

"We are all here to serve each other. At some point we have to understand that we do not need to carry a story that is unbearable. We can observe the story, which is mental; feel the story, which is physical; let the story go, which is emotional; then forgive the story, which is spiritual, after which we use the materials of it to build a house of knowledge."

—Joy Harjo, Poet Warrior: A Memoir

"Each day has a story that deserves to be told, because we are made of stories. I mean, scientists say that human beings are made of atoms, but a little bird told me that we are also made of stories."

—Eduardo Galeano

?

"A revolution based on the people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind"

—Grace Lee Boggs

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Word: a single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others or sometimes alone to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed.

!!!!!!

Word: a command, password, or signal. "someone gave me the word to start playing"

Word: one's account of the truth, especially when it differs from that of another person.

Word: used to express agreement.

"Attention is vitality. It connects you with others. It makes you eager. Stay eager."

—Susan Sontag

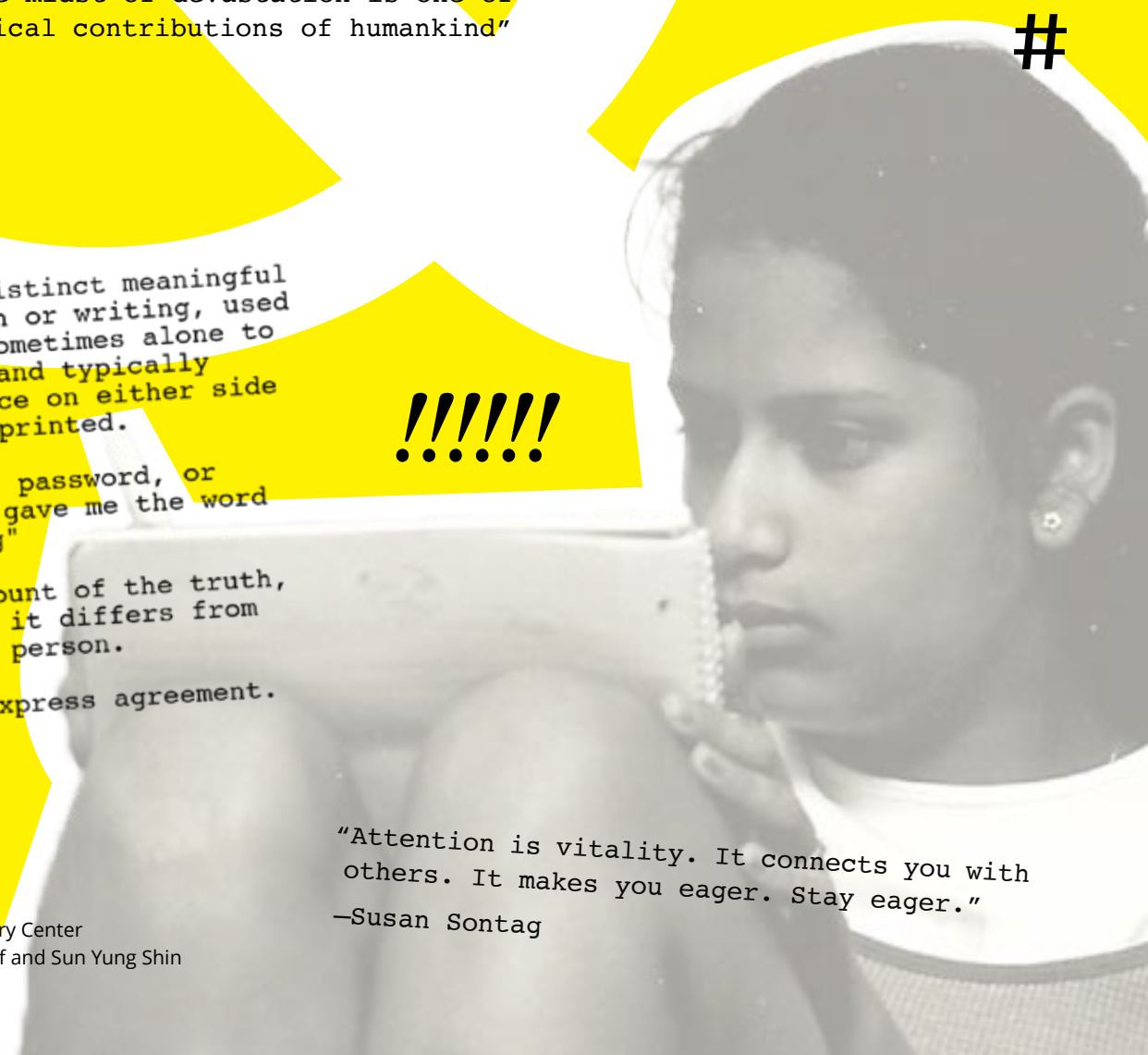




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LETTER FROM THE LOFT'S EXECUTIVE & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

DEAR LOFT COMMUNITY,

We have a new mission! We are excited to share this journey with you. As you will see in the pages of this document, our new mission, vision, and values build on the Loft's literary legacy and evolve our commitment to craft and community.

We have always believed in the power of the word! The Loft began as a writing workshop, grew into a community school and presenter, and has become a beacon of literary community that is known and celebrated locally and nationally. Our contributions to craft are clear in our legacy. Now, as the sanctity of life in our streets and on our planet is threatened, we explicitly commit ourselves to being an antiracist, multicultural institution and to building just, life-sustaining communities. We believe in the power of language, the cultural practices of sharing stories, and