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Media Contact: Juan Rivera  
415.255.9035 x20  
[jrivera@youthspeaks.org](mailto:jrivera@youthspeaks.org)

## **Youth Speaks Announces: 16 Organizations to Receive Grants and Join The Brave New Voices Network Leadership Cohort**

**San Francisco, CA** – Youth Speaks, one of the country’s leading spoken word and literary arts organizations, is pleased to announce the Leadership Cohort grant recipients for ***The Brave New Voices (BNV) Network Initiative***. **Starting this month, Youth Speaks will award grants** directly to other non-profits that work with youth in writing and performance throughout the United States. These grants are a part of a larger seven-year initiative and include general operating support, technical assistance, and staffing support. This group of grantees will serve as the **Leadership Cohort** for the field-wide initiative, and Youth Speaks is thrilled to honor these worthy and impactful organizations. After an extremely rigorous process with a very high caliber of applicants, Youth Speaks has selected 16 organizations to participate as the founding Leadership Cohort for the first three years with the intention to add another 12 organizations in three years time.

“This is a critical opportunity for us to work as a field, to develop our shared expertise, to strengthen our base and make visible the voices of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. We cannot continue to see arts education as being on the fringe and this will plant us firmly in the center, where young people belong,” stated James Kass, the founder of Youth Speaks and lead designer of this Initiative. “I am honored to work with these organizations in a meaningful and long-term way.”

Youth Speaks, whose offices are in San Francisco, will serve as the hub for the entire operation. The organizations selected are:

- Urban Word NYC in New York (founded in 1999);
- Young Chicago Authors (founded in 1991);

- Words Beats and Life in Washington DC (founded in 2002);
- MassLEAP in Boston (founded in 2009);
- Writers in the Schools, Houston (founded in 1993);
- Kuumba Lynx in Chicago (founded in 1996);
- InsideOut in Detroit (founded in 1995);
- Sacrificial Poets in North Carolina (founded in 2012);
- Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (founded in 2009);
- Southern Word in Nashville (founded in 2008);
- TruArtSpeaks in the Twin Cities (founded in 2006);
- Forward Arts in Baton Rouge (founded in 2011);
- GetLit in Los Angeles (founded in 2006);
- Oklahoma Literary Arts Alliance in Tulsa (founded in 2014);
- Philadelphia Youth Poetry Movement (founded in 2009); and
- First Peoples Fund in South Dakota (founded in 1996).

"As an artist and leader actively engaged in building something sustainable, meaningful, and as far-reaching as possible for the youth – and everyone – in my community, this opportunity is incomparable," Tish Jones, a Brave New Voices alumni and the executive director of TruArtSpeaks says about being selected.

***The BNV Network Initiative*** is dedicated to building a sustainable field of organizations that intersect arts education and youth development practices with a deep focus on long-term civic engagement and public presentation. Currently, over 75 programs across the United States make up the Brave New Voices Network. The hope is that by investing in the field as a whole, Youth Speaks can create a pathway for the voices of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America to have the resonance, opportunity and access they both deserve and demand, while ensuring ongoing, local programs in communities nationwide. Additionally, by investing significantly in the organizations that comprise the Leadership Cohort, Youth Speaks aims to change the field by leveraging their strengths and resources to influence the field.

As a part of the plan, half of the Leadership Cohort will also host a Future Corps staffer – a Youth Speaks initiative that hires and trains Brave New Voices alumni on two-year fellowships.

Amanda Torres, an alumni who runs MassLEAP, says, "Many alumni, like myself, who have been transformed by this work are now building off of and re-envisioning the work of our predecessors. I am so excited to continue learning and building alongside the peers and mentors that shaped so much of who I am and the work to which I am committed."

The Leadership Cohort is comprised of large, medium and small arts, literacy, and youth development nonprofits that serve youth between the ages of 13-21 and who believe in the transformative power of the literary arts in young people's lives. The organizations represent a broad range of geographic locations nationwide and include students and communities from urban, rural and reservation settings. All organizations

laid out compelling three-year plans to maximize their impact and influence in the field. All Leadership Cohort members will gain expertise in leadership development, fundraising, communications, operations (including finance), and programming.

The application pool was intensely competitive, and therefore, Youth Speaks chose to create a Leadership Development Award for certain staff from organizations not awarded, including Jeff Kass from Neutral Zone (Ann Arbor), Tama Brisbane from WOW (Stockton), Natasha Thomas-Jackson from Raise It Up (Flint, MI), Cat Magill from Say Word, (LA) and Elizabeth Whitford, Youth Speaks Seattle/Arts Corps.

“Ensuring young people are heard and mentored by well-equipped adults and organizations is essential. Small organizations can be highly effective, yet are often stretched thin and lacking meaningful resources,” notes James Kass. “This project aims to change this dynamic. By creating the Leadership Cohort, we can provide resources to the people on the ground, working with teenagers every day. Ultimately, stronger organizations mean more opportunities for young people to find and present the power of their voices. We could not be more proud of the organizations that have been selected.”

***The BNV Network Initiative*** was launched by Youth Speaks after receiving initial funding from two anonymous Bay Area-based supporters, who have been joined by the Ford and Surdna Foundations, both long-time Youth Speaks champions.

***Background on Youth Speaks:*** Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks has long championed a national movement of young people boldly declaring themselves present through poetry and spoken word. In addition to offering a comprehensive series of arts education programs to over 35,000 youth locally, Youth Speaks produced the first youth poetry slam in the nation in 1997, and launched the Brave New Voices Festival in 1998 (featured for two seasons on HBO) and now the movement serves well over 200,000 young people around the country.

For more information about Youth Speaks and Brave New Voices, please visit [www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org)

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