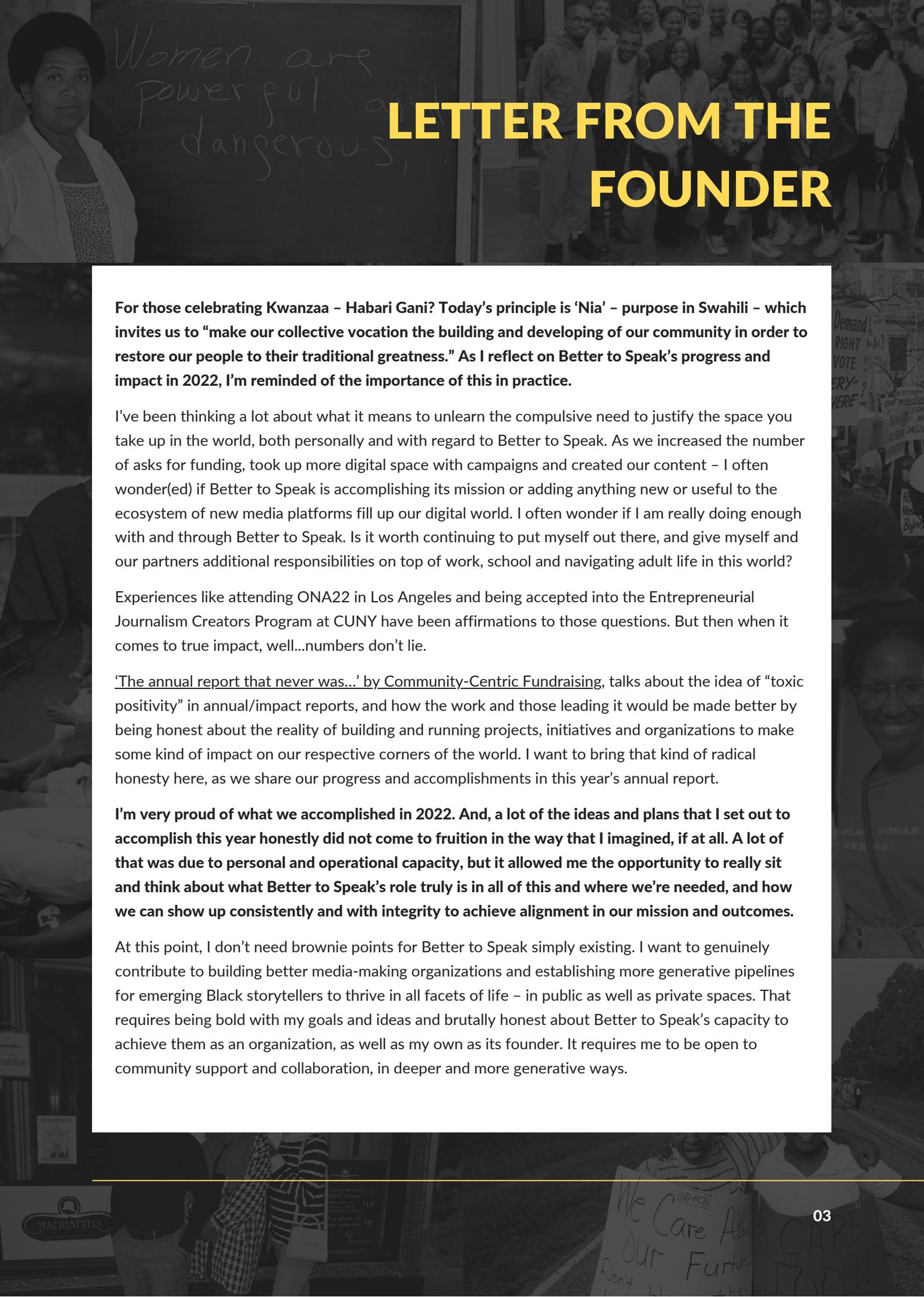


December 30, 2022

# The Annual Report 2022

Prepared by: Kési Felton  
Founder, Head of Storytelling and Strategy





# LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

**For those celebrating Kwanzaa – Habari Gani? Today’s principle is ‘Nia’ – purpose in Swahili – which invites us to “make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.” As I reflect on Better to Speak’s progress and impact in 2022, I’m reminded of the importance of this in practice.**

I’ve been thinking a lot about what it means to unlearn the compulsive need to justify the space you take up in the world, both personally and with regard to Better to Speak. As we increased the number of asks for funding, took up more digital space with campaigns and created our content – I often wonder(ed) if Better to Speak is accomplishing its mission or adding anything new or useful to the ecosystem of new media platforms fill up our digital world. I often wonder if I am really doing enough with and through Better to Speak. Is it worth continuing to put myself out there, and give myself and our partners additional responsibilities on top of work, school and navigating adult life in this world?

