

# Youth Speaks

2024 **IMPACT REPORT**





*“So we cherish what’s in our hands, allow our  
minds to paint a new world into existence with  
one word, one syllable, one poem at a time.”*

-Youth Artist from the Beyond Angelou Workshop





Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on another transformative year at Youth Speaks, I'm filled with gratitude for the incredible journey we've shared. Our mission to empower young voices through culture has never been more vital, and your unwavering support has been the cornerstone of our success in a time of uncertainty.

Between 2023-2024, we've made significant strides in living our values, both in how we serve young poets and how we operate as an organization. We've increased our base pay, ensuring no team member earns less than \$70,000 annually. We've invested in wellness policies, team bonding, and professional development. These aren't just perks; they're a testament to our commitment to nurturing the very people who nurture our youth.

Our impact extends far beyond our walls. From the Bay Area to Butte County and beyond, we've scaled our programs to serve 3,700 students in Bay Area schools and welcomed 6,343 arts audiences back into theaters and cultural spaces through our live performances and events. We provided 294 hours of public storytelling workshops at no cost, regranted \$740,000 unrestricted funds with our partners at the California Arts Council, and provided more than \$40,000 in stipends directly to youth artists here at home in the Bay Area, and in our national Brave New Voices network. We're not just practicing art. We're investing in pathways of economic power for young culture bearers across the U.S., and building an infrastructure around this essential value.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to learning from our rich 28-year history while staying responsive to the dynamic dreams and questions that young people, and these times, are asking. We won't stop.

Your support makes all of this possible. Thank you for believing in the power of youth voices and poetic will, and the incredible things that happen when we bring them together.

With deep appreciation and excitement for what's to come,



**MICHELLE MUSH LEE**

Executive Director



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# MISSION

WE CREATE SPACES THAT CHALLENGE YOUTH TO DEVELOP AND AMPLIFY THEIR VOICES AS CREATORS OF SOCIETAL CHANGE

# VISION

WE ENVISION A WORLD IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HEARD, HONORED AND CONNECTED THROUGH CREATIVE ECOSYSTEMS OF INTERDEPENDENCE AND CARE

# OUR GOLDEN RULES

1. THERE ARE NO WRONG ANSWERS
2. THE STANDARD IS YOURSELF







BY



THE



NUMBERS



**GLOBAL**

**8.5 MIL**

**ENGAGEMENTS ACROSS  
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS**



**1 MIL**

**YOUTUBE VIEWERS**

**NATIONAL**  
**1K YOUTH**  
**FROM**  
**21 CITIES**  
**REPRESENTING**  
**16 STATES**  
**ENGAGED IN THE 2023**  
**BRAVE NEW VOICES FESTIVAL**





**STATE**

**80**

**\$740K**

IN FUNDING DISTRIBUTED TO  
48 CALIFORNIA ARTISTS  
FROM 15 COUNTIES

INTERGENERATIONAL ARTISTS  
PARTICIPATED IN ARTISTS  
LEADERSHIP & TECHNICAL  
ASSISTANCE WORKSHOPS

**12**

PARTNERSHIPS

**294**

HOURS OF PUBLIC  
STORYTELLING

**LOCAL & REGIONAL**

**6,343**

AUDIENCE MEMBERS EXPERIENCED A  
YOUTH SPEAKS ARTS EVENT

**3,700**

YOUTH PARTICIPATED IN RESIDENCIES  
OUT-OF-SCHOOL WRITING WORKSHOPS,  
OR SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

**3,000**

IN-PERSON AT THE 17TH ANNUAL LIFE IS  
LIVING FESTIVAL IN WEST OAKLAND, CA

**\$40K**

GIVEN IN STIPENDS & SCHOLARSHIPS  
TO YOUTH ARTISTS



# ORGANIZATIONAL

Our staff, board, and SPOKES Youth Advisory Board members are part of a creative, liberatory legacy that includes each young person or adult ally who engages with Youth Speaks. In 2023-2024, we continued to invest in our staff. From our Advancement and Finance teams working on sustainability to our Board members who guide us to walk in our vision and values, to our SPOKES Youth Advisory Board members who ensure we center youth voices, our strength and pride are in our people.



**STAFF BASE PAY BY  
12.5% TO \$70,000**



**REVENUE UP BY  
110% OVER 2 YEARS**



**97%  
STAFF RETENTION**



**EXPANDED WELLNESS POLICY &  
INCREASED PAID REST DAYS**



**STIPENDS FOR STAFF TO SUPPORT  
LOCAL THEATERS, ARTISTS &  
CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS**



**ALL SENIOR LEADERSHIP STAFF  
HAVE SUCCESSION PLANS**

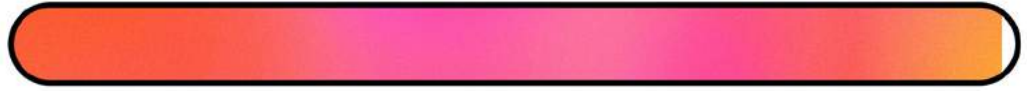


# WE BET ON US



# OUR PEOPLE

**99%**



**OF STAFF MEMBERS IDENTIFIED AS BIPOC**

**60%**



**ALUMNI OR EARLY ARTS ADMINS WHO STARTED AT YOUTH SPEAKS**

**57%**



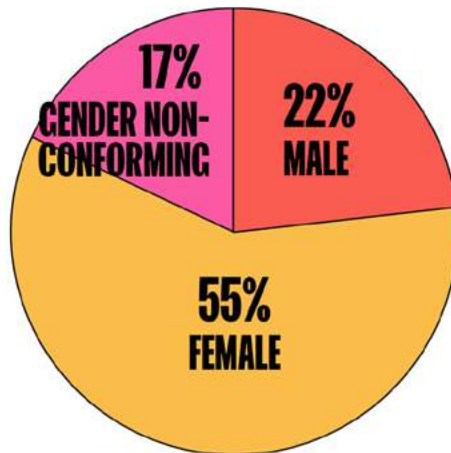
**OF OUR TEAM IDENTIFIED AS CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS**

**83%**

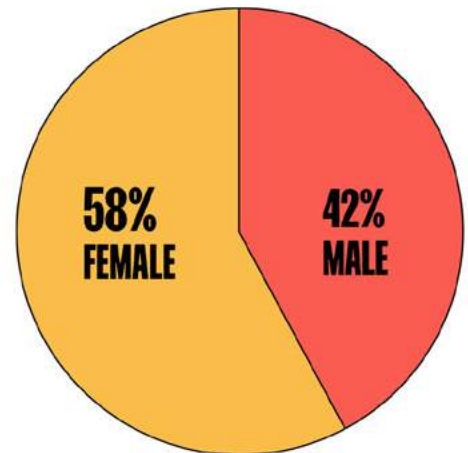


**OF OUR BOARD IDENTIFIES AS BIPOC**

## OUR PEOPLE



## BOARD





*“Before Youth Speaks I hated writing  
and expressing myself...I thought  
people would judge me. After Youth  
Speaks, I realized that there are places  
and people who won’t judge me.”*

