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2022-2025 Strategic Plan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [Reflecting and Reimagining A 21st Century Poetry Foundation 1](#)
- [Introduction 2](#)
- [The Strategic Planning Process 3](#)
- [Organizational Statements 4](#)
- [Goals and Objectives 6](#)
- [Acknowledgements 8](#)



REFLECTING AND REIMAGINING A 21ST CENTURY POETRY FOUNDATION

A letter from Poetry Foundation President Michelle T. Boone and Board Chair Caren Yanis

If there's one thing a writer appreciates, it is the time for a rewrite—time to review, revise, and edit. *Am I being clear with my intentions? What is the purpose of a passage, paragraph, or word?*

We at the Poetry Foundation have considered those questions, among others, as we approached the process of crafting a new strategic plan. Our mission statement had not been revisited since its creation 20 years ago, nor had our *raison d'être* been reconsidered. A lot has changed since the start of the 21st century, and the need for transformation has never been more clear than it is now.

Initiating a strategic planning process was exciting, if daunting. We worked with our entire Board of Trustees and staff to ensure a process that would be internally reflective and externally engaged. The events of 2020—a global pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and subsequent racial reckoning, and a series of our own transitions—accelerated an outcry for social, political, and cultural change to which the Foundation had to respond.

Over the past year, we've listened to and learned from consultations with our stakeholders and poetry communities, understanding that we needed a new mission and vision to embrace poetry in all its forms, articulate new ways to support poetry communities and poets, and expand access and public participation in poetry at-large.

Our new Strategic Plan includes a new mission statement:

The Poetry Foundation recognizes the power of words to transform lives. We work to amplify poetry by fostering spaces for all to create, experience, and share poetry.

We could not have succeeded in this journey without the generous support of our staff and board, whose contributions of time and energy made it possible to create a transformational plan that will guide the next three years of change and impact for the Foundation. And, of course, we could not have landed here without the feedback and insights of hundreds of our friends, partners, poets, readers, and even our critics. We thank you for every survey completed, focus group attended, phone and Zoom call answered.

This Strategic Plan is not the end, but the beginning of this next phase of our work. Together, we have created a plan that enables the Poetry Foundation to embrace its legacy, celebrate and challenge its past, and imagine its future.

Yours in poetry,

Michelle T. Boone
Poetry Foundation President

Caren Yanis
Poetry Foundation Board Chair



INTRODUCTION

The Poetry Foundation is a literary organization of international influence. Established in 2003, with the receipt of a major gift from philanthropist Ruth Lilly, the Poetry Foundation evolved from the Modern Poetry Association, founded in 1941 to support the publication of *Poetry* magazine. The gift from Ruth Lilly allowed the Poetry Foundation to expand and enhance the presence of poetry in the United States and to support *Poetry* magazine in perpetuity. Since the organization's evolution with the receipt of the gift, the world has shifted, and the field of poetry has grown.