the importance of conversation to counter oppression and dehumanization, to bridge our divides, and to help us to build an essential resilience. We recognize the vital necessity of the work of writers not only to enrich our understanding of each other and the challenges that we face but to nourish our imaginations and inspire our movements for people and planet.

We are better together! Now, more than ever, we are committed to developing clear pathways for deepening authentic engagement with you, the individuals and organizations that define our community. Our many partnerships are imbued

with opportunity and vital to the accomplishment of our mission. Our connections in community range from our extensive relationships with writers and teaching artists; to strategic alliances in which the Loft stewards its resources to support solidarity with other BIPOC-led and immigrant-led organizations; from our creative writing program and fellowship funding partners; to our sponsors and promotional partners; from our co-locating partners to our collaborative partners in the founding and leadership of Open Book.

We are still learning! We recognize the need to innovate and evolve in ongoing dialogue with you. We want to get better at being together, inclusive, and prosperous. The next five years will bring evolutions in our use of digital platforms and learning tools and in our approach to feedback and exchange. We will experiment. We will create circles and councils for input and accountability. And we will share important learnings as we go.

We are here because you, our beloved community, believed the Loft into being! And still, the Loft is sustained by both your creative gifts and your generous donations.

This is the moment for our new mission. We dedicate the next chapter in our story to you!

Arleta Little
Executive & Artistic Director

Melinda Ward
Board Chair

MISSION

THE LOFT ADVANCES THE POWER OF WRITERS AND READERS TO CRAFT AND SHARE STORIES, TO CREATE AND CELEBRATE CONNECTIONS, AND TO BUILD JUST, LIFE-SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES.

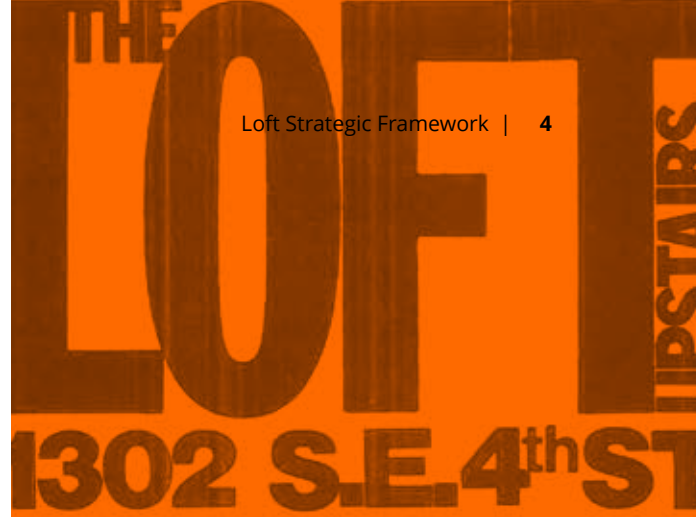
VISION

We envision a world where the power of the word liberates minds, deepens relationships, and inspires movements for people and planet.