-Youth Speaks Participant





# 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

**JULY**



**Brave New Voices Festival & Convening, San Francisco**

**AUGUST**



**Teaching Artist & SPOKES Orientation, San Francisco**

**SEPTEMBER**



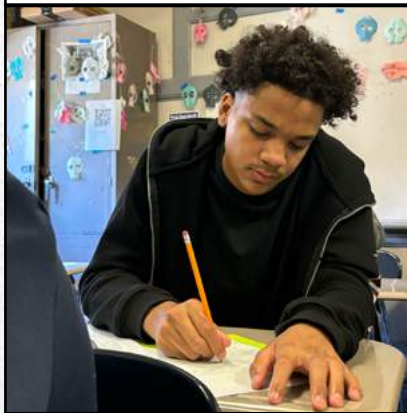
**School Year Kickoff San Francisco**

**OCTOBER**



**Life is Living Festival Oakland**

**NOVEMBER**



**Writing Residency San Francisco**

**DECEMBER**



**Under 21 Open Mic San Francisco**



# 2024 HIGHLIGHTS

## JANUARY



SF Library Open Mic  
San Francisco

## FEBRUARY



Darius Parker @ Black Joy Parade  
Oakland

## MARCH



California Arts Coalition  
Training

## APRIL



Teen Poetry Slam  
San Francisco

## MAY



Friendraiser  
San Francisco

## JUNE



Unified Verses & Vibes  
San Francisco



## OUR ALUMNI STORY

Over the years, Brave New Voices youth have shared the stage as indistinguishable counterparts with legendary artists like Sonia Sanchez, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, De La Soul, Saul Williams, Ben Harper, Common, Idris Elba, the late Bishop Desmond Tutu, former president Bill Clinton and many more. Alumni serve in the highest offices of government; are among today's youngest tech sector innovators; are institution-builders organizing on the frontlines of social movements; and are decorated writers in Hollywood. They still proudly call themselves poets in whatever seat they fill in the world.

When a young poet has early opportunities to practice empathy, bravery and getting all the way free—they soar.

**“TO WRITE, TO CRAFT, TO SCULPT THE MATERIAL OF YOUR OWN IMAGINATION THROUGH LANGUAGE, IT CHANGES THE SHAPE OF YOUR REALITY: WHO YOU CAN BE, WHAT YOU CAN FEEL, THE SIZE AND CLIMATE OF YOUR DREAMS.”**



- Jackson Neal  
Choreographer, Poet, Brave New Voices Alumni



# OUR ALUMNI



**PTE SAN WIN**  
Pine Ridge, South Dakota



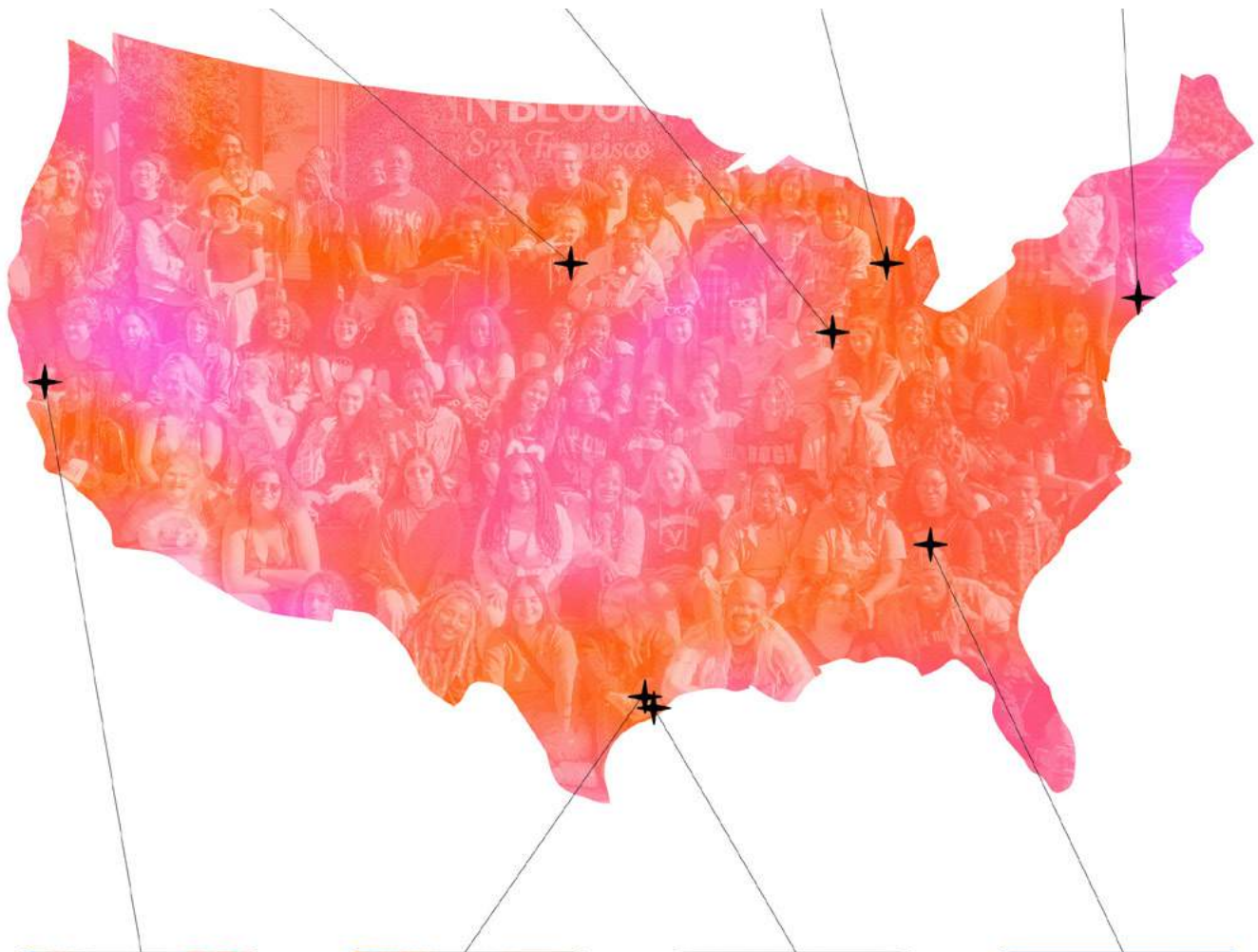
**CYDNEY EDWARDS**  
Chicago, Illinois



**DANIELLE HORTON**  
Flint, Michigan



**AJA MONET**  
New York, New York



**ALEX FRAKNOI**  
San Francisco, California



**ARIANNA LEE**  
Houston, Texas



**JACKSON NEAL**  
Houston, Texas



**NATHAN WALLACE**  
Atlanta, Georgia



**OUR  
ALUMNI  
STORY**

**"I KNOW HOW I FELT AS A YOUNG 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL EXPERIENCING MY FIRST BRAVE NEW VOICES AND THE LOVE THAT WAS POURED INTO ME. I FEEL AND KNOW THAT THE YOUTH THAT COME TO BNV ARE OUR FUTURE. I AM THEM. THEY DESERVE TO BE POURED INTO. THEY DESERVE TO BE SHOWN THE POSSIBILITIES THAT POETRY HAS TO OFFER. IT DOESN'T STOP ON A STAGE. THE WORLD IS THEIR STAGE. THE POINT WAS NEVER THE POINT. THE POINT WAS ALWAYS THE POETRY. THE WORDS THAT HOLD WEIGHT. THE LANGUAGE THAT CONNECTS US ALL. THE COMMUNITY THAT WE ALL DESPERATELY NEED."**

*-Danielle Horton*





Brave New Voices changed my life.

I've always loved to write but when I was about 15, I started taking myself more seriously. I spent hours on Youtube watching videos of HBO's Def Poetry Jam when I found what seemed was a spoken word poetry competition for young people like me it was called Brave New Voices.

I participated in Brave New Voices four years in a row: in San Francisco, Chicago, Atlanta, and Philadelphia.

There's something spiritual that happens at Brave New Voices. It's the only way I can describe it. I feel the movement, the energy being created. And because I knew that many of my people back home in Michigan would never get the chance to experience Brave New Voices (BNV), I made it my mission then to take the spirit of BNV with me everywhere I went: in the way I would love my neighbor, in the way I wanted to pour back into my community of Flint, in the way that I would take my craft seriously, because I knew this would be my tool that I'd use to change the world.

