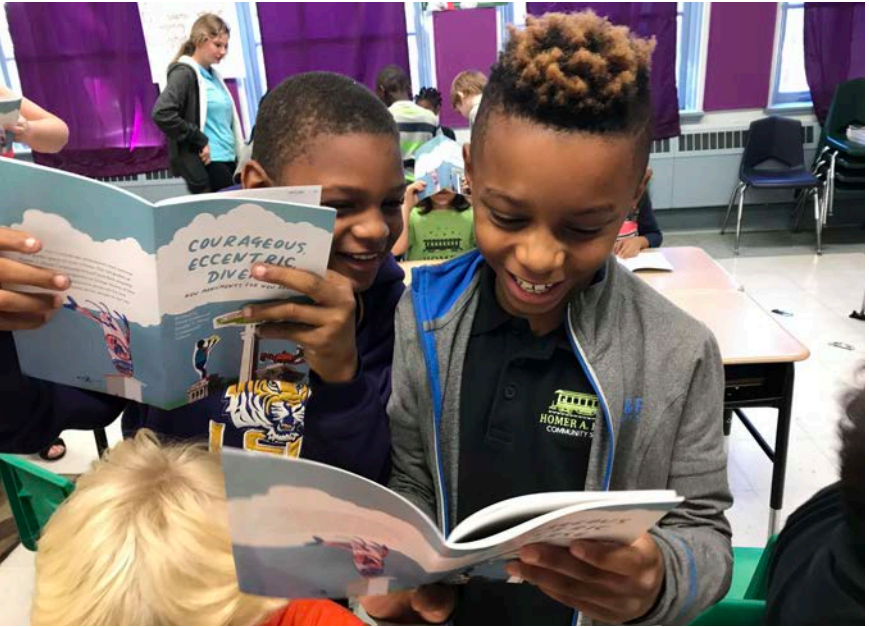




# STRATEGIC PLAN



**2017-2019**

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# INTRODUCTION

*The first time* I got published was at a workshop Big Class was having on a Saturday two years ago. Back then, Big Class was housed in a small room just off St. Claude Avenue and Pauline Street. The primary focus when I arrived that morning was a handful of teenagers getting the opportunity to workshop and network with experienced writers from around the United States. I wrote a collaborative poem with two other young students about our ideas of beauty and got to work on an old-school letterpress machine to publish it. As a writer, experiencing this workshop, seeing how the tools function, and hand-publishing a piece of writing was an absolute delight. It felt encompassing to physically hold my nebulous ideas.

Getting kids published encourages them to write even more, and feel good about their writing! Big Class understands that often writing is something that students feel like they have to do. By working with Big Class staff and volunteers, students as young as six years old are learning that writing doesn't have to be miserable. The kids learn that they can write creatively and poetically. Publishing their work creates a confidence boost and encourages them to write because they know that they have the potential to be heard.

It's not just about the publishing, though. Big Class offers a safe and inclusive space wherever we work. That's why I think our new Youth Writing Center is important; students deserve to have a space where they can write quietly, collaborate, or even get homework help. I think the Youth Writing Center will be a place of discovery for younger kids, a place of hope for middle schoolers, and a space of great potential for older students while also introducing teachers to different approaches to teach students writing inside of classrooms.

This Strategic Plan lays out how Big Class is going to make that happen, as well as all of our other work in schools around the city. There's so much excitement ahead: building community and youth voice; more digital programs that give youth access to new resources; and joining the renowned 826 National network. Everything in here points to new opportunities for young people to excel within Big Class's programs, nurturing inquisitive and explorative young minds.

As I head off to college, I know I will visit (and maybe even volunteer) and see Big Class accomplish the goals set in this Strategic Plan. I can't wait to come back after I finish college, though, and see everything in full swing. At that point, Big Class can create even more ambitious goals, while continuing to do what it does best—giving young people the confidence to write inside and outside of the classroom.



**—CHASITY HUNTER, BIG CLASS TEEN INTERN AND YOUTH  
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER**

# MISSION & HISTORY

**Big Class's mission is to cultivate and support the voices of New Orleans's young writers, ages 6-18, through creative collaborations with schools and communities.**

Big Class has its roots in a series of class projects from 2010, completed by first-grade students at Lincoln Elementary School in Marrero, Louisiana, and led by educators Doug Keller and Heather Muntzer.



As word of the projects spread throughout New Orleans, several teachers reached out to Doug about the need for similar work in their classrooms that would privilege marginalized student voices and give under-resourced youth opportunities to explore their creativity and improve their writing skills through project-based learning and volunteer support.