As an antiracist organization, the Loft develops literary experiences for writers, readers, and storytellers because racism dehumanizes people, and poetry and stories deepen our connection to our shared humanity. Recognizing the relationship between race, power, and resources, we prioritize the engagement of BIPOC and marginalized communities and work for the equitable distribution of our power and resources.

"Outside, the sun was hot and heavy as a hand on my back. I felt it flow down my arms, out my fingers, arrowing through the ends of the fork into the earth. With every root I prized up there was return, as if I was kin to its secret lesson."

—Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*



"Is it possible to sustain life? Can we embrace an ethos of sustainability that is not solely about the appropriate care of the world's resources, but is also about the creation of meaning—the making of lives that we feel are worth living."

—bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*



CORE VALUES

CREATIVITY

We advance the craft and capacity of writers to create across diverse forms and platforms. We are adaptive and cultivate the conditions that allow for our imaginations and our humanity to thrive.

CONNECTION

Our literary experiences cultivate belonging and inclusivity. We recognize our interdependence and accountability to community. We draw on the wisdom of our ancestors to build resilience and consider the impact of our actions on future generations.

JUSTICE

We recognize that oppression, colonization, and extractive economies threaten life in our communities and on our planet. We are committed to antiracist, equitable, and life-sustaining practices in our literary offerings and our approach to work.

CARE

We center people and promote a culture of wellness in all aspects of our work.

CURIOSITY


We play, practice, and experiment. We recognize that joy and ongoing learning are necessary for innovation, restoration, and resilience.

COURAGE

We meet discomfort, fear, complexity, anxiety, trauma, and uncertainty with radical openness, generosity of spirit, and love. We continually evolve our skillfulness. We recognize the value of generative conflict. We cultivate trust-based relationships with people and values-based relationships with money.

Photo: Loft's Equilibrium Supershow by Anna Min featuring Patricia Smith, Regie Cabico, Bao Phi, Emmanuel Ortiz, Lorena Duarte, Hieu Minh Nguyen, Tatiana Ormaza, Marcie Rendon, Diego Vázquez Jr, Tish Jones, Marisa Carr, Christy NaMee Eriksen, R. Vincent Moniz, Jr., Rodrigo Sanchez-Chavarria, Khary Jackson, Juliana Hu Pegues, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, David Mura, Electric Gemini Bailey, Shá Cage, Danez Smith, Danny Solis, Ed Bok Lee, Saymoukda Duangphouxay Vongsay, Douglas Kearney, Ka Vang, Nimo H. Farah, Moheb Soliman, Guante, IBé, Andrea Jenkins, Patricia Nazirah Mickey, Tou SaiKo Lee, Tara Betts, Louis "Babalu" Alemayehu, Frank Sentwali, and DJ Nak.






"Our generation must walk the spiritual path that is available to us only in this time, with its own unique combination of wisdom and creation. I think there are many ways to find that simple path within ourselves, and I think that those of us who wish to see a truly, radically different world must demand of ourselves the possibility that we are called to lead not from right to left, or from minority to majority, but from spirit towards liberation."

—adrienne maree brown, Emergent Strategy

OUR TRANSFORMATIONAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

1. ANTIRACISM
2. EQUITY & ACCESS
3. AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
4. LEARNING & INNOVATION
5. ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING



"I joined and helped create organizations, political and cultural, to work at the social transformation I sought. I wrote poetry and essays and plays and stories towards this end as well. It was, and I am still certain of this, part of the same work."

