



LED BY OUR ROOTS

*826 MSP's Strategic Plan
& 2020-21 Annual Report*



826
MSP

A LETTER FROM SAM

Dear 826 MSP community,

In spring 2021, we were coming to the end of our second school year during a global pandemic. Our local communities were still dealing with the impact of the 2020 uprising, and our organization was coming out of a period of constant pivoting. Frankly, we were just trying to survive.

Amidst this period of change and upheaval, we embarked on a strategic planning process that centered on stakeholder voice. We had more than fifty conversations where we took time to reflect on all that had been happening and created space to dream about what could be next. Here is some of what we heard:

<p>"I was the youngest, so it was kinda hard. So it got easier when I learned the schedule. It really boosted my confidence. I was boosted in everything, my teacher was so surprised at how much better I was doing so my mom took me to more [sessions]. At first it was hard, but I liked the challenge and then I got better. So I like the challenges." -826 MSP student</p>	<p>"Our students have dealt with unimaginable trauma, and you can't impact students and families without creating space to recognize [and process] their trauma and suffering." -826 MSP staff member</p>	<p>"The revolution is at our doorstep and 826 has really stepped into its purpose at this moment...A lot has been considered about how 826 can be used as a tool for broader equity conversations." -826 MSP board member</p>	<p>"The Writers' Room and 826 is not an organization that's just 'trying to have good vibes.' Intentional conversation is valuable and helps build community." -826 MSP student</p>
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In the summer of 2021, our board and staff sat with this feedback and listened to how our community wanted to grow with us in the coming years. The strategic priorities laid out in the next few pages represent our best thinking, and collective wisdom around what is next for 826 MSP. As you will see, where we are going is rooted in where we have been; thus, each strategic priority also includes an update from our recently completed school year.

With all that we have learned and how much we've grown with our community, we are ready for a new chapter. As announced previously, this will be my last school year with 826 MSP. My last day at our organization will be July 1, and we are currently searching for the leader that will help our team actualize these priorities.

I have so much admiration for our team of board, staff, and volunteers, and what we have been able to build with students in the Twin Cities. I am proud of these priorities and where our organization is headed, and I look forward to cheerleading this work from the sidelines.

And of course, thank you for your continued support in writing the future with Twin Cities young authors. We could not do this work without you.



SAMANTHA SENCER-MURA

Executive Director

GAIN CLARITY ON ORG IDENTITY



The Rock Star Supply Co...the Mid-Continent Oceanographic Institute...826 MSP. The name changes our organization has undergone since we were established in 2009 highlight how much we've changed over the years. As we endeavored to map out our future priorities, we knew how essential it was to hear directly from our stakeholders. After connecting with 50 people (including youth, parents, volunteers, educators, donors, community partners, board, and staff) in the summer of 2021, we realized an essential first step to our future growth: we need to gain clarity and consensus on who we are and what we do.



LOOKING AHEAD

In the short term, you can look forward to a few things from us:

- An updated mission statement
- Guiding values that demonstrate the “non-negotiables” within our programming and operations

In the long term, this will lead to:

- A strong foundation of shared understanding on who 826 MSP is
- Greater name recognition of 826 MSP as a youth writing center which is part of a national network
- More room for partnership and collaboration as we refine our impact areas and strive to meet emergent needs

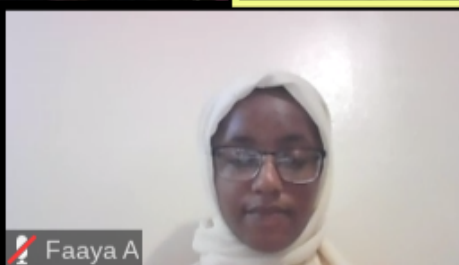
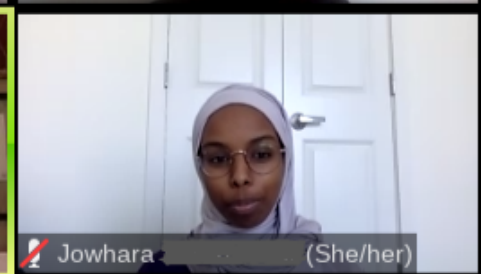
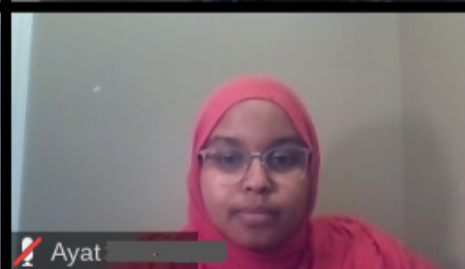
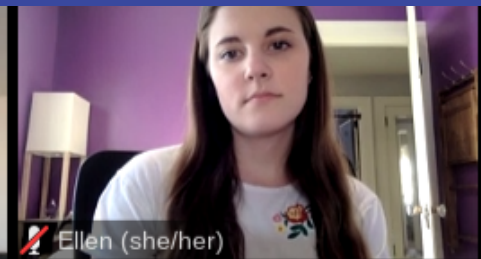
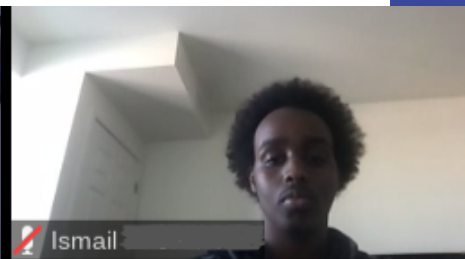