Experiences like attending ONA22 in Los Angeles and being accepted into the Entrepreneurial Journalism Creators Program at CUNY have been affirmations to those questions. But then when it comes to true impact, well...numbers don’t lie.

‘The annual report that never was...’ by Community-Centric Fundraising, talks about the idea of “toxic positivity” in annual/impact reports, and how the work and those leading it would be made better by being honest about the reality of building and running projects, initiatives and organizations to make some kind of impact on our respective corners of the world. I want to bring that kind of radical honesty here, as we share our progress and accomplishments in this year’s annual report.

**I’m very proud of what we accomplished in 2022. And, a lot of the ideas and plans that I set out to accomplish this year honestly did not come to fruition in the way that I imagined, if at all. A lot of that was due to personal and operational capacity, but it allowed me the opportunity to really sit and think about what Better to Speak’s role truly is in all of this and where we’re needed, and how we can show up consistently and with integrity to achieve alignment in our mission and outcomes.**

At this point, I don’t need brownie points for Better to Speak simply existing. I want to genuinely contribute to building better media-making organizations and establishing more generative pipelines for emerging Black storytellers to thrive in all facets of life – in public as well as private spaces. That requires being bold with my goals and ideas and brutally honest about Better to Speak’s capacity to achieve them as an organization, as well as my own as its founder. It requires me to be open to community support and collaboration, in deeper and more generative ways.

# LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

Better to Speak challenged me to step out of my comfort zone in a lot of ways this year, in the name of opening this platform up to even more voices and stories in more collaborative ways. Y'all met me where I was which is encouraging me to open myself up even more to make this platform what I truly believe it can be. All of that said, thank you so much to everyone who contributed their time, voice, energy, words, money and support to me, Better to Speak, and our team and partners.

**As always – here's to letting our stories lead us toward a more liberated self, community and world.**

**Kési Felton**

Founder, Head of Storytelling + Strategy

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## OUR MISSION

**Better to Speak is a Black youth-led community media platform working to transform silence into language and action.**

Through content, community engagement and communications, Better to Speak works to amplify the voices and stories of Black people and communities, equip them with storytelling tools, and cultivate a cultural narrative of self and community actualization.

## OUR VISION

We envision a world where Black people are free, and a culture where individuals and communities – specifically Black youth – are encouraged and given the structural support to explore and actualize the power of their voices and stories.

## THE DREAM TEAM



**KÉSI FELTON**

### **Founder, Head of Storytelling + Strategy**

Kési Felton (pronounced 'Casey' – she/her) is a writer and doula. As the founder of Better to Speak, she leads our operations, content and other programs under our current strategic vision.



**VICTORIA MAKANJUOLA**

### **Content + Community Manager**

Victoria Makanjuola (she/her) is a 25-year-old writer, blogger, and digital content creator. As Better to Speak's Content + Community Manager, she supported editorial and marketing content creation on Stories and our social media!



**ANDRA FLEMMING**

### **Marketing + Outreach Coordinator**

Andra Flemming (she/her) is a social worker, specializing in Child Welfare. She has a keen interest in advocating to ensure BIPOC youth have access to equitable resources. As our Marketing + Outreach Coordinator, Andra introduced Better to Speak to new community members + built a pipeline of new/potential partners!

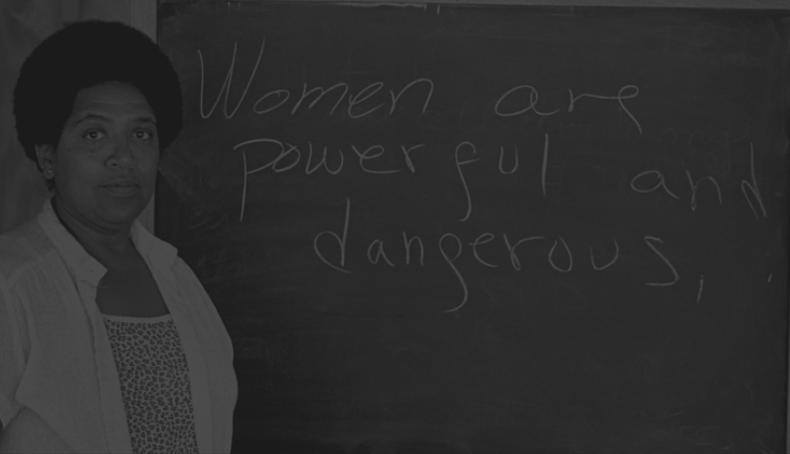


**ANTHONY FELTON**

### **Programs + Operations Assistant**

Anthony Felton (he/him) has a fervent interest in the media's exploration of cultural identities as a form of representation to ensure that he and his fellow youth feel seen in the things they love. He supported Better to Speak's day-to-day operations as the Programs + Operations Assistant.