—Amiri Baraka, Amiri Baraka Reader



Photo: Claudia Rankine
by Anna Min



1. ANTIRACISM

GOAL: The Loft develops literary experiences that are antiracist, culturally competent, and diverse.

STRATEGIES:

- Increase the engagement of BIPOC and marginalized teaching artists, authors, and strategic partners in the design, content creation, and implementation of Loft offerings.
- Increase the engagement of BIPOC and marginalized teaching artists, authors, and strategic partners in application/proposal development, review, and selection.
- Orient and train Loft teaching artists in antiracist values and practices that cultivate trust, accountability, and belonging in creative, multicultural spaces.
- Increase systems of feedback, support, and quality control for Loft teaching artists, presenters, and participants.

THE LOFT'S COMMITMENT TO ANTIRACISM

The Loft's ongoing commitment to being an antiracist organization means that everyone within the Loft community—staff, board, teaching artists, students, audience members, and other program participants—share the responsibility of cultivating an equitable classroom, conference, festival, and event learning environment. We ask that every Loft community member help to create spaces that reflect our shared antiracist and equity-based values, as articulated above and in our code of conduct.

THE LOFT RECOGNIZES:

- Racism within the U.S. was developed to provide and sustain social and economic advantages for people of European/white culture and descent (white supremacy).

- Racism has played a definitive role in the history of our country and communities as well as in the development and perpetuation of our institutions. Factors such as anti-Blackness, land theft and genocide, racialized xenophobia, colonization, exploitation of labor and resources, and state sanctioned violence at home and abroad are not only embedded in the country's history, but baked into structures and practices that persist to this day.
- Racism expresses via individual beliefs and actions, institutional policies and practices, as well as cultural norms and societal systems.
- Within arts and cultural institutions racism often manifests as biases for European/white aesthetics and cultural expression within institutional programs, operations, policies, and practices.
- Systemic racism negatively impacts every indicator of quality life for people of color including health, education, economic prosperity, housing, etc.
- Oppression is intersectional and manifests across identities (including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class) within the systems of white supremacy, imperialism, patriarchy, heterosexism, and capitalism.
- Racism dehumanizes and traumatizes. The power of language and the cultural practice of sharing stories can restore, heal, and reconcile.

AS AN ANTIRACIST ORGANIZATION, THE LOFT IS COMMITTED TO:

- Participating in the active, daily practice of dismantling the individual and societal systems, institutions, actions, and beliefs that oppress and marginalize individuals, groups of color, and Indigenous peoples.
- Ongoing learning and continuing to evolve an analysis of race and racism that informs the equitable (see next page) stewardship of the Loft's resources. This includes rigorously examining and deconstructing existing practices and structures for barriers to participation, especially as they may pertain to people such as American Indian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous, Black, Asian, Latinx, Arab, Middle Eastern, mixed race, and other

marginalized people. We recognize this means there is no one size fits all policy that will solve ours or everyone's problems, and that we must remain nimble, proactive, and collaborative.

- Contributing to the development of all writers and to building communities that help them thrive.
- Building capacity and shared understanding to achieve these goals among Loft staff, board, contract artists, partners, and constituents.
- Amplifying and celebrating stories from diverse cultural communities, with particular care and commitment to the voices of oppressed peoples.
- Generating literary experiences that cultivate belonging, connectedness, wholeness, and an appreciation of the diverse cultures in our community. This includes holding space, whether this be a performance or a class, and defining it as a place where challenging ideas and meaningful, respectful debate can happen. At the same time, remaining vigilant to end the harm that can be caused in these spaces, particularly to historically marginalized communities by the dominant white majority.
- Maintaining accountable relationships with our community.
- Fostering mutually beneficial collaborations and partnerships that advance the agency and power of oppressed peoples and communities.
- Building solidarity with individuals and organizations committed to undoing racism and other systems of oppression.

