

THE
WORD
A STORYTELLING SANCTUARY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024






WELCOME

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A MESSAGE FROM THE WORD TEAM

Dear Word community,

This year has been one of change, transition and evolution but at the heart of it all was and always is our beloved community. Together we:

- hosted the Denver Big Read as we were a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Grant. We collaborated with partners and artists across the city, hosting over 40 readings, book club talks, art-making workshops, youth activities, screening and performances throughout the Denver-metro area in response to Natalie Diaz's brilliant *collection Postcolonial Love Poem*;
- held the 3rd biennial [margins.] literary conference and book festival in Denver's historic Santa Fe Arts District engaging with 300 participants, showcasing local and international artists and award-winning authors from across the country; connected emerging writers with agents; and hosted a virtual conference for accessibility;
- and launched Word Unbound, a virtual literary workshop series for all writers, from all backgrounds and writing experiences, to join together in an exploration of what sits just beyond what we've already asked. The aim of our new program is to connect writers with instructors who have pushed their own craft to unexpected realities or visioned the publication journey past hidden doors; providing a space for learning from peers; and offering moments for many more connections to become.

Last but not least Founder and Executive Director Viniyanka Prasad prepared to embark on a 7-month sabbatical starting in November 2025 to work on her Livingston Fellowship. In preparation for her absence, Chief Operating Officer, Michelle Malonzo moved into an Interim Co-Executive Director role to temporarily share leadership responsibilities and provide guidance during her absence. Additionally, longtime board member and [margins.] co-founder, Chris Aguilar-Garcia, exited the board and joined the staff in the newly created role of Programs Director.

The Word celebrates its past and looks forward to its future. We will continue to evolve as the needs of our communities continue to change and take shape. We will continue to be nimble, listen with care and are as ever honored and grateful to be doing this work alongside you.

- The Word Team



Pictured L to R: Michelle Malonzo, Interim Co-Executive Director; Chris Aguilar-Garcia, Programs Director; Blaire Bridges, Operations Coordinator; Viniyanka Prasad, Founder and Co-Executive Director; and Jesse Martinez, Interim Development Director. Not pictured: Aida Lilly, Programs Coordinator and Alyssa Reynoso-Morris, Program Deputy.

WHO WE ARE

The Word | A Storytelling Sanctuary

is a Denver, CO-based, nationally serving literary arts nonprofit.

Promote authentic storytelling

from BIPOC, LGBTQIAP2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities

Support & connect

writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers

Explore new models

for the literary ecosystem and collective work toward equitable futures

Hold safe space

in community

CELEBRATING

the Livingston Fellowship



Founder and Co-Executive Director, Viniyanka Prasad, was named a Livingston Fellow last year and begins fellowship activities starting November 2025.

The Livingston Fellowship provides advanced learning opportunities to senior-level social sector leaders and promising community-centered leaders who hold significant leadership roles in Colorado's social sector. This innovative professional development opportunity reflects Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's commitment to invest in the sector's greatest assets—its leaders.

Congratulations to The Word | A Storytelling Sanctuary Founder, Viniyanka Prasad!

our programming

The Word creates collective abundance through storytelling by promoting cultural equity and the inclusion in published literature of perspectives from across race, cultural, ethnic, or religious identity; gender identity; sexual orientation; disability; socioeconomic adversity; and personal experiences of adversity or injustice.

Our programming includes:

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP

A one-of-a-kind opportunity for upcoming writers to work with an experienced acquiring editor in a year-long mentorship.

[MARGINS.] LITERARY CONFERENCE + BOOK FESTIVAL

A biannual space where the dream of an inclusive literary future is made into a reality.

#MARGINSBOOKSELLING

A celebration of booksellers and bookstores, centering BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities and culminating in a month-long consumer awareness campaign in August that includes an interactive bookstore map featuring 200+ bookstores, curated author events, workshops, and education sessions.