# 2022 Strategic Goals

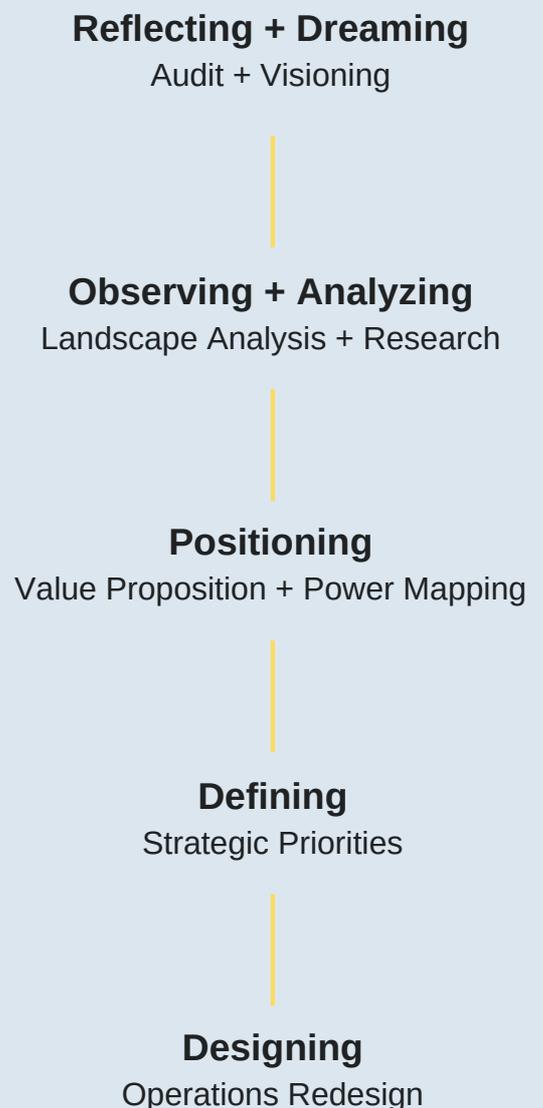


# Strategic Visioning Process

Since 2017, Better to Speak has hosted community dialogue events, produced two podcast seasons, a zine on Black civic engagement, among other community advocacy initiatives for and in partnership with Black folks in Washington, D.C., Metro Atlanta, GA, and elsewhere in the U.S. and internationally.

**From November 2021 until February 2022, Better to Speak took a hiatus to reflect, restructure and reimagine. Using a strategic planning framework, along with more abstract dreaming, we underwent the following process to develop this strategic plan.**

The intention was to reflect on what we've done, dream up what could be possible for this platform, and strategize on what resources and support we would need to bridge the gap between the two.



# 2022 STRATEGIC GOALS

Our Strategic Vision for 2022 aimed to facilitate a more focused and intentional iteration of Better to Speak. We set out to pilot various programs and initiatives that aligned with our mission, with the goal of achieving activity-based metrics and gathering community feedback to clarify the organization's mission, programs and operations in 2023 and beyond.

## Content

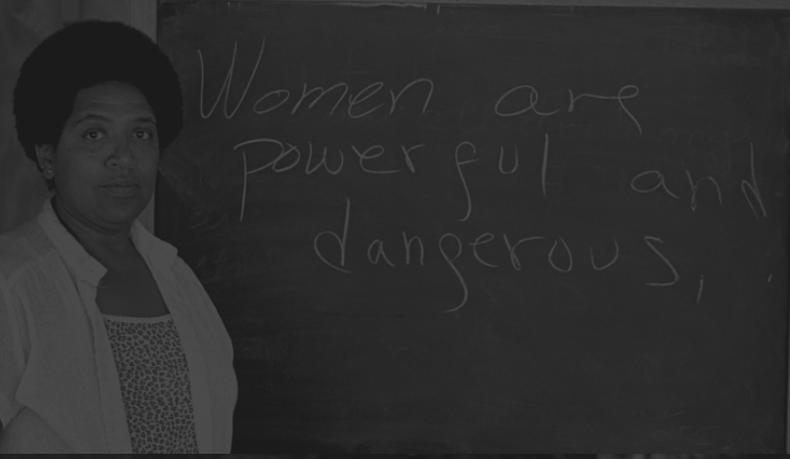
With the support of a grant from Press On's Southern Movement Media fund, we plan to expand our editorial content offerings to include published articles from contributing writers, as well as the continuation of Better to Speak: The Podcast.