I was devastated when I left for college. Brave New Voices was all I had throughout high school and I wouldn't be able to participate. As a McNair Scholar, I researched the power of arts-education pedagogies in the prison system. I studied the power of building poetic communities and creating safe spaces inside prisons, like those that were created for me at Brave New Voices, and its impact on those who are incarcerated. I never let go of Brave New Voices. In 2019, I graduated. The next year, I had another chance to get free and applied for Youth Speaks/Brave New Voices Future Corps Fellowship program, a national arts leadership training and fellowship program for Brave New Voices' national alumni network.

After my Future Corps Fellowship, I went on to apply to become the Brave New Voices Festival Slam Coordinator, and eventually the Festival's Future Corps Fellowship Director. In 2024, I am this year's Brave New Voices Festival Co-Festival Director. My heart is truly full.

It's hard to put into words how BNV has shaped me, and continues to shape me. I know how I felt as a young 15 year old girl experiencing my first Brave New Voices. I know the love that was poured into me. I know that the younger poets and writers who come to BNV today are our future. I am them. They deserve to be poured into. They deserve to be shown the possibilities that poetry has to offer. It doesn't stop on a stage: the world is their stage. They deserve to know that. They deserve to know that the point of Brave New Voices was never the point. The point was always our poetry, and the poetry was, is, and will always be the language that connects us and a community that frees us.

-Danielle Horton

2024 Brave New Voices co-Director, 4x Brave New Voices Youth Poet



**PROGRAMS**

# CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & ARTS-IN-EDUCATION

<b>UNDER 21 OPEN MIC</b>	<b>SCHOOL VISIT ASSEMBLIES &amp; WORKSHOPS</b>
<b>TEEN POETRY SLAM</b>	<b>CREATIVE WRITING &amp; PERFORMANCE WORKSHOPS</b>
<b>SPOKES</b>	<b>BACKYARD CONFERENCE</b>
<b>MC OLYMPICS</b>	<b>UNIFIED SCHOOLS POETRY SLAM</b>
<b>SCHOOL-BASED RESIDENCIES</b>	<b>SPECIAL PROJECTS</b>

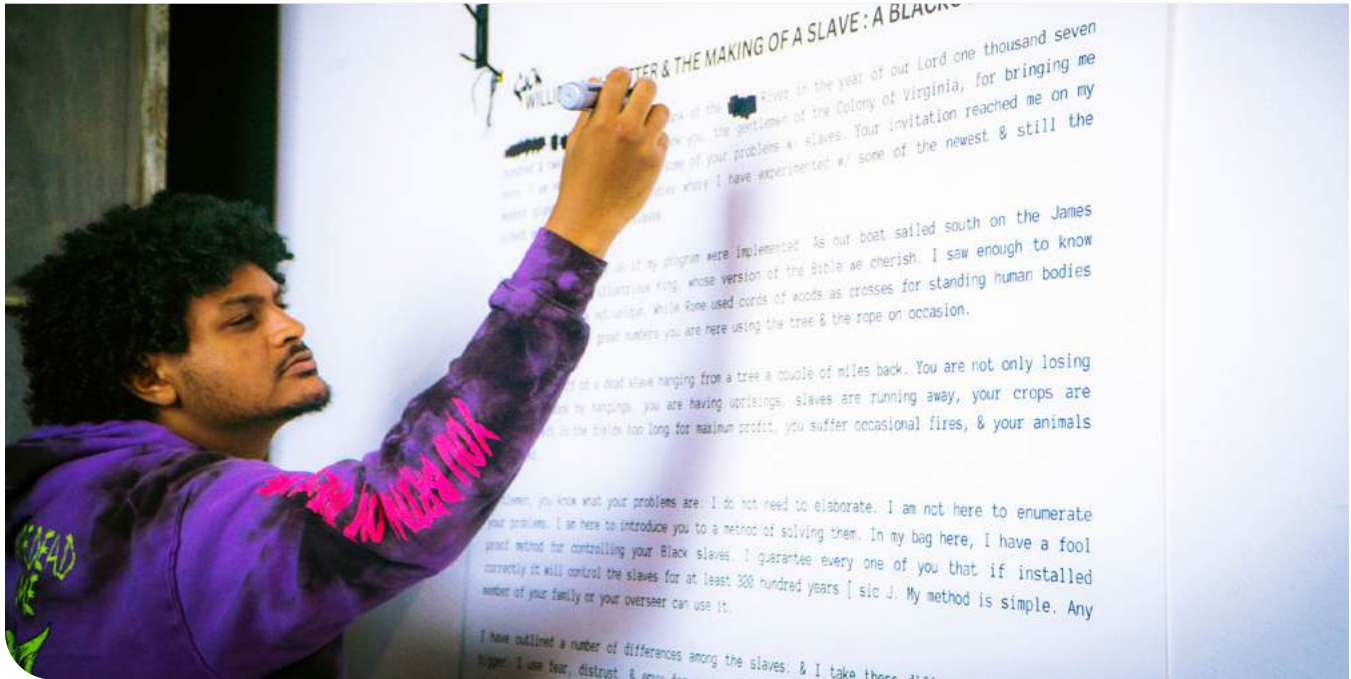
# NARRATIVE CHANGE & FIELD BUILDING

<b>BRAVE NEW VOICES YOUTH POETRY FESTIVAL</b>	<b>ARTIST REGRANTING</b>
<b>BRAVE NEW VOICES NETWORK</b>	<b>RESEARCH</b>
<b>ARTISTIC &amp; PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING</b>	<b>NARRATIVE CHANGE &amp; STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS</b>





# CREATIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT & ARTS-IN-EDUCATION



*“My favorite thing about this program was the amazing content that filled each session. I was there for two hours but I was so engaged it felt like only one.”*

-2024 In-School Residency Student

Creative Youth Development & Arts-In-Education encompasses our heart work with young people wherever they are whether that’s in our longstanding arts education school residencies, after school creative writing workshops on either side of the Bay Bridge, or our renowned Under 21 Open Mics. In the 2023-24 program year, Youth Speaks facilitated creative arts education writing workshops for young people at:

## SAN FRANCISCO & OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

- Balboa High School
- Philip & Sala Burton High School
- Galileo Academy of Science & Technology
- Lowell High School
- United for Success Academy

**400**

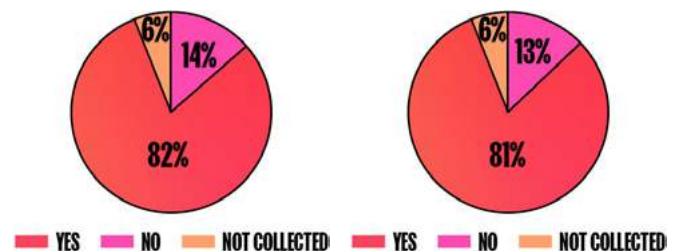
San Francisco & Oakland students participated in Youth Speaks Arts-in-Education residencies at their schools.

**79%**

of student participants said Youth Speaks programs had a positive effect on their mental health.

**84%**

of student participants said Youth Speaks programs helped them understand perspectives different from their own.



After Youth Speaks, will you prioritize self-care more in the next 12 months?

After Youth Speaks, will you care for others more in the next 12 months?



## SCHOOL-BASED RESIDENCIES & SCHOOL VISIT ASSEMBLY PROGRAM

Residencies are high-level creative writing and performance poetry workshops at local schools. Youth Speaks' Teaching Artists partner with classroom teachers in multiple subjects to engage students in arts integrated, Spoken Word Hip Hop pedagogies.

