moving forward. As we begin the process of designing and recruiting a diverse Associate Board comprised of young leaders from throughout Los Angeles, we have a unique opportunity to add voices reflective of our constituents. We will research and connect with philanthropists of color, a strategy which will begin with a PR push to media outlets serving communities of color in Los Angeles. In our fundraising communications, we will emphasize students' strengths and position ourselves as one vital resource in an ecosystem that includes families, schools, and communities.

**Budget Growth 2018-2021**





## Increase brand awareness to become the premier writing organization in Los Angeles.

826LA's high-quality programming, unique approach, and dedication to tens of thousands of students and volunteers over the years has already helped us become a well-known institution in Los Angeles. We want to double down on being the go-to writing organization serving Los Angeles students, through an increased focus on thought leadership and communications/PR campaigns.

We also recognize the huge potential for our students, families, educators, and volunteers to share the 826LA story within their local communities, and will support this through multilingual ambassador materials and tools.

With our two Time Travel Mart storefronts—one in Echo Park and one in Mar Vista—we will continue to connect with the community, bring in revenue to support programming, and tell the whimsical, fun story of the 826LA brand.

Other big projects include a website refresh and utilizing our publications as a platform to serve our fundraising and outreach goals.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

The Time Travel Mart has great potential to share our writing perspective with local communities, especially through an equity and inclusion lens. Tactically, we will continue aligning our products and store messaging with DEI, with diverse heritage month spotlights, student discounts, and more affordable writing materials for all.

# **Priority 4: Build a Thriving Team, Culture, & Work Practices to Enable Future Growth**



**A successful organization relies on having a thriving team and board, with the culture and tools to achieve our bold dreams.**

## Grow & develop staff and organizational culture.

With the support of committed partners and funders, eager donors and volunteers, and the dedication of a tremendous staff, 826LA has grown from just a few employees at its start to over 22 team members today. We need this team to thrive in order to reach our big dreams and enable expanded reach and deeper impact for students served.

We will continue growing our team, specifically the volunteer, in-schools, development, and design departments, to support the growth laid out in this strategic plan, with a commitment to DEI in our hiring process.

To support all staff, we are working hard to strengthen our team and organizational culture to reach an employee retention rate of 85%.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is integral to our approach of building a thriving team at 826LA, and we are actively working to create a safer DEI-aligned working environment and culture. This includes embedding DEI into our hiring plan, holding more DEI staff trainings, integrating DEI into our daily approach and conversations, and using DEI as a guiding principle of our strategic planning retreats.

## Establish operational systems and processes.

Thriving teams need powerful tools, systems, and processes to do their best work. We've made strides already, and through this plan we will establish further information technology, knowledge management, and human resources infrastructure to bolster the work of our team.

Connecting back to our core priority of increasing our impact, our operations and programming team leads will work with all staff to establish impact outcomes per program, create metrics dashboards, and integrate strong data-driven decision-making into every facet of 826LA.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

To ensure that we are serving our students well and to better serve students in years to come, we are making an effort to track our outcomes in ways that will inform our programs moving forward.

## Continue growing and strengthening the board.

Our board of directors continues to be a powerhouse of support for 826LA, and we aim to grow to 16 board members by 2021, strengthen committee infrastructure, and increase the connections between our board and staff, programming, and volunteers.

Additionally, the board has identified specific ways to support the implementation of the core priorities of this strategic plan.

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Focus:**

Board growth will include a core focus on DEI, and to enable this, we will sponsor two board seats to ensure community voices are represented on the board.



# Support 826LA: Volunteer or Donate

**This is where our strategic plan intersects directly with you! Volunteers and donors make our work possible.**

## Volunteer

If you want to become a volunteer with 826LA, our Volunteering 101 orientation is the first place to start! During Volunteering 101 you'll get information about the history and mission of 826LA, hear about our programs, learn tips for being an effective 826LA volunteer, complete your background check, receive our Volunteer Handbook, get registered as a volunteer, and, of course, be able to ask us any and every question you might have about 826LA, our programs, working with students, and the space-time continuum.

Become a volunteer! Sign up for a Volunteering 101 at **[826LA.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://826LA.ORG/VOLUNTEER)**

## Donate

826LA would not be able to provide our free writing and tutoring programs to nearly 9,000 students a year without the support of our generous donors. There are lots of ways to get involved, from corporate sponsorship, to peer-to-peer fundraising events, to monthly support.

Make a donation today!  
**[826LA.ORG/DONATE](https://826LA.ORG/DONATE)**

# 826LA

## Thank You

This strategic plan was co-created with deep input and guidance from the entire 826LA staff and board of directors, as well as our community of students, volunteers, teachers, and parents. Listening to the ideas, feedback, and input of a diversity of voices shaped this plan and the coming years at 826LA.

And thank you to Isis Krause, our consultant, for providing strategic direction and facilitation throughout the work of creating this strategic plan and for lifting up so many voices and perspectives in the process.

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