



## 2020-2025 Strategic Plan

### *Our Vision*

Hugo House opens the literary world to everyone who loves books or has a drive to write.

### *Our Mission*

Hugo House gives people a place to read words, hear words, and make their own words better.

## Background and Summary

Launched in 1996, Hugo House has served over a hundred thousand people as Seattle’s literary center, offering hundreds of creative writing classes, literary events, and teen writing programs every year. Today, Hugo House is in a dramatically new phase.

At a time when rising urban rents are driving many artists out of town and threatening small cultural organizations, the Hugo House community has come together to write a different story. After twenty years operating in a borrowed space, a dilapidated former funeral home, we raised the money for, purchased, and moved into a permanent facility in the heart of the city. Together, we created a space that invites us to gather, reflect, discuss, wrestle with, and appreciate words—a home that will serve Seattle for generations to come.

From this position of strength and stability, the four goals of our strategic plan detail the direction we will head over the next five years. Goal 1 speaks to our devotion to writers, and Goal 4 speaks to our commitment to running a fiscally healthy organization. These goals have anchored Hugo House since its inception, and we remain resolute in our focus on them. It’s in Goal 2 and Goal 3 where we express a new and vigorous focus on expanding our reach. In Goal 2, we seek to engage new groups of people, with the intent to include readers more actively. Reading is as much a focus at Hugo House as writing— it’s an essential component of the craft; by engaging readers more directly we will energize the dialogue and broaden our impact. Goal 3 emphasizes our determination to center Black, Indigenous, and other writers of color as well as engage readers of color: the most pressing adaptive work we can do. Together these goals launch us into an exciting new phase.

### ***Our Four Goals:***

1. We want Hugo House to be a transformative space, **a place writers can come together to grow in their art.**
2. We want to **engage new groups of people** creating opportunities to connect more deeply with the power of the written word.
3. We want Hugo House to be profoundly welcoming to all writers and readers, **to advance racial equity, and to ensure diversity and inclusion.**
4. We want to build a lasting future for Hugo House, **securing the resources necessary to accomplish our vision and thrive.**

## **Purpose: Why words matter**

*Through words, we make the world.*

We navigate troubled times with nuanced writing, serious listening, and a willingness to confront injustice. We also reveal joy by creating poems, essays, and stories that surprise and delight readers. Hugo House is a place to be serious about what writing has to offer: its power to shape the world.

*Words connect people.*

Through skillful writing and thoughtful reading, we come to understand others. As recent visiting writer Chris Abani put it, writing is an engine of empathy, a way for one person to “think inside the brain” of another. As such, a profound sense of connection develops, deeper than that superficial commonalities or expedient alliances can produce.

*Words deepen and clarify thought.*

Our modern world rewards speed, simplicity, and dichotomous thinking. Through reading, writing, and wrestling with what makes a work powerful, Hugo House aims to restore and revitalize our tendency to dwell, to ponder, to revisit and refine, to appreciate subtle distinctions. Our understanding expands; our thoughts come alive.

*Words help us know ourselves.*

We develop what we think by reading what others write. Different points of view give us something to weigh our thoughts against as our own values evolve. We also learn what we think by writing our thoughts. When vague notions are set on paper, we can better spot and fix fuzzy thinking and reform and refine our ideas. Deeper self-knowledge and skilled self-expression are outcomes of the reading and writing life. The attached Theory of Change illustrates the power of the written word to change the world.

## **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion: Why diverse voices matter**

We believe that stories, whether told through the lens of fiction, poetry, or nonfiction, effectively bring one person into the life experience of another. We believe that stories by people from all backgrounds, ethnicities, races, and nations must be heard.

To this end, it is Hugo House's intent is to be profoundly welcoming. We provide a refuge for readers, writers, and thinkers, not because we can guarantee that nothing said will trigger or offend, but because we believe that the search for the right words can help overcome bias and offense, heal trauma, change systems, and help us all learn to thrive as individuals and as supportive members of our larger community.

To create an equitable and inclusive community, one that reflects our antiracist values, we need to be intentional in adapting and making change. Hugo House will ensure that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have a role in shaping Hugo House's future – on the board, as staffers, through teaching, presenting, and performing. We welcome the work ahead, and will approach the changes needed with honesty, humility, and humanity.

The critical importance of including all types of voices is articulated in our racial equity statement:

Hugo House commits to work toward racial equity at all levels of our organization. Our staff and board see this long-term commitment as essential to carrying out our mission and enabling all writers to add their voices to the human story. Hugo House recognizes the historical inequities in access to literary opportunities for people of color. We need to increase awareness and learn from engagement with the broader community in order to expand racial diversity and inclusion. We regard racial equity as a top priority, one that is essential to our progress and growth.