*"Each class there have been students who don't share and they are so shy or they don't have the confidence and by the end or some point in the residency they build up the confidence to share their free writing or poem. (This is a) Really special glow because it's like magic, like how'd you get this kid to say something when they never say something."*

-In-School Residency Partner Teacher





## CREATIVE WRITING & PERFORMANCE WORKSHOPS



This year, 41 youth writers in our after-school creative writing and performance workshop program made history as they honored literary ancestor Dr. Maya Angelou at the unveiling of San Francisco's newest landmark, a sculpture by artist Lava Thomas honoring the legacy and impact of San Francisco poet, Dr. Maya Angelou (1928-2014). Through a year-long creative writing and performance workshop series, youth in our "Maya Did It First" series studied the writings, speeches and autobiography of Dr. Maya Angelou. Her literary descendants, created and [presented original performance poems to celebrate the monumental occasion.](#)



Youth Speaks Participants and Performers at the Dr. Maya Angelou "Portrait of a Phenomenal Woman" Statue Unveiling



## ARTISTIC PRESENTATION & CREATIVE EXPRESSION

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Youth Speaks' monthly open mics are famous for providing emerging young writers, emcees and performers the opportunity to share and find creative community in a safe, celebratory, and affirming environment. This year, we hosted open mics in San Francisco and Oakland to meet the demand from students and teachers on both sides of the bridge.

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For nearly three decades, Youth Speaks' Annual Teen Poetry Slam has been a launching pad for spoken word poetry. This Olympic-style competition invites young Bay Area poets to showcase their talent in three-minute performances across preliminary, semi-final, and final rounds. Each year, the six top-scoring finalists earn the honor of representing the Bay Area at the annual Brave New Voices Festival and Convening, an annual celebration of extraordinary young writers and performers from across the globe.

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The Verses & Vibes showcase was re-envisioned by young emcees, lyricists, and teams of poets wanting a platform to showcase, perform, and spit their truths in community with other young artists throughout the Bay Area without competition. This showcase brings together the school spirit of Youth Speaks' Unified School District Poetry Festival and lyrical cyphers of our MC Olympics events into one spectacular evening of poetry and Hip Hop.

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SPOKES, Youth Speaks youth advisory board, is made up of ten hand-selected Bay Area youth invited to grow as cultural organizers and arts practitioners by using their leadership skills to make the world more just, liberatory, and fun for their communities.





**“TRUTH IS JUST NOT ON A POETRY STAGE,  
NOT JUST OUR PERSONAL NARRATIVES,  
BUT A TRADITION OF LIBERATION”**

- Youth Speaks Workshop Participant





A year ago, Youth Speaks launched a new initiative called Power Lab as a vehicle to activate the next generation of cultural organizers committed to studying and developing deep narratives to leverage the power of culture to influence policy, combat disinformation, and heal civic trauma. The first program to launch from the Power Lab suite of activities, infrastructure and platforms is **Public Poets**, a 9-month fellowship program that launched September 2024. As we look ahead to 2025-2026, Public Poets will train young and emerging writers and story-based artists ages 16-26 to act as essential and catalytic shapers of economic, political and cultural change. The program's Artistic Leadership and Power Building model builds on Youth Speaks' 17 years of co-designing, implementing and evaluating cultural action labs and service projects across the country.



**POWER LAB BRINGS TOGETHER YOUTH, ORGANIZERS, INDUSTRY EXPERTS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS TO LEVERAGE THE POWER OF CULTURE TO INFLUENCE POLICY, COMBAT MISINFORMATION, AND HEAL CIVIC TRAUMA. YOUTH SPEAKS CHAMPIONS IMPACT STORYTELLING, EMERGENT DATA, EVIDENCE, AND NARRATIVE FORMATION TO DEVELOP POTENT TOOLS WITH YOUTH POETS TO ADVOCATE POSITIVE CHANGE AND INSPIRING OTHERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO A BETTER WORLD.**



# NARRATIVE CHANGE & STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS





## BACKGROUND

Our project, *Information Pending Revolution*, challenged the prevailing narrative that youth are not credible messengers in public health communication. Drawing inspiration from influential youth activists like Mari Copeny and Jamie Margolin, we celebrated the transformative power of young voices in driving meaningful social change. This initiative empowered youth poets to create and share original, solutions-oriented content developed during narrative change workshops. To amplify their impact, we explored innovative distribution strategies to enhance visibility and engagement across social media, ensuring these voices reach and inspire a broader audience.

# CULTURE MOVES FASTER THAN POLICY

## OUTCOMES

- Established an ongoing partnership with the California Office of Community Partnerships and Strategic Communication to support statewide initiatives.
- Built alliances with five community-based organizations across key regions, including Sacramento, Los Angeles, Central Valley, Fresno, and broader areas throughout California.
- Amplified creative efforts to address pressing climate justice issues such as extreme heat and water conservation, fostering statewide awareness and action.
- Reached thousands through a targeted social media campaign featuring five posts, effectively raising public understanding of climate resilience and equity.



**EXTREME HEAT**  
Stunnaman02 & Frak



**WATER CONSERVATION**  
With Our Words



**CLIMATE SAFETY**  
Yoko



**UNDOCUMENTED/CLIMATE RIGHTS**  
Benjamin Lopez

Community Partnerships



LitHop









## RESEARCH

It is essential now more than ever to not let up on talking about mental wellness, resilience and recovery, a pressing issue that continues to challenge youth communities across the United States. As Gen Z and Gen Alpha youth navigate the complexities of our world, effective storytelling becomes paramount in fostering trust, identifying resilience, and building youth cultural power to act. By harnessing the power of narrative to blend data, evidence, and personal stories, Youth Speaks' most recent research project serves as a timely catalyst and call-to-action to create a more inclusive Narrative ecosystem, where the voices of youth writers, poets and storytellers are core to ongoing social change efforts.

**WE SEE YOUNG WRITERS AND STORYTELLERS AS CENTRAL TO AN INCLUSIVE NARRATIVE ECOSYSTEM—A GALAXY FULL OF CONSTELLATIONS WHERE A YOUNG POETS SHINE BRIGHT.**







# RECOVERY PENDING INFORMATION

Narrative-Based Research of Resilience, Recovery  
and Mental Wellness with Gen Z



## BACKGROUND

In the spring of 2024, Youth Speaks’ Recovery Pending Revolution (CPR3) campaign was launched to assess the effectiveness of dissemination efforts augmented by a social media influencer and a youth media partner. This initiative was a continuation of Youth Speaks’ narrative change research project “Survival Pending Revolution” carried out in September 2023 and motivated by what Youth Speaks and University of California San Francisco Medical Center saw as a gap in culture-forward public health content that youth of color felt they can trust.

## OUR RESEARCH

Over 7 months, we conducted a research partnership with UCSF and the California Department of Public Health, **and public health researchers** at UC Berkeley and UC Irvine. It aimed to address pandemic recovery for communities and enhance preparedness for future emergencies by highlighting the grassroots communications potential of youth poets of color.

## PROBLEM

### MENTAL DIS-EASE

Even though people are talking more about mental health and the stigma is decreasing, trust in medical, government, and big institutions among youth of color is still very low. Dominant stories suggest that Gen Z youth of color aren’t resilient and don’t take charge of their recovery and wellness. These views miss out on the community-driven solutions and support networks that Gen Z youth of color build and depend on during tough times.







**Gen Z is significantly more likely** to report experiencing anxiety and depression compared to previous generations.



**84%** of Gen Zers believe mental health is a crisis in the United States, with **65%** reporting at least one mental health problem in the past two years.

Annie Casey Foundation, 2024



Most Gen Zers, aged 12 to 27, are in a key developmental stage, facing cognitive, biological, and psychosocial changes that heighten mental health risks.



Approximately 75% of mental illnesses emerge **between ages 10 and 24**.

Annie Casey Foundation, 2024



African American youth exhibit significant mistrust towards medical and public health institutions **due to systemic racism and pandemic-era barriers** to testing and treatment.

Best et al., 2020



The **COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing distrust** in government and public health responses among young people of color, who perceive these institutions as untrustworthy.