## Community

To create opportunities for co-creation of our programming we will launch a community outreach campaign to engage our peers, seek out feedback to inform our offerings and build the foundation to establish Better to Speak as a co-operative membership organization.

## Capacity

Similarly, in order to engage our community in the way this strategy envisions, we must give it proper investment – financially and in terms of people-power – as well as the space, time and dedicated process to dream and put those dreams into action.



# Program + Project Recaps



# CONTENT

With the support of a grant from Press On's Southern Movement Media fund, we expanded our editorial content offerings to include published articles from contributing writers, and support the production of Better to Speak: The Podcast.

## Goals

**Build** a media platform that centers Black youth voices through original and contributed editorial content.

**Pilot** creative approaches to media business models, content creation/production/editorial processes and media org–community engagement.

## Stories

We published and maintained an editorial platform for contributions from Black youth/young adult writers throughout the year that aligned with the topics addressed in our community programming and advocacy campaigns.

## The Podcast

We reimagined the production process of Better to Speak: The Podcast to implement a slower, more collaborative process to build community with guests while producing better audio storytelling content.

## Content + Community Manager

With the support of the grant from Press On, we invested in a dedicated team member to manage contributing writers, support editorial content and lead our content marketing to reach our audience and grow our community.

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Content (Expanding our editorial content offerings)

## AT A GLANCE

50+

Contributing writers in our community network.

21

Published pieces in 2022.

2,000+

Total page views on Stories content.

5

Writers represented the diaspora in five countries - including Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Canada and the U.S.

## Most-Read Stories

1. *Colonialism vs. Slavery – There was no better evil* (Mwende Mutuli Musau)
2. *Black Woman's Path to Emotional Healing* (Edisana Stephen)
3. *Teachers Do More Than Teach – They Inspire* (Kara Little)

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Content (Expanding our editorial content offerings)

## AT A GLANCE

**3,000+**

Downloads to date (79% increase from 2021).

**9**

Interviews published.



Nominated for Best Black News/Informative Podcast.

## Who Our Guests Are:



Community advocates



Leaders in their field/industry



Mostly young Black women and femmes

## Most-Listened To/Downloaded Episodes

1. Amina's Story – Bridging the Gap for Women and Girls with ADHD
2. Kési's Story – The State of the Young Black Advocate
3. Monet's Story – Archiving Black Lives

# COMMUNITY

To create opportunities for the co-creation of our programming launched a community outreach campaign to engage our peers, solicit feedback to inform our offerings and build the foundation to establish Better to Speak as a cooperative membership organization by 2023.

## Goals

**Develop an intentional partner journey for our peers and community stakeholders** – including contributing writers, podcast guests, interviewees, clients, volunteers, and the community at large – with frequent opportunities for community feedback for our learning and growth.

**Explore alternative pathways for ownership and governance of Better to Speak** to ultimately establish a cooperative, membership-based organization for Black youth storytellers and changemakers.

## State of the Young Black Advocate Campaign

This community outreach set the foundation for how we engage with our local community, partners, and readers/listeners. Through mini-campaigns/activations based on our core focus areas, facilitated outreach to specific Black youth/young adult-led or serving organizations.

## Community Outreach

Our Marketing + Outreach Coordinator supported and led the communication with current and prospective partners. Additionally, we created systems and processes for partner and community stakeholder outreach. This included time set aside for Intro + Discovery sessions and community check-ins, partner briefs and proposals (ie. editorial guidelines for contributing writers and a guest brief for The Podcast), as well as feedback forms to gather insight from our stakeholders on our content and programs.

## External Community Engagement

We experienced additional opportunities to engage with and support other people and organizations in the media and advocacy spaces – including facilitating workshops, attending and covering community events, and representing Better to Speak on other organizations' Board of Directors.

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Community (Facilitating co-creation of the work and collaboration in our mission)

## AT A GLANCE

3

Narrative Campaigns/Activations:  
Mental Health Awareness Month,  
Celebrating Black History + Culture,  
and Freedom Summer

4

Digital Activations:  
Transforming Silence into  
Action Resource Guide,  
Juneteenth Event  
Directory, Freedom  
Summer Voter Registration  
Tool and Partner Directory.

8 + 3

Articles + Podcast Episodes published  
on topics related to the narrative  
campaigns and activations.