## The Plan: A framework for our future, 2020-2025

- 1) **GOAL: We want Hugo House to be a transformative space, a place writers can come together to grow in their art.**
  - a. **STRATEGY:** Offer engaging classes to help writers become better writers
  - b. **STRATEGY:** Feature exemplary writers in events across genres and styles to expose the community to a broad range of artistic modes and ideas
  - c. **STRATEGY:** Build a nurturing literary community, connecting writers with one another
  - d. **STRATEGY:** Dramatically expand the participation of youth in Hugo House programming
  
- 2) **GOAL: We want to engage new groups of people, creating opportunities to connect more deeply with the power of the written word.**
  - a. **STRATEGY:** Welcome and encourage those who aspire to write
  - b. **STRATEGY:** Link readers with Hugo House and the larger literary conversation
  - c. **STRATEGY:** Increase ease of access to Hugo House programming
  - d. **STRATEGY:** Increase visibility through an amplified marketing plan
  - e. **STRATEGY:** Increase opportunities for people to volunteer with Hugo House
  
- 3) **GOAL: We want Hugo House to be profoundly welcoming to all writers and readers, to advance racial equity, and to ensure diversity and inclusion.**
  - a. **STRATEGY:** Create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee of the Board of Directors
  - b. **STRATEGY:** Identify barriers to participation by BIPOC in our programming
  - c. **STRATEGY:** Create policies, practices, and programs that remove barriers and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion
  - d. **STRATEGY:** Develop collaborative partnerships to further engagement with BIPOC readers and writers
  - e. **STRATEGY:** Offer youth programming that centers teens of color
  
- 4) **GOAL: We want to build a lasting future for Hugo House, securing the resources necessary to accomplish our vision and thrive.**
  - a. **STRATEGY:** Increase contributed revenue streams from individuals—major donors, annual fund gifts, special events

- b. **STRATEGY:** Broaden grant strategy to appeal to sources that fund issues aligned with Hugo House values
- c. **STRATEGY:** Create a business plan for increased earned revenue
- d. **STRATEGY:** Invest in staff
- e. **STRATEGY:** Build a board with capabilities needed to advance Hugo House
- f. **STRATEGY:** Invest in technological infrastructure
- g. **STRATEGY:** Consider establishing an endowment fund and/or planned giving program

## The Process: How we created and will implement the plan

This plan was created over twelve months and outlines how we will make the best use of our new home in the coming years and in a manner that serves the whole of our community. Hugo House convened a diverse group of board, staff, and community members—over half of whom were people of color—to produce this framework. During the planning process, we solicited feedback from constituents, surveyed hundreds of students and teachers, held focus groups, and collected suggestions from people at our events. Through an iterative process, the whole Hugo House board and staff were involved in every step of this plan. It was unanimously approved in January 2020.\*

Given today's rapid pace of change, setting out multi-year action plans now for the five-year span of this framework seems prematurely prescriptive. Rather we will work within the plan's framework, staying flexible enough to respond to opportunities as they emerge.

To implement this framework the board will set annual priorities and expectations for growth. The staff will develop detailed annual workplans each year with clear objectives and specific measures, which will be tracked throughout the year.

We will evaluate new Ideas for program activity and partnerships on how well they serve the goals, strategies, and approaches in this framework, as well as through rigorous cost/benefit analyses, keeping in mind staff and financial capacity. We want to strike a balance between dynamic artistic growth and financial health – avoiding dangerous risk on one hand and stagnation on the other.

We will evaluate our progress at the end of each year, learning from the work as we go and constantly striving to improve everything we do. We will build a new action plan each year based on:

- 5) Progress to date
- 6) Challenges encountered
- 7) New opportunities
- 8) Changes in the external environment
- 9) Financial capacity

\*Revisions to the original plan – which were suggested by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee – were incorporated and approved by the board in June 2020.

## Strategic Planning Committee

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| <p><i>Board Members</i></p> <p>Lynn Grant, <i>Chair</i><br/> Dick Gemperle<br/> Elise Holschuh<br/> Maggie Orth<br/> Mike Trickey</p> <p><i>Staff</i></p> <p>Rob Arnold<br/> Ana Lester<br/> Tree Swenson</p> | <p><i>Community Members</i></p> <p>Laura Da'<br/> Mindy DeYoung<br/> Ramon Isao<br/> M'Bilia Meekers<br/> Harold Taw</p> <p><i>Consultant</i></p> <p>Charla Skaggs</p> <p><i>Focus group facilitator</i></p> <p>Carol Holding</p> |
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## Hugo House Board of Directors

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| <p>Dick Gemperle, <i>President</i><br/> Sarah Kuipers, <i>Treasurer</i><br/> Mary Jo Newhouse, <i>Secretary</i><br/> Allison Augustyn<br/> Elizabeth DeNoma<br/> Donte Felder<br/> Bruce Funkhouser<br/> Dottie Hall<br/> Lynn Grant<br/> Lynn Heinisch</p> | <p>Elise Holschuh<br/> Stacy Lawson<br/> Georgia McDade<br/> Maggie Orth<br/> Shahina Piyarali<br/> Tim Shea<br/> Garth Stein<br/> Mike Trickey<br/> Tree Swenson (ex officio)</p> |
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## Hugo House Staff

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| <p>Tree Swenson<br/> <i>Executive Director</i></p> <p>Rob Arnold<br/> <i>Program Director</i></p> <p>Margot Kahn Case<br/> <i>Education Director</i></p> <p>Lily Frenette<br/> <i>Registrar &amp; Front Desk</i></p> <p>Megan Gallagher<br/> <i>Marketing Assistant</i></p> <p>Louise Kincaid<br/> <i>Development Director</i></p> <p>Nicole McCarthy<br/> <i>Development &amp; Board Coordinator</i></p> | <p>John Peterman<br/> <i>Finance Director</i></p> <p>Katie Prince<br/> <i>Marketing Director</i></p> <p>Paroma Zaman<br/> <i>Youth &amp; Administrative Coordinator</i></p> <p><i>Program Assistance and Front Desk Staff</i></p> <p>Sarah Johnson<br/> Thomas Ianelli<br/> Mickee Cheung<br/> Amy Lin<br/> Eric Roper</p> |
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