Best et al., 2020



## OUR SOLUTION

We brought together Gen Z youth of color artists and health professionals to develop culturally affirming messages. We studied the effectiveness of incorporating artistic storytelling into public health messaging. Many young people in our programs were grappling with the intersections between challenges such as loneliness, mental health wellness, and socioeconomic factors, including housing and economic struggles. Finding holistic, story-centered recovery strategies was one of our goals.



## OUR STORIES

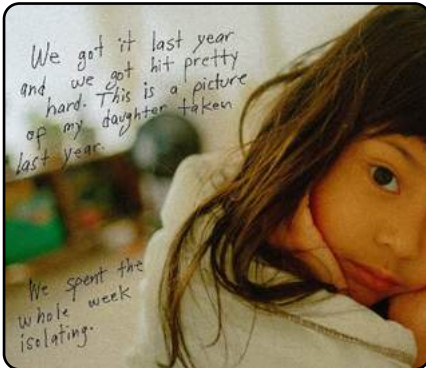
Young poets who participated in Recovery Pending Information shared grappling with the need to support themselves, families, communities, and their futures amidst the challenges of COVID-19 recovery and resilience. Their stories reflect their cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and their keen grasp of science and history. Poet cohorts shared how medical systems have historically failed BIPOC communities and their families. Youth poets in the health story circles (focus groups) were not only culturally-informed but also grounded in science, adding valuable perspectives to evolving discussions about COVID-19 and future recovery and resilience efforts. Stories of economic insecurity and burden, mental health struggles, grief, physical isolation, and digital rituals (versus human, in-person mourning ceremonies) were discussed during the workshops, highlighting the multifaceted impact of the pandemic on young lives and surfacing “hard-to-see” moments where BIPOC youth are clearly practicing resilience strategies.





# HIGHLIGHTS

*Click images to view*



## TWENTY BIPOC YOUTH WRITERS

created a new art/campaign to support recovery efforts, helping public health and youth programs better assist future youth of color with the personal and collective impacts of COVID-19

## SIX REELS

made with three social media influencers, the campaign showed increased engagement compared to Survival Pending Revolution

## FIVE YOUTH COHORTS

for a total of 13 narrative change workshops

## TWO ANIMATIONS AND FILMS

## TWELVE UNIQUE POEMS





## METHODOLOGY





Youth Speaks has crafted foundational narratives and perspectives on mental wellness, recovery, and resilience through an eight-month collaboration with a diverse group of contributors. These narratives, rooted in personal experiences, beliefs, data, evidence, and storytelling, are designed to inspire future creative projects and meaningful action.



# CORE NARRATIVES & CORE BELIEFS



<p><b>PARTIAL NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>Gen Z aren't reliable or informed public messengers.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth are inexperienced and need guidance from older people and institutions.</li> <li>Youth spread mis/disinformation and are unreliable fact-checkers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>WHOLE NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>We're savvy navigators of information platforms and mis/dis information.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That's cap.</li> <li>We're smarter about information platforms than most adults we know. "News" isn't just on tv anymore.</li> </ul> <p><b>Big Story</b>  <a href="#">Gen-Z Demand Racial Justice, Not Just Diversity, Equity And Inclusion From Brands</a></p>



<p><b>PARTIAL NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>Gen Z are passive victims of the world.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth don't have the power or know-how to rise above personal or societal barriers.</li> <li>Youth are unable to achieve success without other people's support.</li> </ul> <p><b>Big Story</b>  <a href="#">The Battle Over Gen Z Minds—Sad, Bad Or Mad?</a></p>
<p><b>WHOLE NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>Our mental health struggles are also teaching us resilience practices.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We aren't helpless—we're skeptical about racism and unfair systems.</li> <li>Staying true to and not denying my pain is what's getting me through life's crises.</li> </ul> <p><b>Big Story</b>  <a href="#">What Gen Z Can Teach Us About the Power of Voice</a></p>



## CORE NARRATIVES & CORE BELIEFS

<p><b>PARTIAL NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>Gen Z is a lonely generation without tools to make healthy connections.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Youth don't have social skills to connect with people outside of games and the internet.</li><li>• Youth are stuck in depression with no self-help skills.</li></ul> <p><b>Big Story</b></p> <p><a href="#">Gen Z is loneliest generation, as young people yearn for more meaningful friendships, experts say</a></p>
<p><b>WHOLE NARRATIVES</b></p> 	<p><b>We value intergenerational connections but it's hard to learn how to relate when we don't see it enough in the world.</b></p> <p><b>Core Beliefs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some of the safest parts of our lives are when we are connected to elders and kids younger than us.</li><li>• We feel strongest when we're connected but aren't really taught what solidarity with other groups has looked like throughout history.</li></ul> <p><b>Big Story</b></p> <p><a href="#">Connection matters for Gen Z, but they're not sure they deserve love</a></p>





*“When I first experienced Youth Speaks, it really showed me a different way of approaching other things and also made me really think about society and things nowadays. I feel like my attitude about speaking and writing changed because I feel like I am able to fully express myself through my writing.”*

-Youth Speaks Program Participant





# IMPACT

# 85%

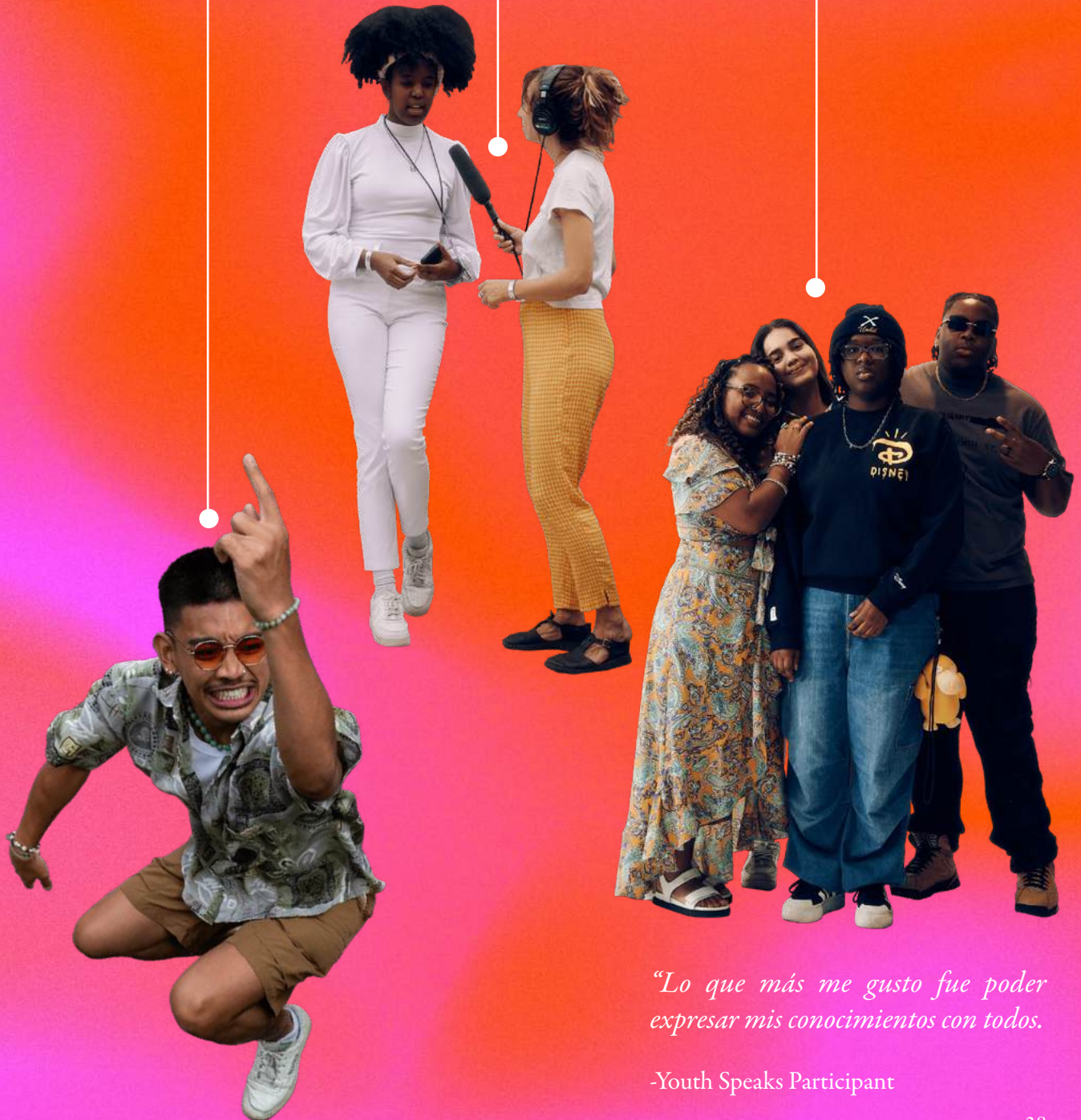
of attendees say Youth Speaks events had a positive effect on their mental health