BIPOC BOOKSELLER AWARD

An annual award and ceremony, the only of its kind in the U.S., celebrating three booksellers whose dedication to indie bookstores and their BIPOC colleagues and communities has positively influenced the industry.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We hold safe space and make room for joy, connection and celebrating the beautiful art from our communities in a variety of meet-ups and community events throughout the year.

WORD UNBOUND

Word Unbound provides a range of writing, publishing, and bookselling workshops, that foster creativity, professional development and community.

DENVER'S NEA BIG READ

City-wide reading event that included book talks, readings, art-making workshops, film and performance all in response to Natalie Diaz's POSTCOLONIAL LOVE POEM sponsored by the NEA, running October 2023-April 2024



THE 2024

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP



our 2024 mentors

NAOMI GIBBS

Executive Editor
Pantheon Books, PRH

2024 Adult Fiction Mentor



CHARLOTTE PETERS

Editorial Assistant
Dutton & Plume, PRH

2024 Adult Romance Mentor



LEYLA ERKAN

Assistant Editor
Hachette Book Group

2024 Middle Grade Mentor



TJ OHLER

Assistant Editor
Zando

2024 Picture Book Mentor



RACHEL DIEBEL

Editor
Feiwe! & Friends, Macmillan
Children's Publishing Group)

2024 Young Adult Fiction Mentor



our 2024 editor-writer mentees

2024 ADULT FICTION

BRENTON ZOLA



2024 ADULT ROMANCE

CARMEN CATENA



2024 MIDDLE GRADE

TRINITY CLEMENTS-CLARK



2024 PICTURE BOOK

R.C. CHIZHOV



2024 YOUNG ADULT

MARISA CATALINA CASEY





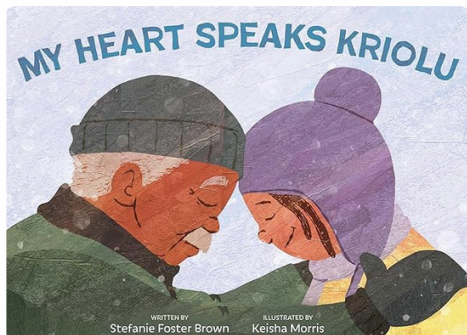
THE

EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP

THE WORD'S

mentees

ARE MAKING WAVES



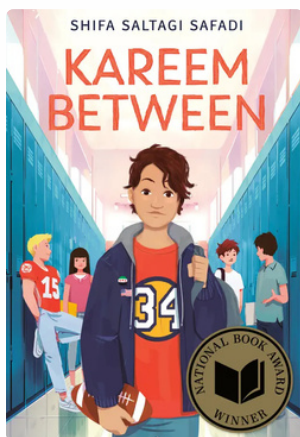
Stefanie Foster Brown

2021 Graduate

My Heart Speaks Kriolu

Simon & Schuster
For Young Readers

On-sale 2025



Shifa Saltagi Safadi

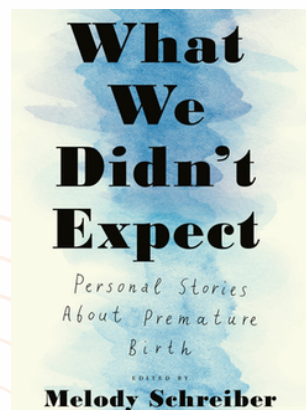
2022 Graduate

Kareem Between

G.P. Putnam's Sons Books
for Young Readers

On-sale Sept. 2024

**2024 National Book
Award Winner**



Melody Schreiber

2020 Graduate

What We Didn't Expect

Melville House

On-sale November 2020

Since 2017, The Word has been pairing upcoming writers from underrepresented backgrounds with experienced book publishing editors for a year-long mentor experience. Our list of graduates includes **2024 National Book Award Winner, Shifa Saltagi Safadi** and **2024 Whiting Award Winner Samuel Kóláwólé**.