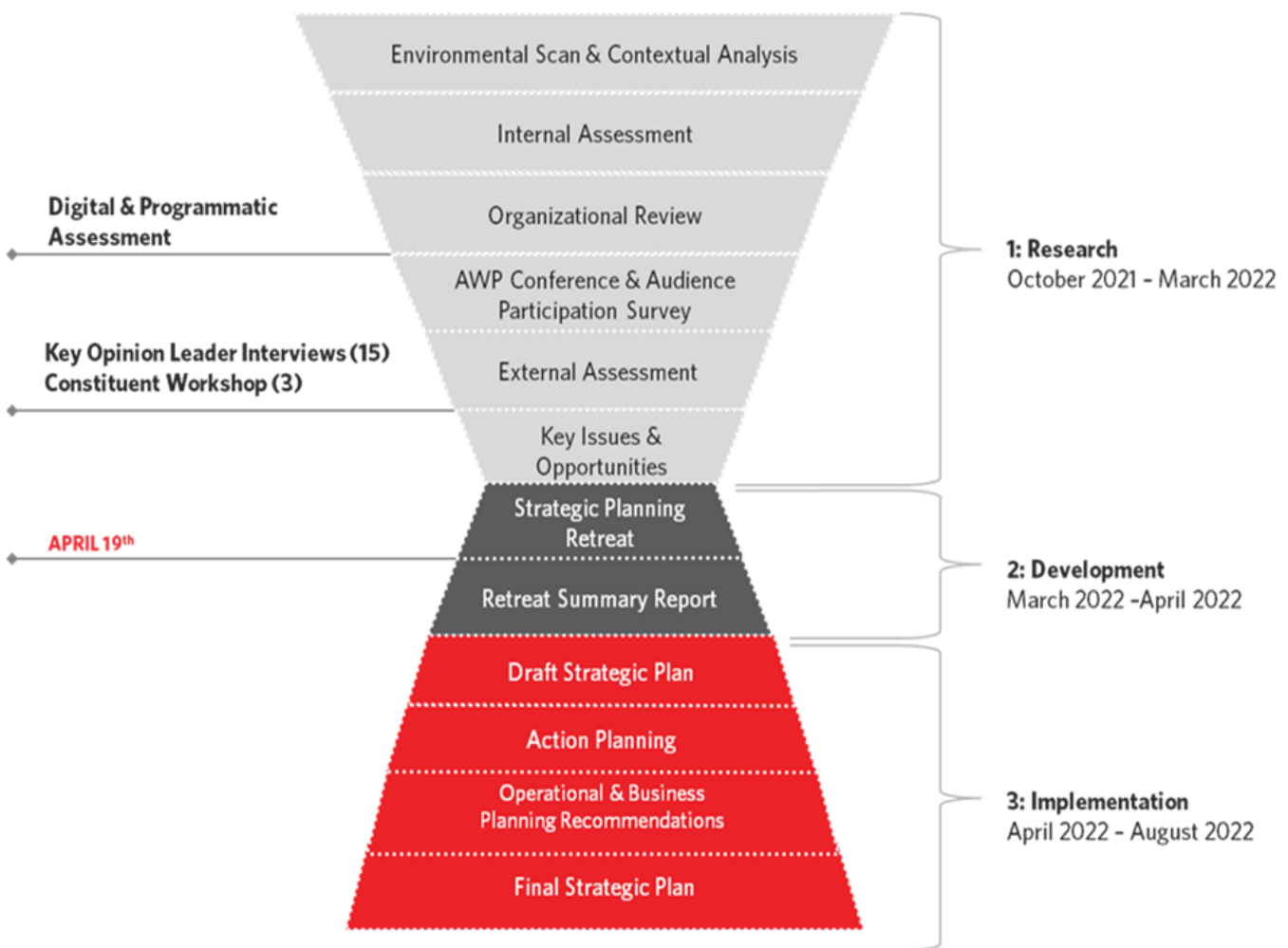
In 2021, the Poetry Foundation welcomed new leadership at the management and board level and recognized an opportunity to address its past and current positioning within the field to develop a new roadmap for the future. A strategic plan process was launched to set a three-year direction for the Poetry Foundation.

This plan seeks to underline principles reflecting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and commitment to anti-racism in all forms. This plan's work is iterative, focusing on adopting sharing as a central value of the organization. That work requires the capacity and ability to pivot and adapt to the needs of the field and the external forces impacting it. This Strategic Plan is not the end of our work but the beginning. The Poetry Foundation Board, Staff, audiences, peers, and partners have created a plan that allows the Foundation to embrace and celebrate its legacy while reimagining the organization's impact and future.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In the fall of 2021, The Poetry Foundation engaged the international arts and culture consulting firm Lord Cultural Resources to work collaboratively with the Board, President, and staff to facilitate a strategic planning process to revisit the mission and vision, craft core values, set impactful goals, and develop measurable objectives.