In 2013, Big Class joined with Press Street, a community arts nonprofit, to open The Big Class Studio, a creative space offering writing programs after school to young people in the Upper Ninth Ward of New Orleans, and began operating as a year-round organization with programming hosted at The Big Class Studio, in collaboration with other organizations, and in schools around the city.



# BIG CLASS & 826 NATIONAL

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In Fall 2014, Big Class entered into Chapter Development with 826 National, a network of youth writing nonprofits. This partnership with 826 allowed Big Class to join a national learning community while remaining a local organization responding to the unique needs of New Orleans youth. In January 2015, Big Class became a 501c3 nonprofit, and the organization now offers, at no cost to participants, a wide variety of innovative programs that support the writing skills of New Orleans youth.

As Big Class prepares to open a Youth Writing Center in the 7th Ward and to become the next 826 chapter, our programming continues in collaboration with schools, libraries, and other organizations around the city. Our programs are all project-based, volunteer-supported, and driven by student voice.

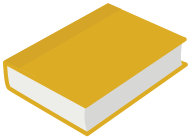
## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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**Young writers exit our programs knowing the power of their voices on and off the page.**



80% of our participants report that they identify as writers even though over 50% of these students state they did not consider themselves writers before participating in our programs.



80% of students across all programs report an increase in their confidence in writing, and these responses are echoed by their parents and teachers.

Since our founding:

**More than 3,500**  
students served  
1,500 in 2016-17  
alone

**More than 400**  
volunteers

**More than 100**  
student publications



# CURRENT PROGRAMS

## THE WRITERS' ROOM AT SYLVANIE WILLIAMS COLLEGE PREP

The Writers' Room is a dedicated room for writers in grades 1-7 to improve their communicative and expressive abilities through curriculum-aligned writing workshops led by volunteers that culminate in published work.



## BIG CLASS IN-RESIDENCE



This program places a dedicated staff member in a partner school to cultivate year-round writing and publishing happenings, spearheading school newspapers, book-making clubs, grade-level collaborations,

## BIG CLASS PROJECTS

Big Class projects are writing and publishing collaborations with public schools and teachers around New Orleans. Projects are supported by a dedicated group of volunteer tutors, artists, copy editors, and designers who engage with students over several weeks, working towards a final project that is shared with the community in a public reading and celebration.





## THE PIZZA POETRY PROJECT



The Pizza Poetry Project is a celebration of National Poetry Month and the power of youth voices through the publication of poems by young writers on pizza boxes delivered around New Orleans.

Poems are collected throughout the year through school and community-based workshops and open submission.

## STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

In April of 2016, Big Class embarked on a journey to develop foundational documents that would ground the organization and provide guidance for future steps. This process defined direction and strategies through a collective process that accurately reflects the growth of Big Class beyond a founder driven organization and towards an established resource for New Orleans and a chapter of the 826 National network. Through the guidance of Sage Crump of National Performance Network and the engagement of multiple stakeholders in a variety of settings, Big Class has developed a 3-year plan for 2017-2019.

The Big Class Strategic Plan 2017–2019 is a document designed as guide for organizational decision making. This Plan provides collectively developed directions and strategies, values, and a Theory of Change that incorporates insight from students, staff and board members. This plan will inform infrastructure development, programmatic decisions, and communications. A strategic plan is an organic document intended to offer direction, but will also be influenced over time by contextual issues in the communities Big Class serves and shift in the fields of education, arts & culture, and youth programming.



# **BIG CLASS VALUES**

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**We believe** that confidence in written language is fundamental to self-empowerment and future success.

**We believe** in providing young writers with space, time, support, and opportunities to publish their work.

**We believe** that writing is a great equalizer and can be a catalyst for social change.

**We believe** that creative writing encourages students to break down barriers and imagine the full range of what is possible.

**We believe** in facilitating and amplifying youth voices, particularly those most marginalized by current social conditions.

**We believe** that powerful youth become powerful adults.

**We believe** in the creation of safe, supportive spaces for black, brown, and queer youth.

**We believe** in collaborating with students, families and communities in developing learning environments inclusive of multiple ways of being and knowing.

**We believe** in cultivating a sense of possibility that allows for creativity, joy, humor, and weirdness.





# BIG CLASS THEORY OF CHANGE

## WHY Why does Big Class exist?

Because having confidence in written language is fundamental to self-empowerment and future success.