# 84%

of participants say school-based programs helped youth understand perspectives other than their own

# 80%

of youth participants were inspired to show more care for others



*“Lo que más me gusto fue poder expresar mis conocimientos con todos.”*

-Youth Speaks Participant



# 82%

of surveyed youth expressed that participating in weekly Youth Speaks programs inspired them to practice self-care

# 121

hours of narrative change learning opportunities offered by Youth Speaks staff

# 294

hours of public storytelling workshops provided to youth & emerging artists





# DIGITAL



“My favorite part is seeing a lot of people of color partake in this and have different stories to share.”

- Nyah, Youth Speaks Participant

**8,459,584**

engagements across all social media platforms in 2023-2024

**148k**

Total Social Media Followers

**14k**

New Followers

**6.8M**

Reached on Social Media

**4M**

TikTok Views

**71K+**

Tik Tok Followers

**2.1M**

Youtube Views

**259K+**

Youtube Subscribers

**232K**

Website Page Views



# FINANCIAL REPORT

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Consolidated  
Statement of  
Financial  
Position

## ASSETS

Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$603,368.14
Receivables	\$1,506,070.00
Investments, at Market Value	\$3,293,021.32
Fixed Assets	\$34,314.29
Property	\$1,794,844.43
Prepaid Expenses, Inventory Assets Deposits	\$714,099.71
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$9,087,414.19</b>

## LIABILITIES

**\$895,348.96**

## NET ASSETS

Without Donor Restrictions	\$5,770,947.94
With Donor Restrictions	\$1,279,420.99
Total Net Assets	\$7,050,368.93
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>\$7,945,717.89</b>

## SUPPORT & REVENUE

Contributions & Grants	\$2,220,478.53
Fee-for-Service, Registration & Ticket Sales	\$100,608.43
Net Assets Temporarily Restricted	-\$185,000.00
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	\$2,294,262.96
Total Support & Revenue Before Gains on Investments & Other Assets	\$4,430,349.92
Gain or Loss on Investment	\$136,802.61
<b>Total Support</b>	<b>\$4,567,152.53</b>

Consolidated  
Statement of  
Activities

## OPERATING EXPENSES

Programs	\$2,320,262.99
<b>Supporting Expenses</b>	
Fundraising	\$386,633.45
Marketing	\$290,180.07
Administration	\$834,655.15
Facilities	\$59,685.30
<b>Total Operating &amp; Supporting Expenses</b>	<b>\$3,891,416.96</b>

## NET INCOME

**\$675,735.57**

\* Financials are unaudited



# FINANCIAL REPORT

## RESTRICTED/UNRESTRICTED

Temp. Restricted Net Assets	\$1,279,420.99
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$5,090,578.37

## INCOME & REVENUE

\$4,567,152.53

## STATEMENT OF FUNCTION EXPENSE

Programs	\$2,320,262.99
Management & General (Marketing, Administration, Facilities)	\$1,184,520.52
Fundraising	\$386,633.45





# WHAT WE'RE LEARNING





## YOUTH OF COLOR, SOCIAL MEDIA & DIGITAL SPACE

Youth Speaks' pedagogy has evolved to fit the needs of young people in classrooms, theaters and communities. Youth with limited or no access to arts programming in their local communities benefit from Youth Speaks' digital presence and exposure to free livestream arts education programs like our Under 21 Open Mic, After School Creative Writing Workshops and Teen Poetry Slam. By leveraging digital tools and strategies, we seek to enhance the effectiveness and reach of our programs, ensuring that young people are engaged, educated, and empowered to foster empathy in their communities. We're learning that not only are young people "on social," youth, especially youth of color, are extraordinary bridgers of technological innovation and cultural expression. We're exploring how Youth Speaks can support building back in-person arts-based experiences, while evolving with technologies that that many of our youth views as enriching aspects of their daily lives.

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Around **95% of young people** between the ages of 13–17 use at least one social media platform. More than one-third of those report using social media nearly constantly.

-Medical News Today June 2023

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Kids as young as **8** are using social media more than ever.

- Common Sense Media

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Although technology use increased across the board, screen use was **highest among kids from low-income families as well as children of color.**

-Devorah Heitner



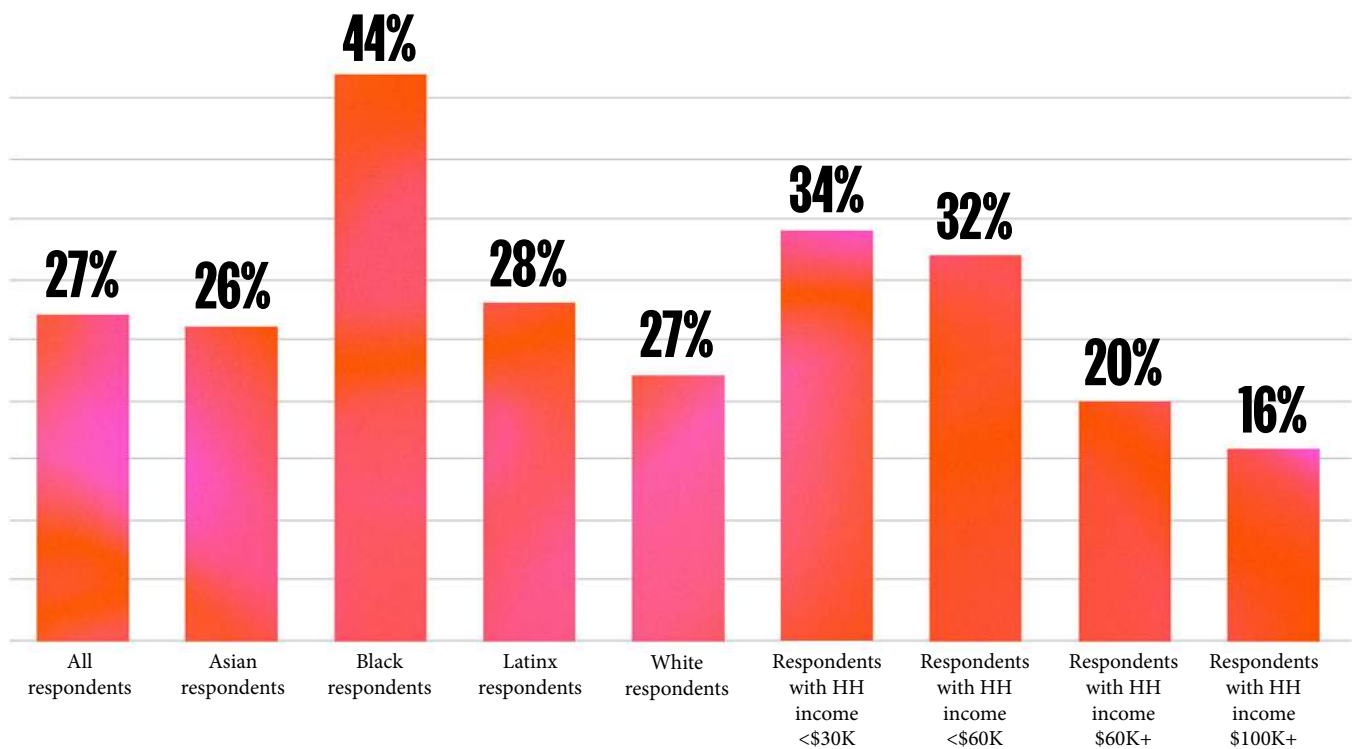


## YOUTH ARE RETHINKING TRUST

Despite their passion for political issues like climate change and gun control, only **19% of young people trust the government to do what is right.**<sup>1</sup>

Survey data of Millennials and Gen Zers demonstrate a disconnect between young adults and government that is most acutely prevalent for individuals from communities of color and households roughly below the median income.