## Highlights/Wins

- 1. Mental Health Awareness:** Published the first free resource in our Digital Library – Transforming Silence Into Action resource guide
- 2. Celebrating Black History + Culture:** Amplified the voices and stories of The Dream Team, our community partners and other brands and organizations through our storytelling
- 3. Freedom Summer:** Received \$2,000 from the Andrew Goodman Foundation to support our Digital Advocacy work on the Freedom Summer campaign

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Community (Facilitating co-creation of the work and collaboration in our mission)

## AT A GLANCE

In 2022, Better to Speak attended...

10

Local Community  
Events

2

In-Person  
Conferences

7

Virtual  
Summits/Conferences

## Highlights/Wins

- 1. Powerful IDEAS Expo + Online News Association 2022 Conference:**  
We received scholarships that covered our registration for Gain Power's career expo and training in Washington, D.C. as well as the ONA22 conference in Los Angeles, CA.
- 2. Opportunity to explore our coverage of Black youth and young adults in sports:** We had the opportunity to attend and cover the Athletes Unite Conference (Shakeout) and Power in Sports Mixer (The Collaborative) in Atlanta, GA. Both events highlighted topics like identity, mental health and career for young athletes thinking about their life after sports.
- 3. Other events focused on Black youth and/or hosted by Black youth-serving institutions:** Other events we attended (both virtually and in-person) included the Pan-African Youth Conference, The Democracy Summit hosted by Howard University's Center for Journalism and Democracy, and re:imagine/ATL's Dreamfest annual screening.

# CAPACITY

To give Better to Speak's mission a shot at having true long-term impact we must plan and prepare to give it proper investment – in terms of finances and resources, people-power, as well as the space, time and dedicated processes to dream and put those dreams into action.

## Goals

**Plan to grow sustainably** by increasing our monthly income – from our merch store, communications services and grassroots donations – while identifying and pursuing long-term funding and grants.

**Expand our internal team** to test strategies for organizational growth and recruit young Black leaders and professionals to manage and lead programs across departments.

## Defining + Diversifying Our Revenue Portfolio

Our goal is to get a clear understanding of our true operating budget now that we are running all offerings at once. Now, we are able to set more informed revenue goals and pursue additional funding, with the plan to scale back to our core offerings, and prioritize sustainability while exploring how Better to Speak might be able to grow and scale.

## The Dream Team Pilot Program

This pilot program allowed us to bring on the following roles: Content + Community Manager, Marketing + Outreach Coordinator, and Programs + Operations Assistant. We were able to test out different roles and responsibilities to see what Better to Speak's true needs are in terms of where we need additional support, and how we can make an internal team culture mutually beneficial for young Black workers/professionals.

## Membership Program/Cooperative Model

In addition to the service subsidization model that we use and have used in the past, we explored (and are exploring) how a membership/cooperative model can also potentially offer a source of income and sustainability (ie. membership dues).

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Capacity (Building internal capacity to promote sustainability)

## AT A GLANCE

**\$1,345**

Raised since the campaign launch  
(27% of our overall goal)

**67%**

First-time donors in 2022

**\$100**

Largest donation amount

**\$50**

Most common donation amount

## Highlights/Wins

1. **Tested fundraising strategies** – including a community ambassador fundraising toolkit, founder donation appeals through our newsletters, leveraging our Impactive action platform, and sprint fundraisers around specific needs and projects.
2. **Attracted new donors and gained our first sustaining/monthly donor** – while exploring how to increase current/previous donor engagement.
3. **Participated in a training on grassroots fundraising** with Press On's development team & other 2021-22 Southern Movement Media Fund grantees – after which we received an additional \$5,500 grant award through the fund.

**STRATEGIC GOAL:** Capacity (Building internal capacity to promote sustainability)

## AT A GLANCE

The trainings, conferences and summits we attended in 2022 fell into the following themes...



**Business/organization development:** Revenue planning, opportunity exploration, business and governance modeling, value proposition.