Because young writers rarely have the space and time to write, the individualized support needed to develop as writers, and publication opportunities that celebrate their writing.

Because the world we live in is not a meritocracy. Some young people have more access and privilege than others. Writing is an opportunity to bridge gaps and equalize the validity of experiences.

Because creative writing is a vital tool for breaking down barriers and imagining the full range of what is possible.

Because solutions for issues faced by youth, particularly those most marginalized by current social conditions, are best developed by youth themselves. As such, their writing should be central to such efforts.

Because safe, supportive spaces for youth, particularly Black, Brown, and queer youth, creates necessary room to develop an individual voice.

Because engaging a diversity of ideas and experiences, particularly those of students, parents, and educators, creates learning and writing environments inclusive of multiple ways of being and knowing.

Because writing demands a sense of possibility that allows for creativity, joy, humor, and weirdness.

## WHAT What does Big Class believe needs to happen?

Under-resourced youth in New Orleans need more opportunities to write and improve their writing.

These opportunities:

1. Need to be relevant to student interest and experience;
2. Need to be community supported;
3. Need to be driven by youth voice;
4. Need to take place in emotionally and physically safe spaces;
5. Need to make clear that writing is a means of communication and expression that can be self-generated and useful.

This writing needs to be published and shared widely, creating tangible proof points of the unique perspective youth have to share and their profound abilities when given such opportunities.

## HOW How is Big Class working to make this happen?

In Big Class programs, young people become published authors with the support of caring volunteers.

Youth engage in Big Class programs in collaboration with schools, libraries, and other organizations around the city. Soon these programs will also take place at our Youth Writing Center in the 7th Ward and on and around It's Lit, a mobile youth writing center.

Programs range from one-time workshops and events, to writing clubs over several weeks or months, to residencies in teachers' classrooms, to year-long school day, after-school, and weekend classes and drop-in programs.

Big Class programs norm writing as both an individual practice and as a social activity, cultivating habits of mind around voice, self-efficacy, identity, and community. Through one on one attention, an emphasis on creativity and fun, and the promotion of identification with writing, students build their writing confidence and skills.

## WHO Who does Big Class work with?

Big Class programming is implemented by staff, volunteers, and partner educators who are passionate about writing, creativity, and youth voice. Big Class often works with schools and libraries who provide spaces and other resources to carry out this programming.

Big Class is working with 826 National to become a chapter of their network and participate in resulting support systems.

Big Class's support system consists of a volunteer Board of Directors, Advisory Council, Youth Advisory Board, parents, other nonprofit organizations, and funders who share a vision of a New Orleans where young writers thrive.

## SO WHAT? Impact (Short & Long)

### Short

- 1) Youth have increased sense of self-efficacy through the ability to express themselves through writing;
- 2) Youth perceive writing as useful to their lives;
- 3) Youth identify as part of creative community;
- 4) Youth have improved writing skills
- 5) Teachers' perceptions of student capacity are broadened, and knowledge of best practices in teaching writing is expanded;
- 6) Parents who witness their children become published authors have increased pride;
- 7) Community has more positive perception of youth capacity for learning and expression;

### Long

Youth develop the desire and skills to write their path forward defined by aspiration, not by circumstance. They are able to explore the unlimited depths of their imaginations, navigate and overcome life's obstacles, and imagine and strive for a better life for themselves and their community.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### Priority 1: Identity

Clarify and communicate the values and impact of Big Class.

### Priority 2: Community

Deepen engagement with parents, teachers, and community members as active participants in organizational health and growth.

### Priority 3: Structure

Strengthen organizational policies, practices, and resources to create transparency, sense of efficacy, and adaptable alignment of values.

### Priority 4: Programmatic Depth and Breadth

Utilize all the assets of the organization to to expand and deepen programmatic reach and impact on the lives of the young people engaged across the city and in the 7th Ward.



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## PRIORITY 1: Identity

Clarify and communicate the values and impact of Big Class.

### ***Background:***

Big Class began as a grassroots organization driven by volunteers.

As the organization matures and refines its identity internally, the forward challenge is to share that identity publicly to build new relationships that lead to organizational growth.

### **Direction 1:**

*Amplify public knowledge of Big Class' programming, service, impact and values.*

**New Orleans knows about Big Class in the same way it knows about many community resources  
—primarily by word of mouth.**

**We want to help people who already know about Big Class tell a clearer and richer story about our work to others who don't know us as well.**

**Strategy 1:** Regularly share a story about what Big Class is doing, and how Big Class is doing, using both qualitative and quantitative information.