DEEPEN EQUITY WORK

826 MSP's work is in direct response to inequities within our school system. Because of this, we aim to have practices, policies, and pedagogies that are grounded in equity in all areas of our organization. To do this, we need to continue to develop our staff and board's understanding and ownership of equity issues. One way we have engaged in this continual learning is through our JEDis (Justice and Equity Dialogues) for staff, board and volunteers. In the 2020-2021 school year, some of the themes for our JEDis included Afrofuturism, White Supremacy in the Workplace, Supporting Muslim Students During and After the Pandemic, and more.

LOOKING AHEAD

- We will add youth members to our board of directors
- Increased compensation directly for youth and families
- Updated personnel and hiring policies
- Continued equity training for staff, board, and volunteers



DEEPEN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIC
PRIORITY

LOOKING AHEAD:

- Enhance cross-chapter youth collaboration
- Establish a model of programs that are entirely youth-run
- Elevate the quality of writing in publications
- Increase leadership opportunities in every program

Our programs remained entirely virtual for the 2020-2021 school year, with the introduction of some hybrid (virtual and in-person) programming in summer 2021. Despite the challenges of pivoting to virtual programming, we maintained high youth engagement and student retention, serving 1,500 youth. We deepened our youth engagement through continuing to develop our leadership programming, including increased spots on our Young Authors' Council and our Writers' Room Advisory Council, as well as "micro-leadership" opportunities in all programs.





DEEPEN COLLABORATION

At 826 MSP, our community is our biggest asset. After relocating from St. Paul to South Minneapolis, since 2018 we've been focused on growing our Southside roots. In the 2020-2021 school year, we worked with more guest artists than ever before; 22 out of 23 identify as BIPOC and all are focused on building supportive pathways for the next generation. Another big highlight was deepening our partnership with our publisher, Wise Ink. Through their Project Exodus program, we worked with an editorial board of 7 Black youth from Minneapolis on an anthology titled *Rehumanize Me* focused on themes of self-determination, Black liberation, Black joy, and much more.

Thank you to our 20-21 teaching artists & guest speakers!



Cynthia Zapata



Dara Beevas



Waringa Hunja



Jono Cowgill



Dr. Kate Beane



Kao Kalia Yang



Keno Evol



Maria Isa



Marlon James



Moheb Soliman



Porsha Olayiwola



Qorsho Hassan



Rachel Warner



Sha Cage



Shannon Gibney



Shruthi Kamisetty



Tall Paul



Tish Jones



Trungles



Jason Reynolds



Jonathan Rabb



Rayna Acha



Ty Chapman



LOOKING AHEAD:

- Build partnerships based on our new organizational values
- Enhanced volunteer training and recruitment
- Continued collaboration with 826 National and our sister 826 chapters



EXPAND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



Being student-centered isn't just about working with youth. We also need to prioritize and engage with students' families and the greater ecosystem. Positive word-of-mouth in the community, leading to an increased demand for our programs, demonstrates our growing success in these areas. Most recently, due to the challenges and rapidly evolving needs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we've been in closer communication with our families than ever before. After gathering feedback from families and working with a professional consultant, we created a dedicated family engagement staff position and welcomed Aminah Hussein as Community Engagement Manager to our team in September of 2021.

LOOKING AHEAD:

- Offer dedicated whole-family programming on a monthly basis developed by our staff and in response to the expressed needs and vision of our families
- Gather feedback from parents and relatives related to programmatic offerings and changes
- Increase parent leadership opportunities, including representatives on our board



COMMUNITY CENTRIC FUNDRAISING



As a nonprofit organization, 826 MSP relies on donations and other contributed revenue to sustain and grow. Fundraising and development activities provide the essential resources we need to exercise our mission. However, fundraising (and the philanthropic sector in general) has the potential to be harmful, especially when it perpetuates false narratives about the communities we serve. Thus, 826 MSP is committed to ensuring that our fundraising and communications are aligned with our values. Our 2020 fundraiser, Books for Breakfast: Anti-Racism in Education with special guest, Marlon James, was planned through a community-centric fundraising lens. The event was a huge success, raising awareness and more than \$25,000 in support of our programs.