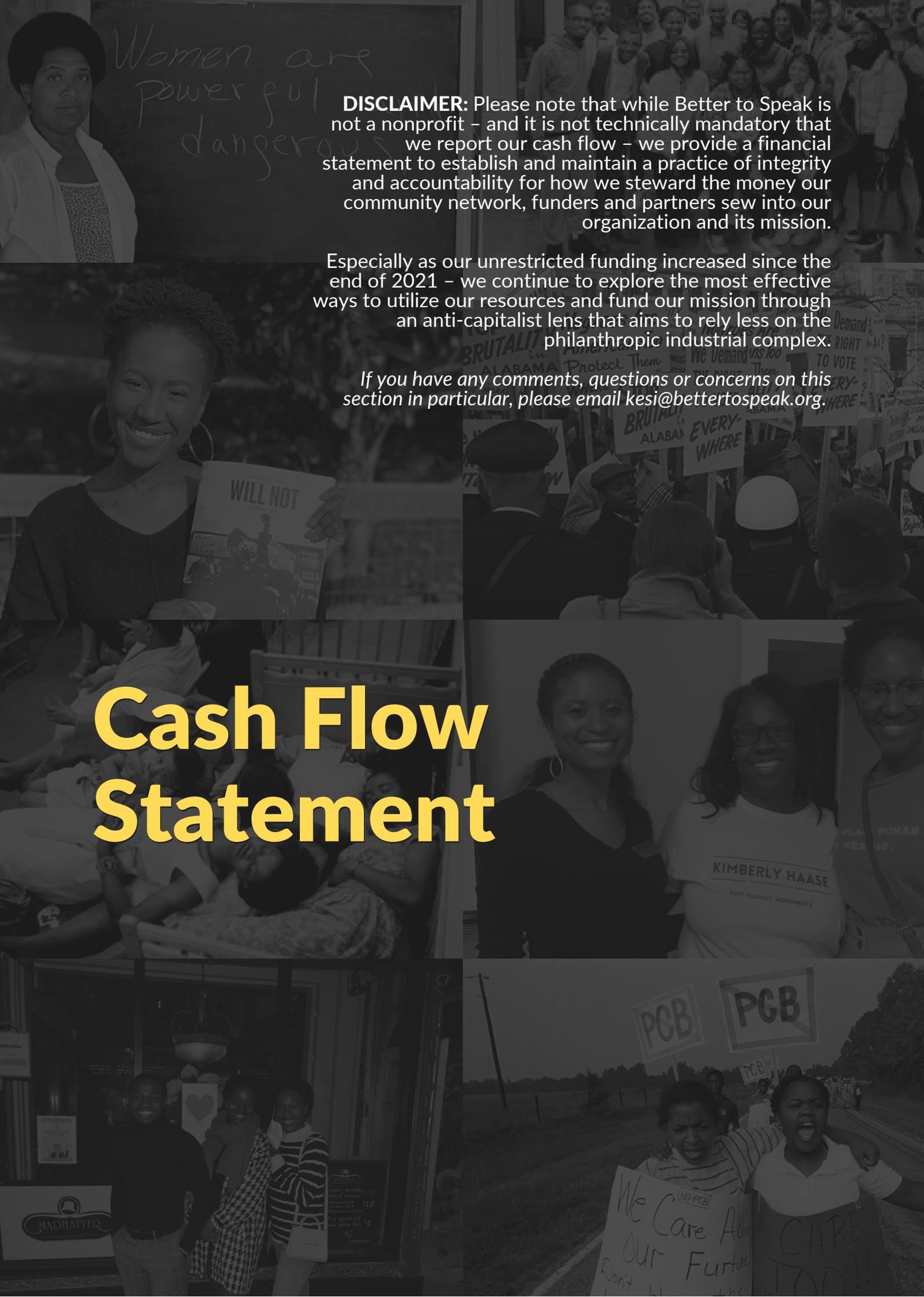
**Media-making best practices:** product-thinking, collaborative and community-centered media, newsletters.



**Communications:** Content and communications strategy, digital organizing and grassroots storytelling, cultural organizing.

## Highlights/Wins

- 1. Accepted into and currently participating in business/organization development programs** – the Georgia Cooperative Development Center's Co-op Academy and the fifth cohort of CUNY's Entrepreneurial Journalism Creators Program.
- 2. Participated in virtual trainings** that covered topics including organizational development, grassroots fundraising, journalism and narrative power, movement journalism and communications, digital organizing, etc.
- 3. Attended ONA Conference and other summits** – where Better to Speak had the opportunity to connect with other journalists, publishers and news organizations.



Women are powerful dangerous

**DISCLAIMER:** Please note that while Better to Speak is not a nonprofit – and it is not technically mandatory that we report our cash flow – we provide a financial statement to establish and maintain a practice of integrity and accountability for how we steward the money our community network, funders and partners sew into our organization and its mission.

Especially as our unrestricted funding increased since the end of 2021 – we continue to explore the most effective ways to utilize our resources and fund our mission through an anti-capitalist lens that aims to rely less on the philanthropic industrial complex.