## SHARE OF RESPONDENTS THAT SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY DISAGREED WITH STATEMENT, “GENERALLY, I FEEL LIKE A FULL AND EQUAL CITIZEN IN THIS COUNTRY WITH ALL THE RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS THAT OTHER PEOPLE HAVE.”<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Ashley Spillane, Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School “Celebrities Strengthening Our Culture of Democracy: A Study On The Impact Of Celebrity Engagement On Civic Participation” 2024  
<https://thenext100.org/new-next100-and-genforward-survey-reveals-young-adults-lack-trust-in-a-government-that-feels-distant>

<sup>2</sup>A 2024 Next100 and GenForward national survey and report on Gen Z and Millennial young adults’ views on political participation, trust in government and their views on the state of democracy. Link to report “Young Adults Think America’s Political System Isn’t Working (Report By GenForward And Next100)”: <https://genforwardsurvey.com/2024/08/23/genforwardnext100aug2024/>

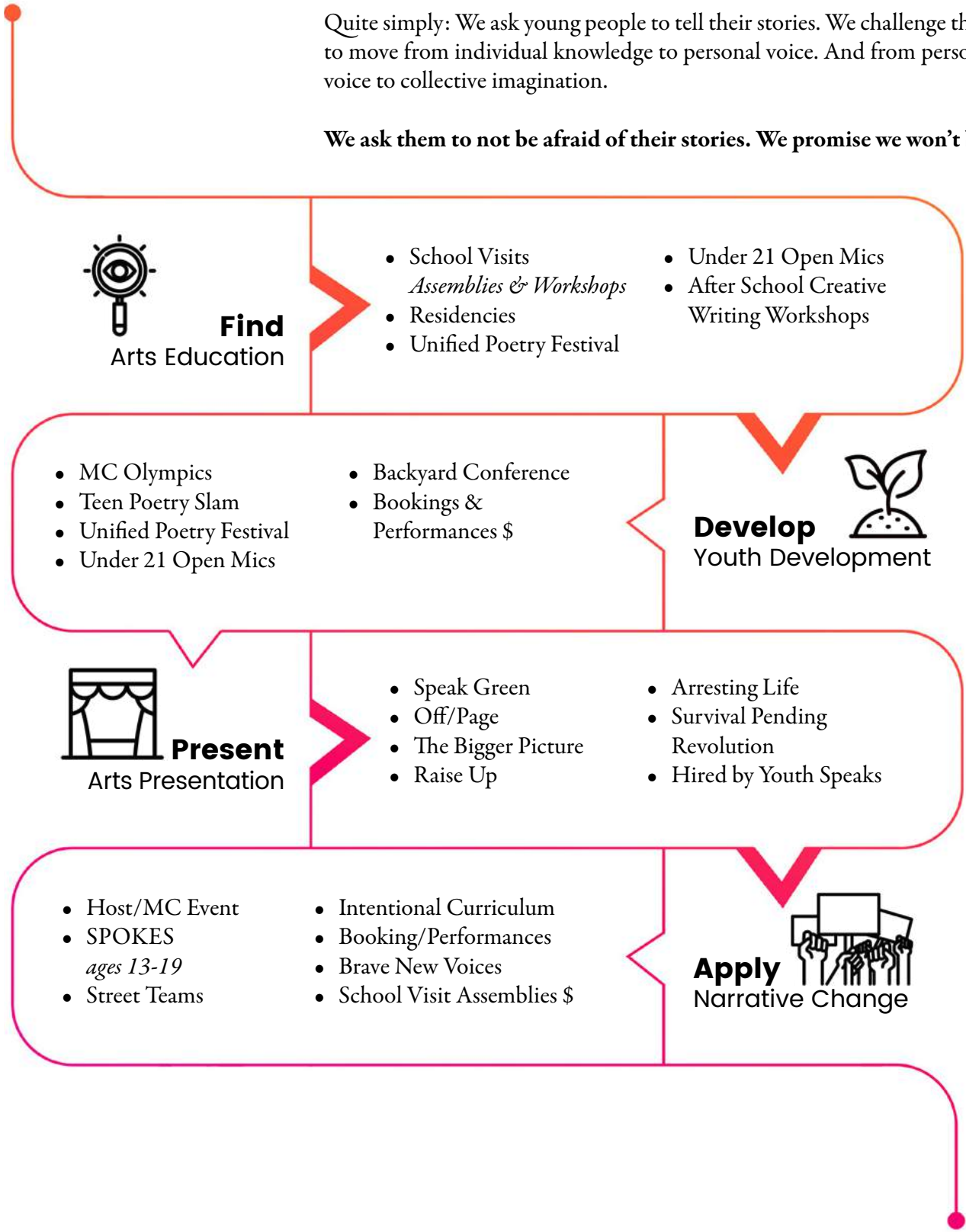


# OUR MODEL

At Youth Speaks, we believe the voices of young people matter. We believe that our success is in part due to our unique 4-stage process that we don't teach poetry or even spoken word. Our mission includes facilitating brave spaces where young people can be, as they are, however they come to us, and each other.

Quite simply: We ask young people to tell their stories. We challenge them to move from individual knowledge to personal voice. And from personal voice to collective imagination.