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“Dealing with equity is the biggest challenge that philanthropy faces. They need to learn about it from their community and from grantees. One of the reasons it’s such a blessing to be invited to [826 MSP] events is that sometimes you are isolated from community [in philanthropy]. 826 MSP helps bring me in.”
- 826 MSP anonymous donor

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LOOKING AHEAD:

- Host Books for Breakfast in 2022 collaboratively with our midwest sister chapter, 826CHI
- Explore crowdfunding opportunities to sustain programming, such as Kickstarter
- Continually refine grant language to incorporate more student voice
- Develop gift acceptance policies to ensure that the support we receive is values-aligned

LAY FOUNDATIONS FOR GROWTH

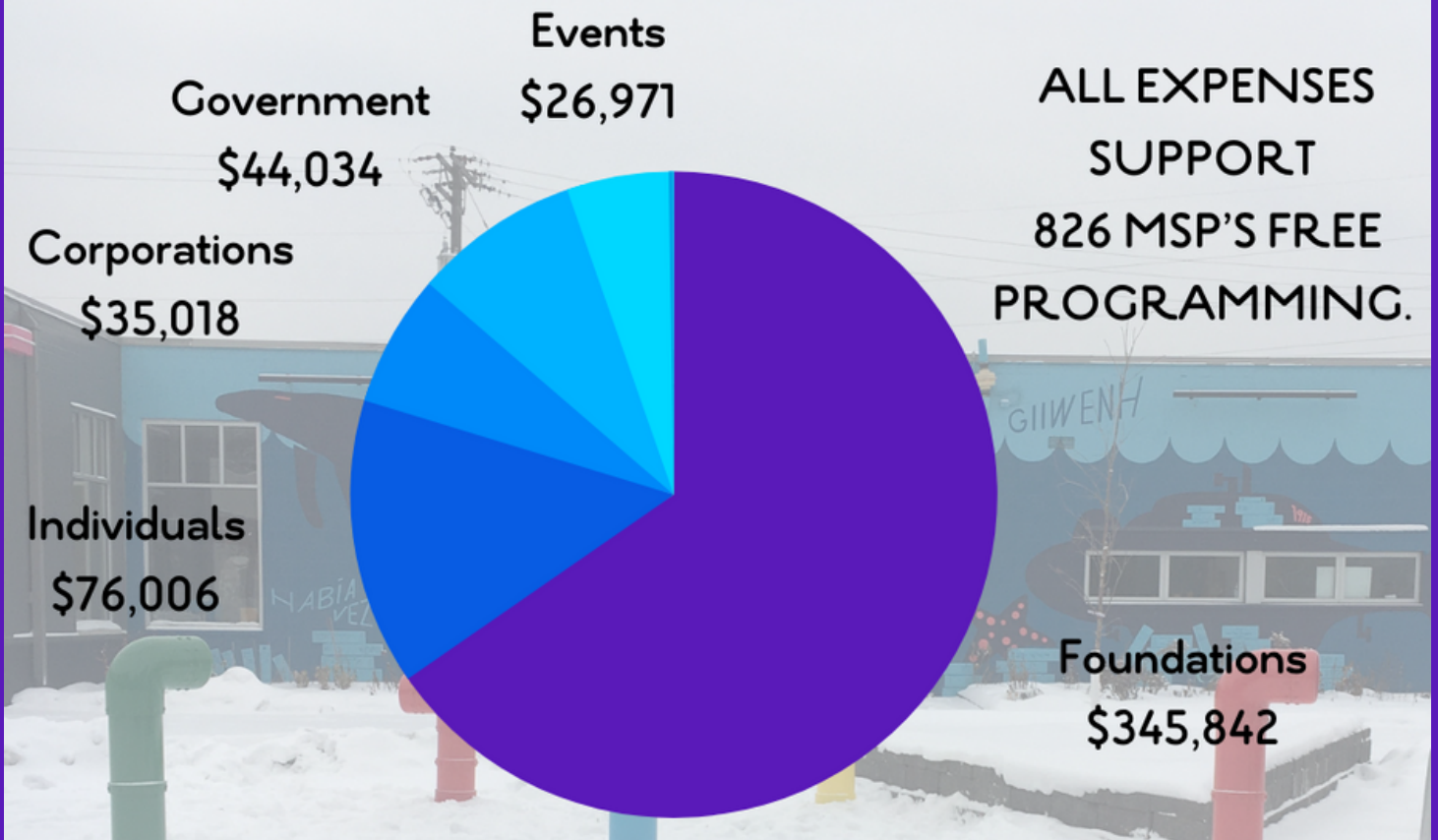


One clear answer from a very unclear 2020-2021 school year... the demand for our programming and need for young people to write us toward a better future is stronger than ever. We are committed to sustainable growth that ensures the needs of our community are centered and being met. See below for financials from our 2020-2021 fiscal year. With these strong roots, we look forward to growing to achieve the priorities of our new strategic plan.

FY21 FINANCIALS

TOTAL INCOME: \$529,305

TOTAL EXPENSE: \$421,725



Help us write the future with Twin Cities young authors!

DONATE AT: 826msp.org/donate



MINNESOTA

Minnesota is a male. He's young and doesn't get old, sweet.
He's taking care of us . . . in a way.

He is very loving most of the time. But also there is a lot of construction. He isn't very commonly known like Chicago, New York, but he is still known. He is usually known for 10,000 lakes, and the biggest mall is called MOA (Mall of America). He loves it when it's winter. He starts to get mad, but it's okay because some hot chocolate and a fireplace can cheer him up. His Twin Cities are really pretty, and when they glow at night you can see it from far away. But there are bad things like racism, but Black Lives Matter.

- AMIRAH F., GRADE 7