*If you have any comments, questions or concerns on this section in particular, please email [kesi@bettertospeak.org](mailto:kesi@bettertospeak.org).*

# Cash Flow Statement

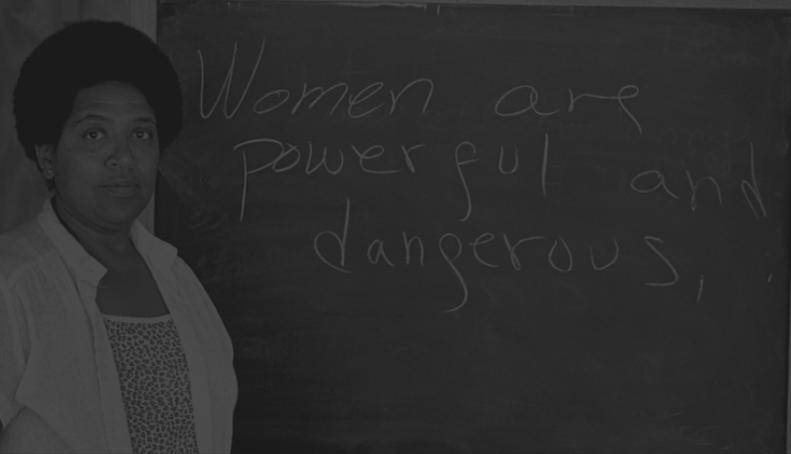
# Cash Flow Statement

Income and expenses from November 2021 (when we received our first grant) to December 12, 2022.

US\$	FY'22	FY'20-21	YOY CHANGE
<b>Earned Revenue</b>	\$15,865.74	\$4,166.18	280.82%
A. Awarded Funding	A. \$12,500.00	A. N/A	
B. Community Donations	B. \$1,587.74	B. \$1,885.86	
C. Services + Stipends	C. \$1,700.00	C. \$1,555.00	
D. Merchandise Sales	D. \$78.00	D. \$725.32	
<b>Expenses</b>	\$18,619.83	\$5,672.29	228.26%
A. Admin/Overhead	A. \$3,579.05	A. \$3,232.73	
B. Payroll – The Dream Team	B. \$3,945.00	B. N/A	
C. Payroll – Contributors	C. \$2,975.00	C. \$1,100	
D. The Podcast	D. \$268.00	D. \$178.99	
E. In-Person Events/Conferences	E. \$1,532.28	E. N/A	
F. Learning + Development (Virtual Trainings)	F. \$5,620.50	F. N/A	
G. Donations from BTS	G. \$700.00	G. \$1,160.00	
<b>Net Profit/Loss</b>	-\$2,764.09	-\$1,506.11	83.53%

## Notes:

- Our 2020-21 Net Loss was previously misreported as -\$1,750 due to overcounting operations budget items.
- 'Services' accounts for services rendered under Better to Speak LLC., while 'Stipends' refers to personal funds earned by Better to Speak's founder from freelancing and volunteering that were reinvested into BTS.
- 'Donations from BTS' accounts for money donated to Black youth-led and/or -serving projects and organizations – this includes The Book Drive, The Period Project, and our donation to Fair Fight Action using proceeds from 'Your Silence Will Not Protect You' in Jan. 2021



# Friends of Better to Speak

# Partners

Ahzjah Simons, Georgia Cooperative Development Center  
Aleah LaForce  
Allison Hood, VOX ATL  
Alyzza May, Press On South  
Amina Sesay, Duke Center for Girls and Women with ADHD  
Andra Flemming  
Anthony Felton  
Augustina Boateng  
Avery Oliver  
Baltimore Youth Voter Registration Committee  
Brikitta Hairston  
Change Consulting  
Chichi Agorom  
Chidinma Iwu  
Classye James, Shakeout  
Collette Watson, Media2070/Free Press  
Coral Feigin, Press On South  
Edisana Stephen  
Eight88 Studio  
Elizabeth Bolarinwa, Project Alafia  
Emmanuel Nwaka  
Family Literacy Project of Georgia  
Farooq Al-Said, 1Hood Media  
Free Minds Book Club  
GAIN Power  
Hollie Schultz, Online News Association  
Imani Stephens  
Jamie McGonnigal, Impactive

Jada Wesson, Blvck Psych  
Jade Jacobs, Black Education Research Center  
Jeremy Caplan, Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY/J+  
Katy Butler, Andrew Goodman Foundation  
Kara Little  
Kimberly Haase  
Lee Smith, New Voices for Reproductive Justice  
Makunde Martin, Justice for Cameroon  
Miracle Jones, 1Hood Media  
Missing Pieces Support Group  
Mississippi Votes  
Monet Lewis-Timmons  
Mwende Mutuli Musau  
NAL Media  
Naledi Sikhakhane  
Peter Lubembela, 10For10  
Rachel Alterman Wallack, VOX ATL  
RadComms  
Ray Mwareya  
re:power  
Shainah M. Andrews  
Sheena Roberson, CannabisNoire  
Stephanie Wolfe, Reading Partners D.C.  
Sydnee Walker, The Collaborative  
Tierra Stewart, Lead the Way  
Victoria Makanjuola  
Yanick Rice Lamb, Howard University  
48in48

