Mission
Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) provides underserved youth with exceptional programs in academics, arts and athletics within a nurturing environment, empowering them to develop their potential, pursue their education and strengthen their communities.

Equity Statement
The Heart of Los Angeles mission is an attempt to address unequal access to quality education for youth in our neighborhood. The root of this problem is systemic oppression that manifests as intersectional barriers to those who have been historically underrepresented based on (but not limited to) race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, language, citizenship status, or religion. Our organization’s success therefore requires that we commit fully to a practice of equity, which we envision as a process of continuous improvement toward embedding an equity lens throughout our organization, including within strategies, programs, policies, and management.

We see the effort to align the approach of our programs and business operations with the equity values underpinning our mission as a matter of integrity. We further believe that such an effort will advance our core mission, because active participation in dismantling systems of oppression by centering youth in a practice of equity and inclusion is a meaningful learning experience for all involved. Finally, we hope it will help our organization conscientiously navigate our responsibilities as part of a charitable sector that has historically been influenced by paternalism, white supremacy, and social change strategies that too often address the effects of injustice, rather than the root causes.

We know that intention alone will not alter oppressive systems—we must advance our power collectively and individually to affect change as a core aspect of our mission. We therefore commit to:
- intentionality, transparency, and action ensuring equitable access to resources and services for the community we serve
- the creation of an environment and organizational structure that prioritizes equity and inclusion in all areas
- accountability through continuous evaluation of practices, policies, program outcomes, and agency culture
- placing our mission on behalf of youth at the center of all decision-making, and
- elevating community voice within our leadership.

History and Rationale
The concept of equity is foundational for HOLA, and we are proud that an asset-based approach, which focuses on our students through the lens of their value and potential rather than being defined by the
challenges they face, has long guided our work with students, employees, and the community at large. We also celebrate our early adoption of other equity-aligned practices including trauma informed care, growth mindset, a whole child approach, and youth leadership development. We simultaneously acknowledge that our practice of equity has not been consistent over time or across departments, and organic accountability measures have fallen short of the learning we could achieve through concrete and institutionalized systems, processes, and metrics.

HOLA is now on the eve of opening our long-awaited headquarters, which will trigger a period of rapid expansion for the organization. We are slated to increase the number of families served on campus annually by more than 74% over the next three years through program expansion and partnerships, and this is an opportunity to recommit to approaching our equity practice with rigor. HOLA has struggled in recent years to see our student body reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of low-income students in our neighborhood, and we acknowledge that we must do more to create a sense of belonging for youth of all races and ethnicities—in particular for Black students if we are to counter the uniquely devastating impacts that anti-Black racism has had on access to quality education. A focus on fully valuing and engaging everyone as contributors in a conversation about how to support those with the fewest resources and opportunities is what will actualize our mission of providing access to quality education for youth who are Black, Latinx, or members of other oppressed groups.

Commitment to Advancing Equity

We seek to understand our organization’s successes and failures as they relate to practices, policies, and culture as we embark on a continuous process to embed equity within our work. We commit as an agency and as individual staff members to our role of driving organizational progress. We commit to an action plan, and the tasking of subcommittees to provide leadership toward its implementation, to include the following imperatives:

- Regular collection and reflection upon data that reveals successes and limitations as to actualizing the values put forward in our Equity Statement.
- Regular review (approximately every 18 months) of the Equity Statement to examine its relevance as our organization and the world progress, and regular examination of our mission and vision statements with the Equity Statement in mind.
- Continuous acknowledgement of education as a right for all youth regardless of background with the aim of closing the K-12 education gap.
- Support for all students who desire college access through college access programming and quality programming across academic enrichment subjects.
- Support for family stability by means of direct and emergency aid and mental health services – often the very services many of our youth need to support their pursuit of higher education – with the acknowledgement that the communities we serve have a right to shelter, food, and quality of life.
- The elevation and inclusion of the voices of our students, parents, community members and partners in decision-making processes, and thoughtfulness about when a person’s position within a traditional hierarchy should determine their role, and when it should not.
- A commitment to coaching and the provision of professional development opportunities to our community and to our staff so they can grow their careers at HOLA or elsewhere.
● The creation of desirable employment opportunities for staff, as a model encouragement to youth pursuing their education as a means of strengthening their communities.

● Individual and department-level work plans that include annual equity goals, action plans, and evaluation measures that are specific to job responsibilities or areas of expertise.

● A regular examination and evaluation of policies and practices concerning recruitment, hiring, compensation, promotion, or retention (including board membership, personnel, students, partners, contractors, vendors, and volunteers) to ensure the values of transparency, inclusion, and diversity are upheld and that policy and practice align with our equity values.

● The sponsorship and support of affinity and resource groups reflective of all identities who desire to increase their skills and competencies.

● A commitment that the work to create an inclusive and equitable work culture that welcomes and retains a diverse community does not fall to those who have been historically excluded or marginalized by group identity or organizational position.

● A commitment to establish a culture of continuous learning through open conversation about barriers to implementing the values stated herein or other difficult issues as they arise.