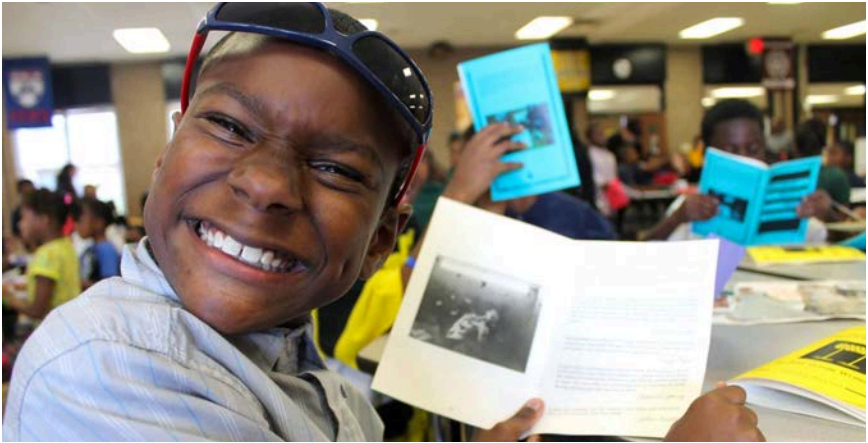
**Strategy 2:** Develop a communications approach that utilizes various mediums and is tailored to specific audiences.

**Strategy 3:** Promote understanding of Big Class programs as not only rooted in writing and creativity, but also connected to multiple disciplines and applications.



## Direction 2:

*Integrate Big Class into the 826 Network, and 826 into Big Class.*



Since our founding, Big Class has been inspired by the 826 model of youth writing centers that has seen success with 32,000 students annually in seven other cities.

Big Class is working through 826 National's multi-phase Chapter Development Process towards our ultimate goal of joining the network when we open the 826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center.

Being a part of 826's renowned national network will have a catalyzing impact on our work and our city as we learn from and collaborate with the national office and chapters in other cities.

**With the support of 826, the power of our students' voices will carry across the country.**

**Strategy 1:** Complete 826 National Chapter Development Process.

**Strategy 2:** Develop an integrated brand with the 826 Network.



## Direction 3:

*Establish Big Class reputation as publisher of New Orleans youth voices from marginalized communities that contributes to civic dialogue.*



**Big Class recognizes the importance of expanding avenues of publication for the young authors shaped by its programming and creating a safe space for the dissemination of often unheard stories.**

**Strategy 1:** Improve physical qualities of publications.

**Strategy 2:** Increase the readership and visibility of student publications through the media, local bookstores, and schools.

**Strategy 3:** Build the public conversation around Big Class publications as means of promoting youth voice and growing program authenticity.



## Direction 4:

*Strengthen anti-racism, social justice, and trauma-informed lens and practices.*

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**Big Class is committed to amplifying marginalized voices and supporting young people who are often overlooked.**

**An anti-racism lens on decisionmaking and programming is aligned with Big Class's organizational values and Theory of Change.**

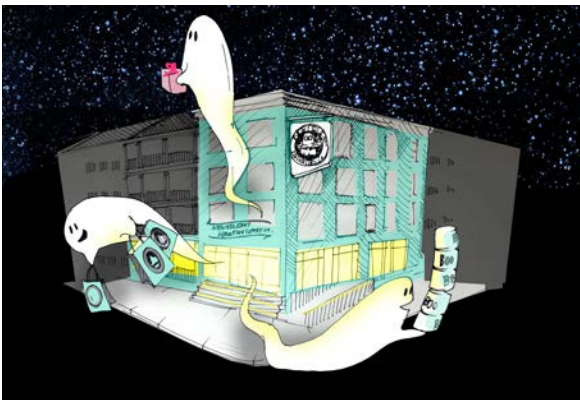
**Strategy 1:** Develop anti-racism and trauma-informed guidelines and practices for board, staff, and volunteers.

**Strategy 2:** Develop projects in dialogue with justice-focused topics.

## Direction 5:

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**Open the New Orleans Haunting Supply Co. and further integrate the storefront into the organizational brand as a gateway to Big Class's work.**



# **PRIORITY 2:** Community

---

*Deepen engagement with parents, teachers, and community members as active participants in organizational health and growth.*

## **Background:**

As a youth-serving nonprofit that will soon be rooted in a street-level community space, Big Class believes in being an equitable participant in a larger ecosystem of community resources. We will continue to work more deeply with parents, teachers, school administrators, authors, volunteers, and cultural workers in support of youth voice.