Embodying the Work

In the past, the Loft has relied on external consultants to guide our antiracism work. We are shifting to embody the knowledge and skills necessary to be an antiracist, multicultural organization. We have accelerated our capacity to implement antiracism and equity by establishing related knowledge and skills requirements in our hiring practices and by investing in team members with lived experience for key leadership and staff positions. We will take a staged approach to training our team and key partners in the work.



2. EQUITY & ACCESS

Equity is about access, power, and resources. In accordance with our vision, we are working to increasingly share power and resources with our partners in the work, especially writers and teaching artists from BIPOC and marginalized communities. To advance equity and access, the Loft will conduct an equity review of our financial practices and pay structures for teaching artists and team members. While the Loft will continue to offer programs and services at various price points, we will work to establish free, reduced, and sliding fee offerings for programming. We will increase the availability of funds to underwrite the participation of students in need, especially BIPOC and marginalized writers. We will leverage our space, staffing, and other resources in support of our strategic partners.

GOAL: The Loft offers economically equitable and accessible programs, services, and events.

STRATEGIES:

- Define equitable and just financial practices at the Loft
- Increase the availability and awareness of free, reduced, and sliding fee cost structures for Loft offerings
- Optimize Loft partnerships and collaborations to advance equity and access
- Increase the availability of access funding for BIPOC and marginalized writers
- Establish equitable pay

“A scientist’s data are influenced by the questions she asks, which are steered by her imagination, which is delimited by her senses. The boundaries of our own Umwelt corral our ability to understand the Umwelten of others.”
—Ed Yong, *An Immense World*

The Loft’s Definition of Equity

The Loft defines equity as the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some individuals or groups. Equity does NOT assume everyone is starting from the same place, with the same needs; instead, equity involves trying to understand and meet people where they are, provide them with what they need to succeed based on their lived experiences and the ways in which they and their communities have been marginalized and oppressed.