The process was undertaken in three phases:



ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENTS

The mission and vision of an organization are a glimpse inside the institution's inner workings. They are a plan for how it reaches out to engage its community and the public at large. The mission and vision are the cornerstones to creating an organization's identity. The mission is the organization's reason for being, and the vision is the impact that it hopes to have on the world.

Revisiting the organizational statements during the strategic planning process is integral to ensuring that the values and ethos of the organization are in sync with its current trajectory. This allows for innovation and evolution. In addition to the revised mission and vision, the Poetry Foundation adopted organizational values. These values will anchor all the Poetry Foundation's activity, speaking not only to public engagement but also to its internal operations.

Based on staff and stakeholder engagement, internal and external assessment, and research throughout the process, the Poetry Foundation staff, and Strategic Planning Steering Committee recommended revised mission and vision statements and suggested language for organizational values. The Board then approved these organizational statements in June 2022.



NEW MISSION

The Poetry Foundation recognizes the power of words to transform lives. We work to amplify poetry and celebrate poets by fostering spaces for all to create, experience, and share poetry.

NEW VISION

The Poetry Foundation supports poetry in all its diversity. We envision a world where poetry is vital to building a better future for everyone.

VALUES

Sharing + Collaboration: We build community in collaboration with poets, arts and cultural communities, and current and future audiences.

Equity + Access: We create inclusive spaces for poets to share their work with a growing, engaged community. We center the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in programming, publishing, grantmaking, and internal operations.

Innovation + Growth: We support innovation in poetry: in print, digital, and performance, to foster sustainability and enable multiple points of access.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Poetry Foundation developed three strategic goals to guide the organization for the next three years. These goals are outlined by objectives confirmed by the staff during the Action Planning process.

Objectives are short-term, quantifiable levels of achievement specified in plans and budgets. The next step of this process is Implementation, where Poetry Foundation staff will further develop the objectives by identifying actionable tasks to achieve each goal.

STRATEGIC GOAL #1: ACCOUNTABILITY

Improve transparency through evidence-based evaluation and open communication.

OBJECTIVES

- Clarify how the Poetry Foundation relates to artists, audiences, and communities.
- Deepen and grow the audience for poetry by adopting a shared curatorial approach, building on our historical role as publisher and perceived arbiter of value.
- Institute organization-wide policies, goals, and metrics for internal and external reporting.
- Evaluate new and existing programs against their relevance to the updated organizational purpose.

STRATEGIC GOAL #2: PURPOSE

Establish a clear organizational purpose that supports an equitable and sustainable future for poets and poetry.

OBJECTIVES

- Adopt a new Mission, Vision, and Values statements relevant to today; must clearly reflect who the Poetry Foundation is, and what it does.
- Express intentions to be of service to the poetry field-at-large and to communities; clarify what it means for the Poetry Foundation to celebrate poets and poetry.
- Help create or broaden paid opportunities for poets.
- Establish clear grant-making parameters.
- Clearly state how the Poetry Foundation can help achieve an equitable and sustainable future for poets and poetry

STRATEGIC GOAL #3: FOCUS

Focus on collaborating with poets and creative communities.

OBJECTIVES

- Sponsor and develop collaborative research (e.g., Poetry Today) that signifies connection to the sector, not just its audience; can help the Poetry Foundation understand how to broaden its focus.
- Globally adopt a people-first perspective.
- Convene and sustain conversations about issues impacting poets, while creating a platform for the many conversations already taking place (e.g., poetry disability, mass incarceration, etc.).
- Seek, acknowledge, and support those doing innovative work in their various communities by meeting them at the point of their needs with a spirit of generosity and creativity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks for the advice, insights, and assistance of all who contributed to this strategic planning process. And a special thanks to the entirety of the Poetry Foundation staff for their continued excellence and integral work towards the development of the Strategic Plan.

Poetry Foundation Strategic Planning Steering Committee

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