SINCE 2017

68 book deals received by graduates

40 books have been traditionally published

25 books self-published

10 mentees received **agented contracts**

IN 2024

We received **93** applications from **10** countries. **5** publishing houses participated in our program, and **5** editors provided editorial feedback to **5** mentees

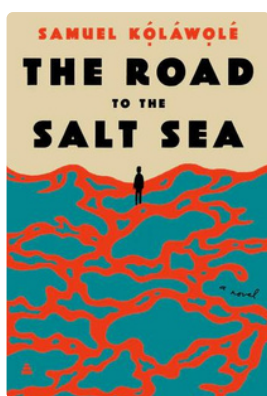


THE EDITOR-WRITER MENTORSHIP

creating new avenues
to publication & discovery

[Click Here](#)

or scan below to learn more
about the Editor-Writer
Mentorship Program.



Samuel Kôlâwôlé

2019 Graduate

The Road to the Salt Sea

Amistad

On-sale July 2024

**2024 Whiting Award
Winner**

“ The mentorship helped renew my hope that there are editors out there who will get your work. It's just a matter finding the right ones. Having an editor understand and get my work was so meaningful. ”

– Mimi Wong
2021 Mentee



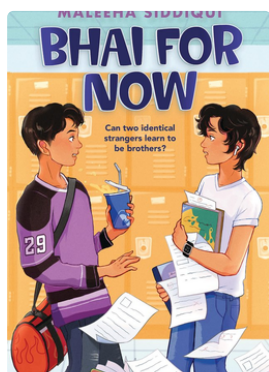
Denise Adusei

2019 Graduate

Cesaria Feels the Beat

Roaring Brook Press

On-sale June 2024



Maleeha Siddiqui

2018 Graduate

Bhai for Now

Scholastic Press

On-sale October 2022

“ I'm not sure what my journey with this project would have looked like had I not gotten into the Editor Writer Mentorship. ”

– Ebonie Ledbetter
2023 Mentee

biennial literary conference + book festival

In preparation for The Word's 2024 programming, we welcomed Chris Aguilar-Garcia as our new Programs Director. They are one of our conference co-founders and founding board member who joined our staff this year to help us bring [margins.] 2024 to life!

For the 2024 [margins.] literary conference + book festival, we partnered with the historic Arts District on Santa Fe in Denver, working with local businesses and artists to gather and connect local, national and international emerging and established artists and readers to one another. Over the course of one weekend, we came together to celebrate, learn and contribute to the thriving arts community in Denver. In addition, we ran a full weeklong virtual conference for our national and international community members.

We were grounded in each other's presence. We explored expanding paths. We came together to heal, learn, and spark continuing movement.

300

people attended the
4-day conference
and festival

28%

of conference
attendees were
award scholarships

100+

artists were
provided paid
opportunities



Scan the QR code to
learn more about the
[margins.] conference.



"My heart is still so full from this weekend. Thank you so much for all the work you do at The Word, it's truly inspiring and a reminder why I want to keep doing the work too."

-- MONICA RODRIGUEZ
2023 and 2024 [margins.] panelist and attendee



margins.



"Writing is a lonely business, especially for writers of color and otherwise marginalized creatives, but The Word is working with and on behalf of community so that it doesn't have to be that way in Denver. As a long-time Denver creative, I am both grateful and excited. It's about time."

-- ROWENA ALEGRÍA
2024 [margins.] attendee



"There is no literary gathering quite like [margins.]. The creative pathways and connections I made refilled my creative cup. [margins.] reaffirmed why I work in the literary world: our stories matter. Now more than ever, we need spaces to share who we are on the page and in community. [margins.] is that space."