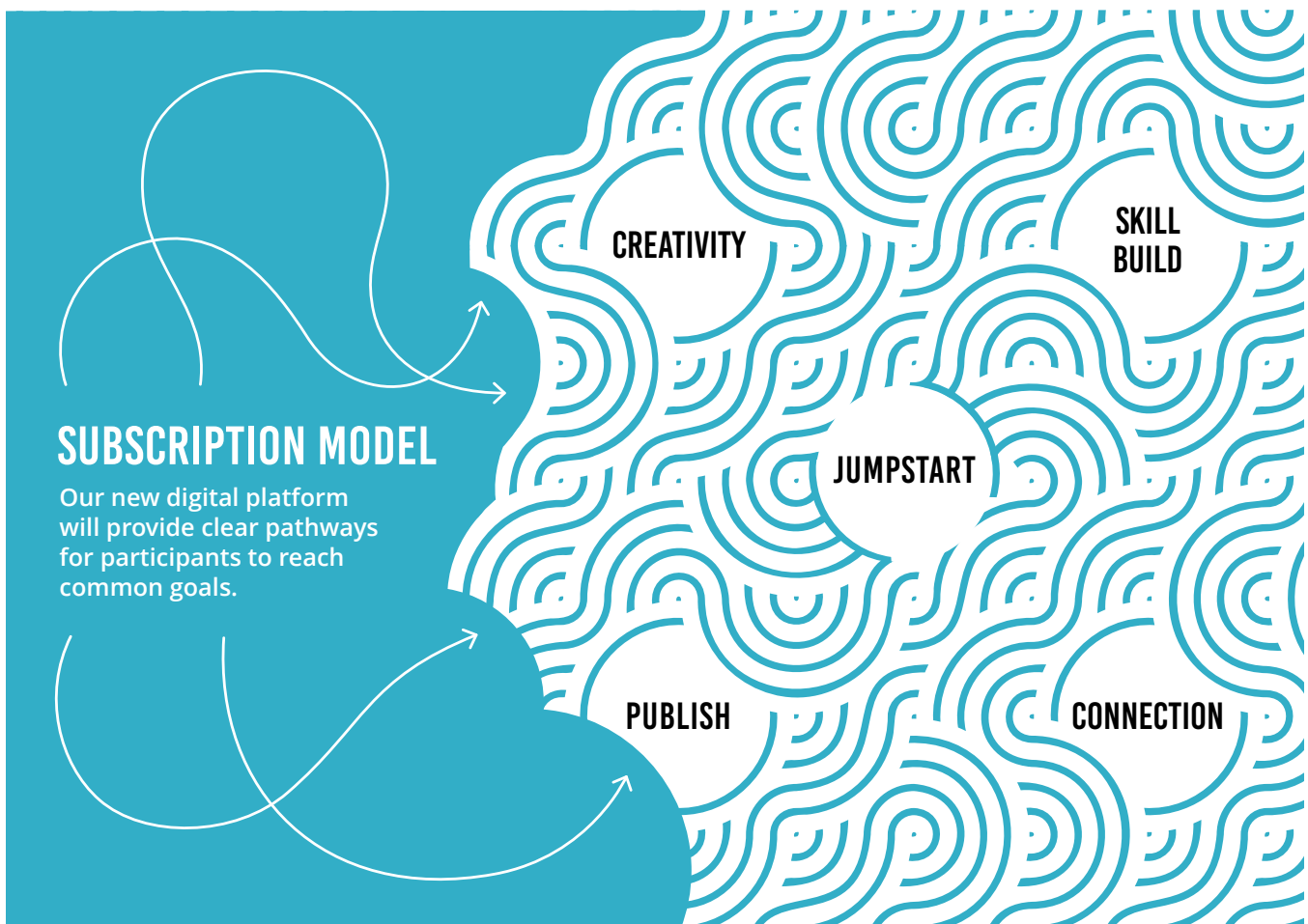
3. ENGAGEMENT PATHWAYS

We will develop clear pathways to support our writers, teaching artists, and partners to accomplish their goals in relationship with the Loft. These new pathways will advance learners' skills with craft; engage BIPOC and marginalized writers across our programs and services; connect writers and readers with each other; and enable constituents to contribute ongoing and meaningful support. We will leverage technology to broaden our community and deepen our engagement. Our new digital platform and subscription model will support Loft learners in advancing their craft; Loft teaching artists in designing content and growing audiences; and writers, readers, and event goers to convene in virtual communities.

GOAL: The Loft builds pathways that increase authentic community engagement.

STRATEGIES:

- Design and implement clear engagement pathways for BIPOC and marginalized communities
- Design and implement clear engagement pathways for deepening participation (frequency and duration – new, dabbler to devotee)
- Design and implement clear engagement pathways for increasing skills development (writers advancing knowledge and competence with craft – emerging to advanced)
- Design and implement clear engagement pathways for increasing support from individuals (volunteers, members, donors, major donors, legacy)