# Financial Supporters

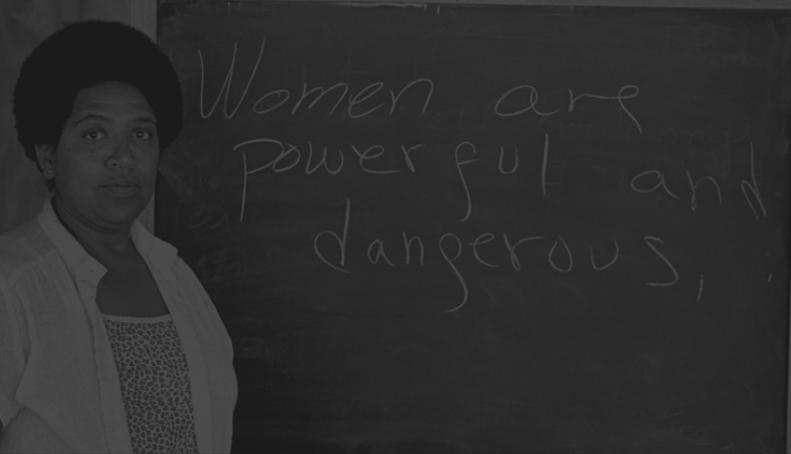
## **Individuals:**

Allison Hood  
Angela Harris  
Bradley Silber  
Brittani Samuel  
Carletha Felton  
Charles Felton  
Chloe Pantophlet  
Christine Njoku  
David Doctor  
Dillon Bernard  
Harold Gist  
Jamie Hampton  
Janis Ware  
Joyce Wright  
Kenyora Parham  
Kyle McMurtry  
Krystal Leaphart  
Mayowa Fageyinbo  
Mia Bolton  
Michelene Wilkerson  
Morgan Williams  
Natalie Chevalier  
Rachel Bradford  
Shanan Custer  
Shirley Carswell  
Tamara Felton-Howard  
Tanya Forehand  
Tierra Stewart

## **Organizations:**

Andrew Goodman Foundation\*  
Mixte Communications  
Press On South\*

*\* = Grant, stipend or awarded funding*



# Looking Ahead to 2023



# 2023 Strategic Goals

1

**CONTENT:** Double down on editorial content to focus on sustainability in publishing and refining our core editorial proposition.

Explore how we can leverage content capability and platform for other areas/needs (ie. membership offerings/perks/contributions, partnerships, sponsored content, newsletters + other media products, etc.)

2

**COMMUNITY:** Launch a beta membership program and open up Better to Speak for cooperative governance (beta members will ideally help to co-create the member experience and, by July, be eligible for ownership).

Initiate and complete the State of the Young Black Advocate survey of Black youth and young adults ages 18-30. Our goal will be to then leverage data and insights for our mission/content and programs, partnerships and membership offerings.

3

**CAPACITY:** Continue to refine systems to specifically improve contributing writer experience, editorial process, as well as administrative systems and processes.

Establish and work towards revenue goals with a focus on establishing core income sources (ie. membership, services, digital products, partnerships/sponsored content) while continuing to explore grants, fiscal sponsorship, and possibly loans for cooperative organizations that we are eligible for.

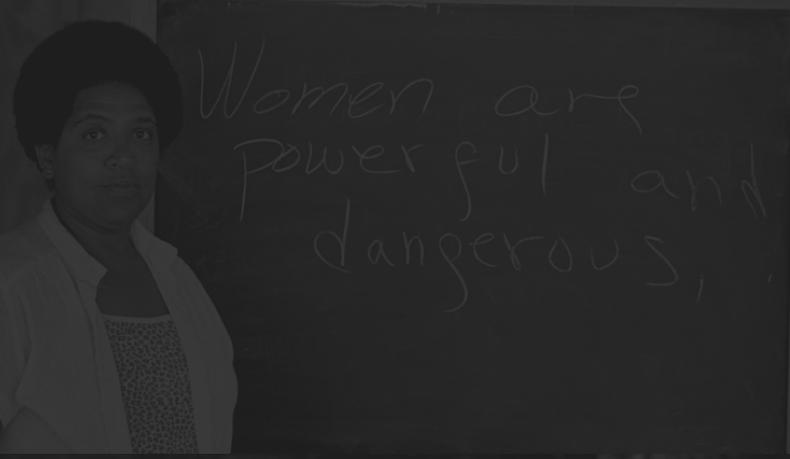
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**Contact us with any  
questions or inquiries for  
2023 collabs!**

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