-- BRITT CAMACHO
2022 and 2024 [margins.] attendee

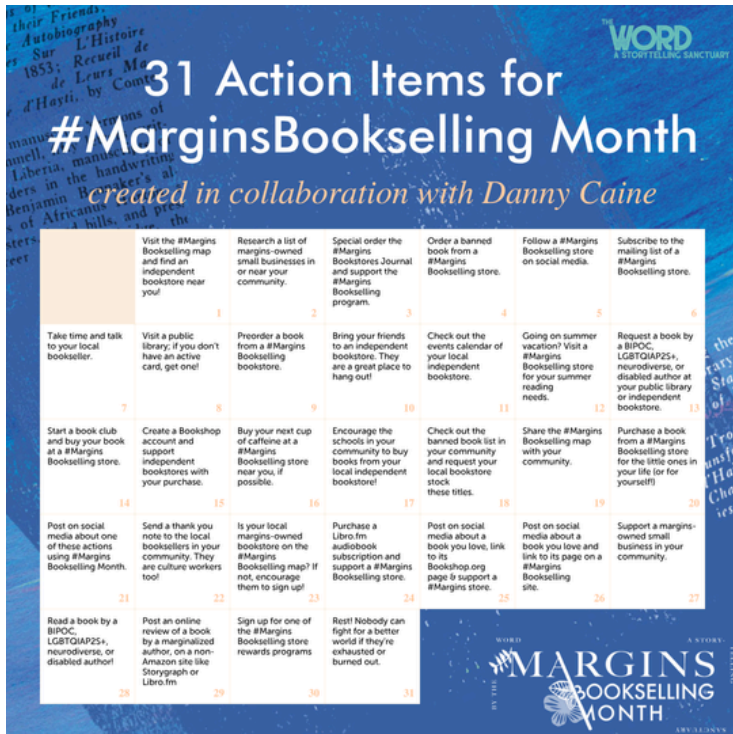
WORD A STORY-TELLING

MARGINS

BOOKSELLING MONTH

BY THE ARVANS

#MarginsBookselling celebrates booksellers and bookstores, centering BIPOC, LGBTQIAP2S+, disabled, and neurodiverse communities.



Our #MarginsBookselling Month officially moved to July in 2024 and our map grew and now features 200 bookstores owned/managed by the communities we serve!

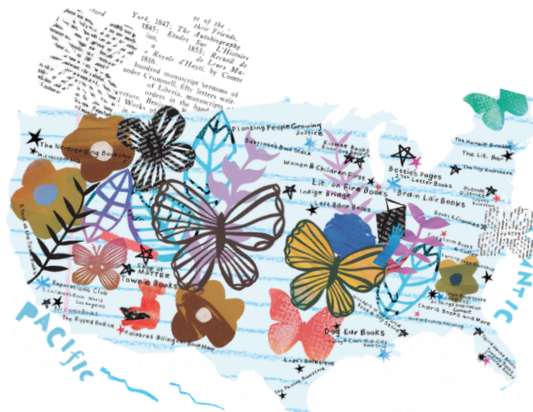
This year we deepened our partnership with I Stand With Immigrants and co-hosted a teach-in event, [“Storytelling and Solidarity: Bridging the Gaps Between Our Communities & Movements.”](#) This panel discussion focused on the power of storytelling, what solidarity means, and how to build it between communities. The session served as a teach-in for bookstores – places with the capacity to be community centers, safe third spaces, and places to meet accessibility needs such as literacy and language barriers – on how they can most effectively be in community with marginalized people.

Additionally we partnered with poet, former bookseller and The Word’s Writers’ Circle advocate Danny Caine to create [The Word's #MarginsBookselling Month Action Calendar](#) which features 31 actions we can all try and take to support bookstores, booksellers and the community all year long.

Scan the QR code to visit the map and support #MarginsBookstores



supports
200+
booksellers



and **200+**
bookstores

Scan the QR code to learn more
about the BIPOC Bookseller Award.