**We ask them to not be afraid of their stories. We promise we won't be.**



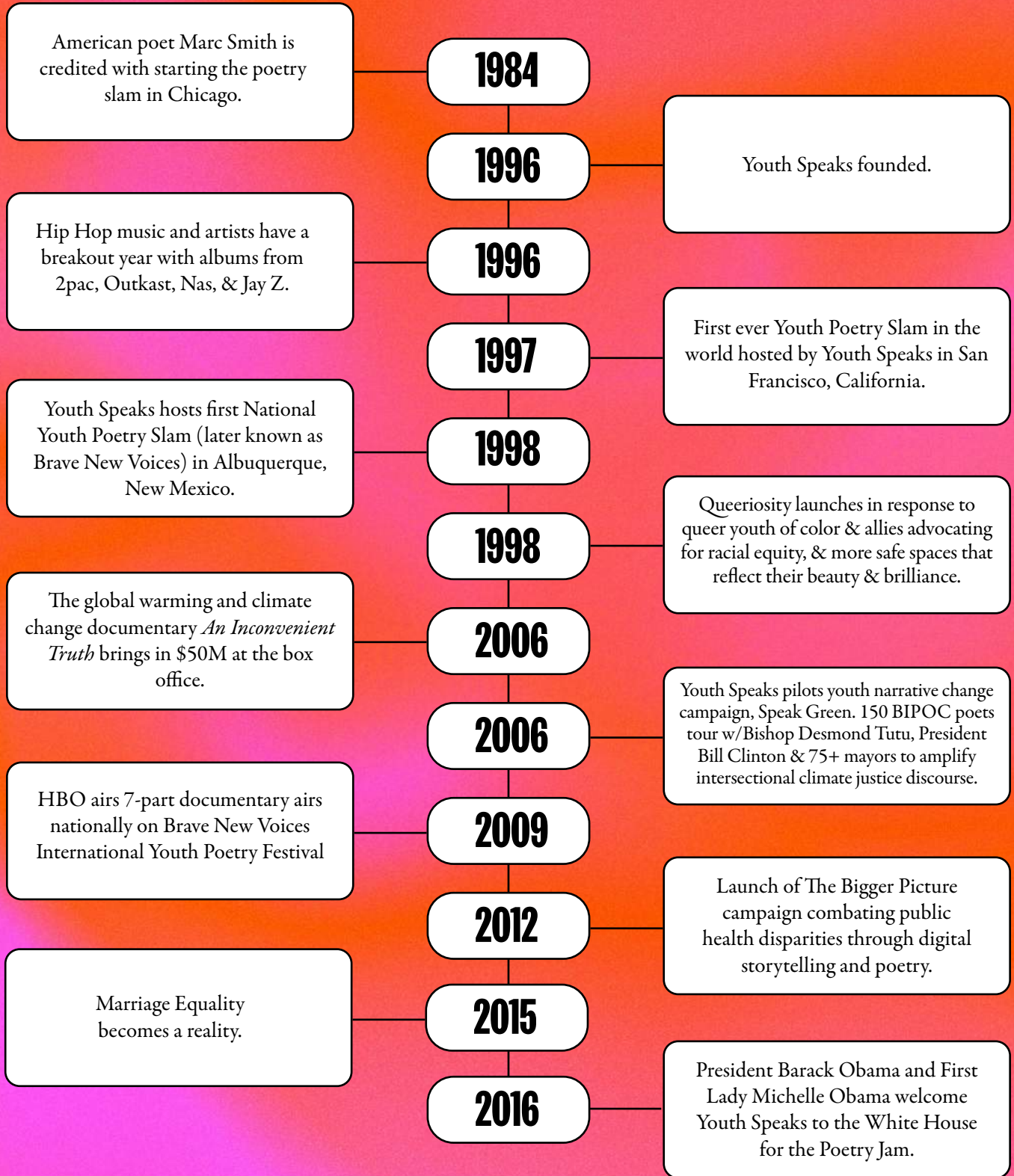




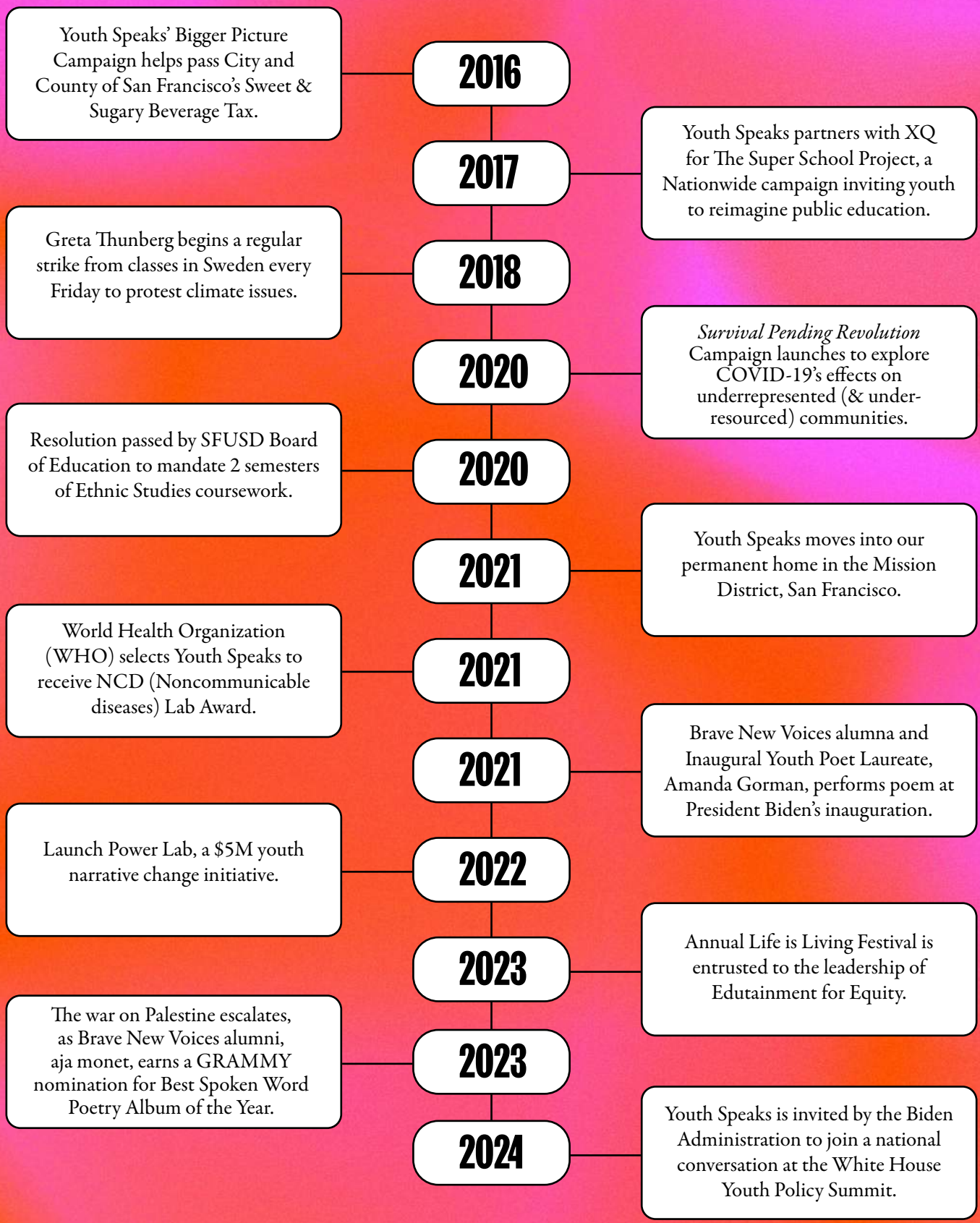


# TIMELINE of YOUTH SPEAKS

For nearly three decades, Youth Speaks has witnessed the power and potential of youth voices when they feel safe enough to be heard, and seen. Through our culturally affirming youth development pedagogy and our fierce belief that the next generation speaks for itself, we've created enduring programs and youth-led campaigns that continue to resonate and precede cultural change.









# TEAM



Michelle Lee



Joan Osato



Stephanie Cajina



Darius Rashad Parker



Bijou McDaniel



Nick James



Annie Jupiter-Jones



Paola Ramirez



Perla Barraza



Gretchen Carvajal



Aleah Bradshaw



Leticia Guzman



Vania Luna Gutierrez



Bridgette Yang



Jose Portillo



Maximiliano Urruzmendi



Brandon Gagante



Mubeenah Wishnoff



England Smith



Freddy Gutierrez



Tierra Lu



## BOARD



Renée Dupree



Corey Ponder



Chinaka Hodge



Tony Francis



Tim Haydock



Evan Bissell



Jen Heifferon



Emily Leys



Alyson Palmer



Steve Cox



Cesar Luna



Laura Brief

## SPOKES



Aris



Betty



Lilth



Mahder



Mei



Sareena



Vee



Sam



Zoe



Viv



# STAY CONNECTED

[YOUTHSPEAKS.ORG](http://YOUTHSPEAKS.ORG)



DONATE TO  
YOUTH SPEAKS



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YOUTH-SPEAKS







**BECAUSE  
THE NEXT  
GENERATION  
SPEAKS  
FOR ITSELF**