## **Direction 1:**

*Develop reciprocal relationships that build community investment in organizational and programmatic health.*

---

**Big Class seeks to be an organization that is community-based and accountable to the people it serves.**

**We believe in participatory democratic processes for decision making that creates pathways to leadership.**

**Strategy 1:** Increase parental participation in program and organizational sustainability.

**Strategy 2:** Engage teachers and educators in programmatic development and implementation, both in schools and in the community.

**Strategy 3:** : Develop ladders of engagement with increasing levels of organizational responsibility and decision-making.

**Strategy 4:** Intentionally engage our 7th Ward community through outreach and site-specific work.





## Direction 2:

*Align the work of Big Class with strategic work dealing with education, youth development, and the arts in New Orleans and nationally.*



**Big Class will develop relationships with organizations who have similar missions to exchange knowledge and share resources.**

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**Strategy 1:** Align Big Class' staff development and programming with the best practices in the arts, youth development, and education through local and national resources.

**Strategy 2:** Build relationships with local education and youth development decision-makers.

**Strategy 3:** Build collaborations with other organizations on





# Direction 3:

*Grow and sustain volunteer corps.*

**Volunteers are integral to the success and sustainability of Big Class's programming. We will grow a diverse volunteer base that is committed to young people and embodies our values.**



**Strategy 1:** Develop methods to increase recruitment, appreciation, training, and retention of volunteers.

**Strategy 2:** Increase effectiveness of volunteers in supporting young writers of color throughout diverse contexts.



# PRIORITY 3:

## Structure

---

*Strengthen organizational policies, practices, and resources to create transparency, sense of efficacy, and adaptable alignment of values.*

### **Background:**

Big Class began as a grassroots organization, driven by its founder and volunteers. As staff capacity, board leadership, and organizational support grows, Big Class is poised to realign the organization to build long-term sustainability.

## Direction 1:

*Grow sustainable board and staffing structures.*

---

**Big Class is committed to having a board of directors and staff that works in ways that support organizational needs and reflect the community it serves.**

**This requires policies and practices that support multiple modes of engagement, communication, and learning.**

**Strategy 1:** Align and grow staff throughout service to Big Class.

**Strategy 2:** Establish standing practices and policies for board.

**Strategy 3:** Increase shared accountability amongst staff, leadership, and governance bodies.



## Direction 2:

*Develop leadership pathways for growth, evolution, and transitions.*

---

**In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization, it is crucial for Big Class to be proactive in its approach to developing leaders.**

**Strategy 1:** Develop intentional pipelines to Board Service.

**Strategy 2:** Create strong transition plans for staff and board to ensure stability through changes.

## Direction 3:

*Evolve organizational ability to build sufficient and sustainable resources secured from diverse opportunities.*

---

Throughout its growth, Big Class has thus far relied mostly on grants, donations, and support from 826 National.

**As we mature as an organization (and work to execute this strategic plan), it's crucial that we continue to work to expand current revenue streams and develop new ones.**

**Strategy 1:** Grow revenue in accordance with programmatic growth.

**Strategy 2:** Engage all stakeholders in resource development and fundraising.

**Strategy 3:** Open Haunting Supply Co. and grow revenue to 10% of organizational budget.

**Strategy 4:** Codify decision making practice with regards to seeking, accepting, and managing funds.



# Direction 4:

*Successfully open, operate, and build community around the 826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center.*

**826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center is located in the 7th Ward of New Orleans. Big Class intends to be a strong community asset that supports its neighborhood's well-being through collaboration and shared resources.**