4. LEARNING & INNOVATION

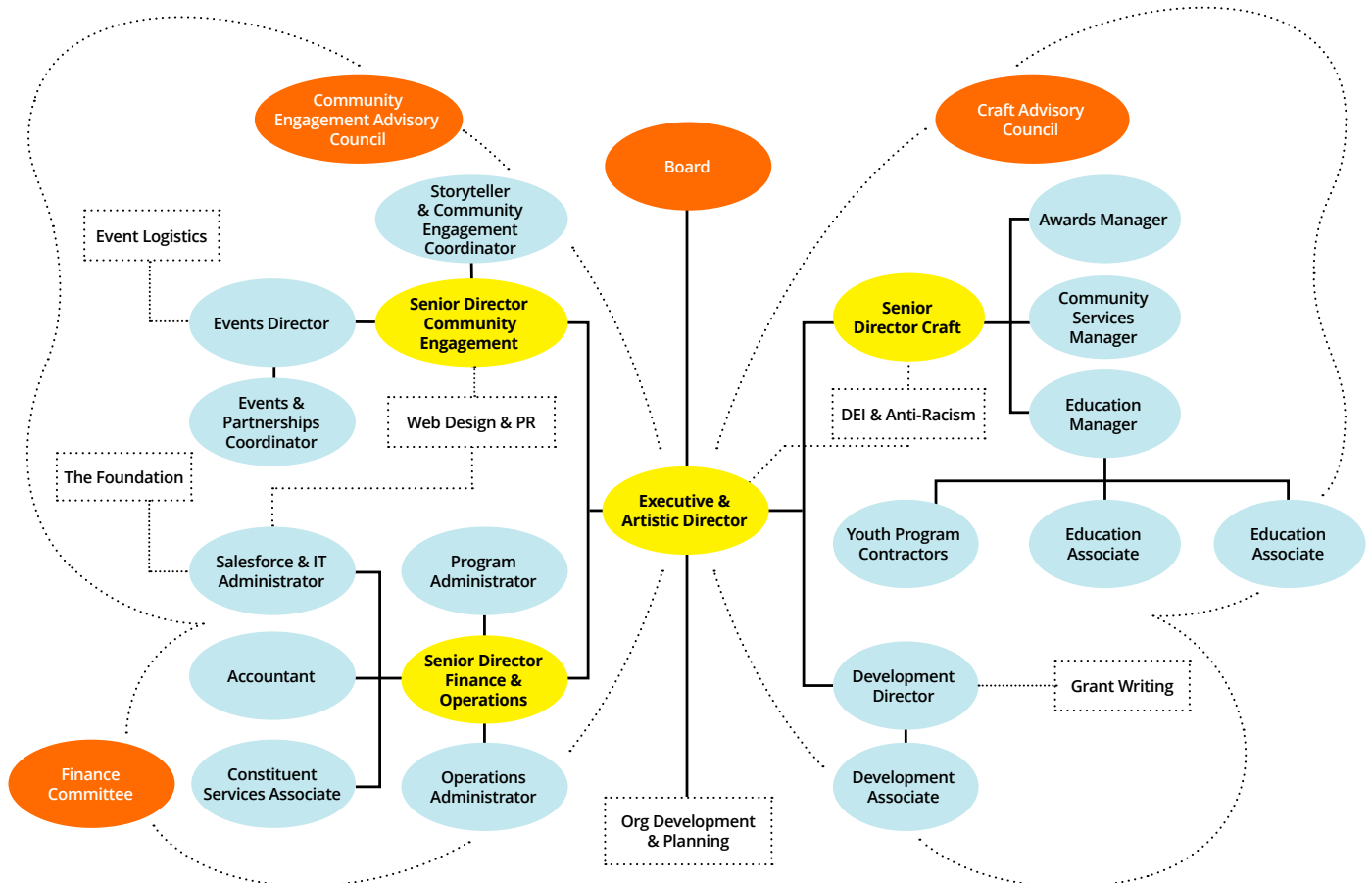
Our learning is ongoing and involves risk and experimentation. We will organize our teams in support of information sharing, collaboration, and sound decision-making. We will create craft and community advisory councils to inform and participate in the design of our work. We will evolve our systems and processes for input, feedback, assessment of and accountability in our work.

GOAL: The Loft develops an organizational culture of learning and innovation.

STRATEGIES:

- Evolve our systems for constituent input, feedback, and evaluation
- Develop our approaches to experimentation
- Optimize organizational structures and networks for innovation, information sharing, learning, decision making, and accountability
- Organize and share learnings with others to build the field for literature and the arts

We have reorganized our team to advance learning and innovation in two key impact areas: Craft and Community. The Craft and Community Engagement teams, our two big wings, are guided by the executive body including the Board, Executive & Artistic Director, and the Executive Leadership team (orange and yellow) and supported by the Finance & Operations and the Development teams. We have strengthened our finance and operating systems by internalizing accounting and we have increased administrative resources in support of human resources, operations, and programs. The Loft will create Craft and Community advisory councils that include teaching artists and other community members. Advisory council members will serve as strategic thought partners who contribute to design, decision-making, and accountability in our work.



5. ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Organizational health involves developing and managing our human and financial resources in alignment with our values and with an approach to work that centers wellness. We will evolve our knowledge, skills, and practices with antiracism, equity, and finance. We will invest in the professional development and wellness of our team members. We will revitalize and grow our relationships with contributors and practice Community-Centric fundraising. We will continue to contribute strategic resources in support of the success of Open Book.

GOAL: The Loft cultivates organizational health and well-being.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop a regenerative financial model and increase financial agency within the Loft team
- Train Loft board and staff in antiracism and equity values and practices
- Incorporate equity and antiracism throughout Loft governance, organizational policies and practices
- Revitalize financial resource development and implement Community-Centric fundraising practices
- Maintain a culture of wellness for Loft team
- Contribute strategic resources to support the success of Open Book

32-Hour Work Week

To maintain a culture of wellness for the Loft team, we moved from a 40-hour work week to a 32-hour work week, giving our team much needed time back to attend to their wellness. In this change, we kept wages the same effectively increasing the hourly wages for staff by 20%.

Community-Centric Fundraising (CCF) communitycentricfundraising.org

“Community-Centric Fundraising is a fundraising model that is grounded in equity and social justice. We prioritize the entire community over individual organizations, foster a sense of belonging and interdependence, present our work not as individual transactions but holistically, and encourage mutual support between nonprofits.” The Loft will implement CCF principles such as treating donors as partners with whom we have transparent conversations, pursuing transformational not transactional relationships, fostering a sense of belonging, equally valuing all who engage in strengthening the community, valuing time and money equally, and recognizing that everyone benefits from social justice work.

“Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?...Just so’s you’re sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter.”

-Toni Cade Bambara, The Salt Eaters

INVESTING IN OUR WORK

| STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2023-2028 | COST |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. ANTIRACISM | \$200,000 |
| <p>Embodying antiracism is fundamentally about our people. The Loft will hire and train our leadership and team members to have the knowledge and skills for best practices in antiracism, diversity, equity, and inclusivity. This work will include working with members of BIPOC and marginalized communities and our teaching artists to develop the Loft's approach to disseminating our organization's values, creating community agreements, changing application processes, and developing pedagogy to create literary experiences that are antiracist, culturally competent, and diverse.</p> | |
| 2. EQUITY & ACCESS | \$250,000 |
| <p>Equity is about access, power, and resources. The Loft will conduct an equity review of our financial practices, pay structures for teaching artists and team members. We will work to establish free, reduced, and sliding fee offerings for programming. We will increase the availability of funds to underwrite the participation of students in need, especially BIPOC and marginalized writers. We will leverage our space, staff, financial and other resources in support of our strategic partners.</p> | |
| 3. AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT | \$250,000 |
| <p>We will develop clear pathways of engagement and leverage technology to support Loft learners in advancing their craft; Loft teaching artists in designing content and growing audiences; and writers, readers, and event goers to convene in virtual communities.</p> | |
| 4. LEARNING AND INNOVATION | \$150,000 |
| <p>Our learning is ongoing and involves risk and experimentation. We will organize our teams in support of information sharing, collaboration, and sound decision-making. We will create craft and community advisory councils to inform and participate in the design of our work. We will evolve our systems and processes for input, feedback, assessment of and accountability in our work.</p> | |
| 5. ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND WELL BEING | \$150,000 |
| <p>Organizational health involves developing and managing our human and financial resources in alignment with our values and with an approach to work that centers wellness. We will evolve our knowledge, skills, and practices with antiracism, equity, and finance. We will invest in the professional development and wellness of our team members. We will revitalize and grow our relationships with contributors and practice community-centered fundraising. We will continue to contribute strategic resources in support of the success of Open Book.</p> | |
| TOTAL | \$1,000,000 |

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Word: a single distinct meaning or element of speech or writing, especially when it differs from that of another person.

Word: a command, password, or signal. "someone gave me the word to start playing"

Word: one's account of the truth, especially when it differs from that of another person.

Word: used to express agreement or disagreement.

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