**Strategy 1:** Create and operationalize plans and systems for facility management.

**Strategy 2:** Create and operationalize plans and systems for New Orleans Haunting Supply Co.

**Strategy 3:** Develop reciprocal financial relationships with the community and those served.



# PRIORITY 4:

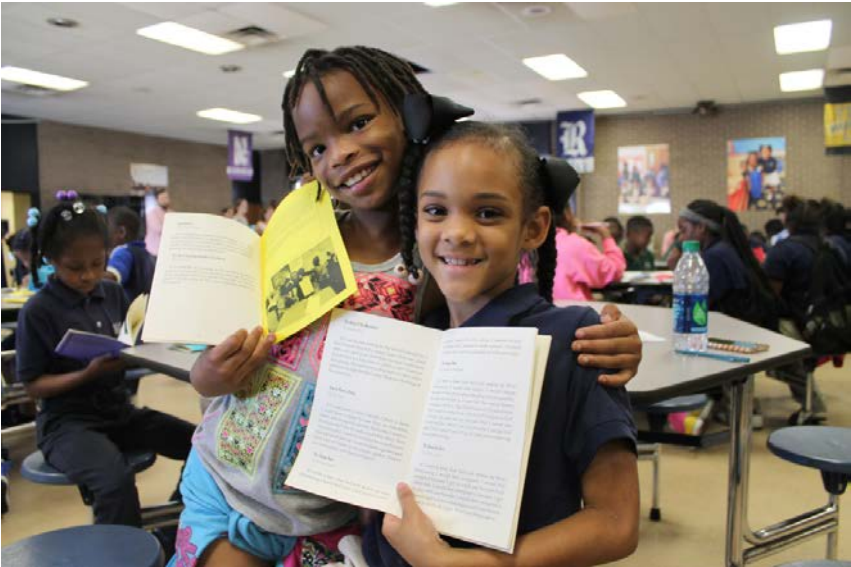
## Programmatic Depth & Breadth

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*Utilize all the assets of the organization to expand and deepen programmatic reach and impact on the lives of the young people engaged across the city and in the 7th Ward.*

### **Background:**

Big Class has signed a 10-year lease for our new home in the 7th Ward. This is a monumental leap forward for the organization—one that has been long planned for and coincides with development into a chapter of 826 National.



**Ultimately, the 826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center will build organizational capacity, create a third space (outside of school and home) for the community, enable new programmatic possibilities, and fill in gaps for young people in New Orleans.**



# Direction 1:

*Build new programming for the Youth Writing Center.*

---

**A Youth Writing Center will grow new opportunities for young people to write and to be supported in their writing, and offer a space of possibility for educators and families**

**Strategy 1:** Launch after-school writing and tutoring program as centerpiece of new center-based programming efforts.

**Strategy 2:** Begin storytelling, bookmaking, and digital storytelling workshops and field trips.

**Strategy 3:** Create summer opportunities for young people.

**Strategy 4:** Evolve teen opportunities with a focus on collegiate and professional futures.

# Direction 2:

*Concretize framework and tools for assessment.*

---

**Big Class has developed assessment methodologies and practices during its early stages as an organization. We are poised to document and reflect the efficacy of our practices. We also aim to deepen our impact on students and schools by focusing on our most transformative programs and by involving students and teachers in multiple programs over time.**

**Strategy 1:** Codify pedagogy, curriculum tools, processes, and approach.

**Strategy 2:** Solidify program evaluation.

**Strategy 3:** Improve Data Collection.



## Direction 3:

*Focus on in-school programs that allow for depth of engagement with students, classes, and schools.*

---

**As Big Class turns its focus to the 826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center, we will spend more time and resources within schools that create opportunities for success.**

**Strategy 1:** Offer high impact in-school projects that serve populations in need, address priority themes, have buy-in from school communities, and grow student confidence.

**Strategy 2:** Increase staff and volunteer resources towards Writers' Room program to improve literacy across school through writing.

**Strategy 3:** Increase the number of high-quality Pizza Poetry workshops to over 50 annually.

## Direction 4:

*Create pathways for youth to matriculate within Big Class programming.*

---

**As Big Class turns its focus to the 826 New Orleans Youth Writing Center, we will spend more time and resources within schools that create opportunities for success.**

**Strategy 1:** Strengthen links between programs.

**Strategy 2:** Develop opportunities for pathways through programs, from elementary school to high school and beyond.





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Sage Crump for leading this process, and to Monica Tyrان for her support.

Big Class's Strategic Plan was developed by Board Members Alvin David, Jayeesha Dutta, Danielle Gilyot-Smith, Kelly Harris-DeBerry, Heather Muntzer, Kathleen Whalen, Gabrielle Wilson-Prout, Staff Members Doug Keller, Kyley Pulphus, Ashley Teamer, Eliza Walker, with input from students including Anyx Burd, Hector Campbell, Christiann Cannon, Nia Gates, Chasity Hunter, Amaya Smith, Kennedi Smith, Akilah Toney, Alaila Young, Deyonne Young, and parents Katy Reckdahl, Albert Smith, and Alaina Young. Additional feedback came from 826 National's Gerald Richards and Kait Steele, and staff members Kortney Morrow and Shannelle Mills.

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