DUENDE-WORD BIPOC BOOKSELLER AWARD

Duende District & The Word founded the annual BIPOC Bookseller Awards to celebrate and uplift BIPOC independent booksellers, whose dedication to indie bookstores and their Black, Indigenous, and POC colleagues and communities, have touched and influenced countless lives. The BIPOC Bookseller Award is celebrated during #MarginsBookselling Month.

All BIPOC who work in U.S. independent bookstores in any capacity are eligible to be nominated for the three categories. Winners are awarded a plaque and monetary prize.

INNOVATION

2023 Innovation Award Winner
Jhoanna Belfer

THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHOSE VISION, WHETHER ENTREPRENEURIAL OR PROGRAMMATIC, HAS SHOWN US WHAT THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY SHOULD BE.

ACTIVISM

2023 Activism Award Winner
Erica Tso Haides

THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHO GOES ABOVE AND BEYOND TO ADVOCATE FOR BIPOC BOOKSELLERS AND LITERARY REPRESENTATION IN THEIR STORES AND COMMUNITIES.

LEADERSHIP

2023 Leadership Award Winner
Egypt Otis

THIS AWARD IS FOR THE BOOKSELLER WHO HAS DEDICATED THEIR CAREER TO SUPPORTING, UPLIFTING, AND LEADING BIPOC BOOKSELLERS IN THEIR STORES, COMMUNITIES, REGIONS, AND/OR NATIONALLY, FIGHTING FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR ALL BIPOC IN THE BOOKSTORE INDUSTRY.



THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 BOOKSELLER JUDGES
CALVIN CROSBY, CHAWA MAGAÑA, & CORINNE ACOSTA

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

*Serving the community
in-person and virtually*



nearly **1,000** individuals



participated in our **Writing
Paths Workshops**

attended our virtual
community discussions

and attended our in-person
community gatherings held
throughout **Colorado**



we continue to serve



17,000

BOOK PEOPLE

ANNUALLY ACCESS
TOOLS + RESOURCES
BUILT BY THE WORD



word unbound

a literary workshop series

The Word's newest virtual literary workshop series, Word Unbound, will focus on topics less explored by other literary programs – opening up to unbounded, creative and even wild ideas in writing and publishing, open to participants of all identities and backgrounds.

In addition to providing professional development to established and emerging writers, the series also creates paid opportunities for BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, neurodiverse and disabled writers and publishing creatives across disciplines and levels of expertise to lead education sessions in a safe and unbounded environment.

**AWARD-WINNING & BESTSELLING
SCHEDULED AUTHORS INCLUDE:**



Ingrid Rojas Contreras



Sasha Geffen



Gina María Balibrera



Shifa Saltagi Safadi



For every writer and story

DENVER'S NEA BIG READ



The Word is one of 62 organizations nationwide selected to receive a 2023-2024 NEA Big Read grant. An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest, the NEA Big Read broadens our understanding of our world, our communities, and ourselves through the power of a shared reading experience.



The Word, in partnership with Denver Arts & Venues, Denver Public Library, History Colorado and Graywolf Press, engaged and collaborated with organizations and businesses across the Denver metro area to bring bilingual programming that engaged readers across libraries, breweries, basketball games, and more in celebration of Natalie Diaz's stunning work *Postcolonial Love Poem*!



Diaz's brilliant work about love, loss, indigeneity, land, inheritance, basketball, family, beauty, and movement was celebrated in a city-wide reading experience that ran from October 2023 - April 2024 culminating in a community reception with Natalie Diaz, a keynote discussion and book signing.



Through the NEA Big Read, we engaged and connected with our community as readers, writers, artists, thinkers, and creators.

DENVER'S NEA BIG READ



1,848 adults engaged in arts and culture activities through our Big Read events

143 youths engaged in art-making activities and/or book club discussions and performances

40+ events, reading groups, performances, workshops and art-making activities throughout the city



18 book distributions hubs throughout the city including a **virtual book distribution hub** through our partner **Libro.fm** to increase accessibility and engage audiences throughout Colorado.

THE NUMBERS

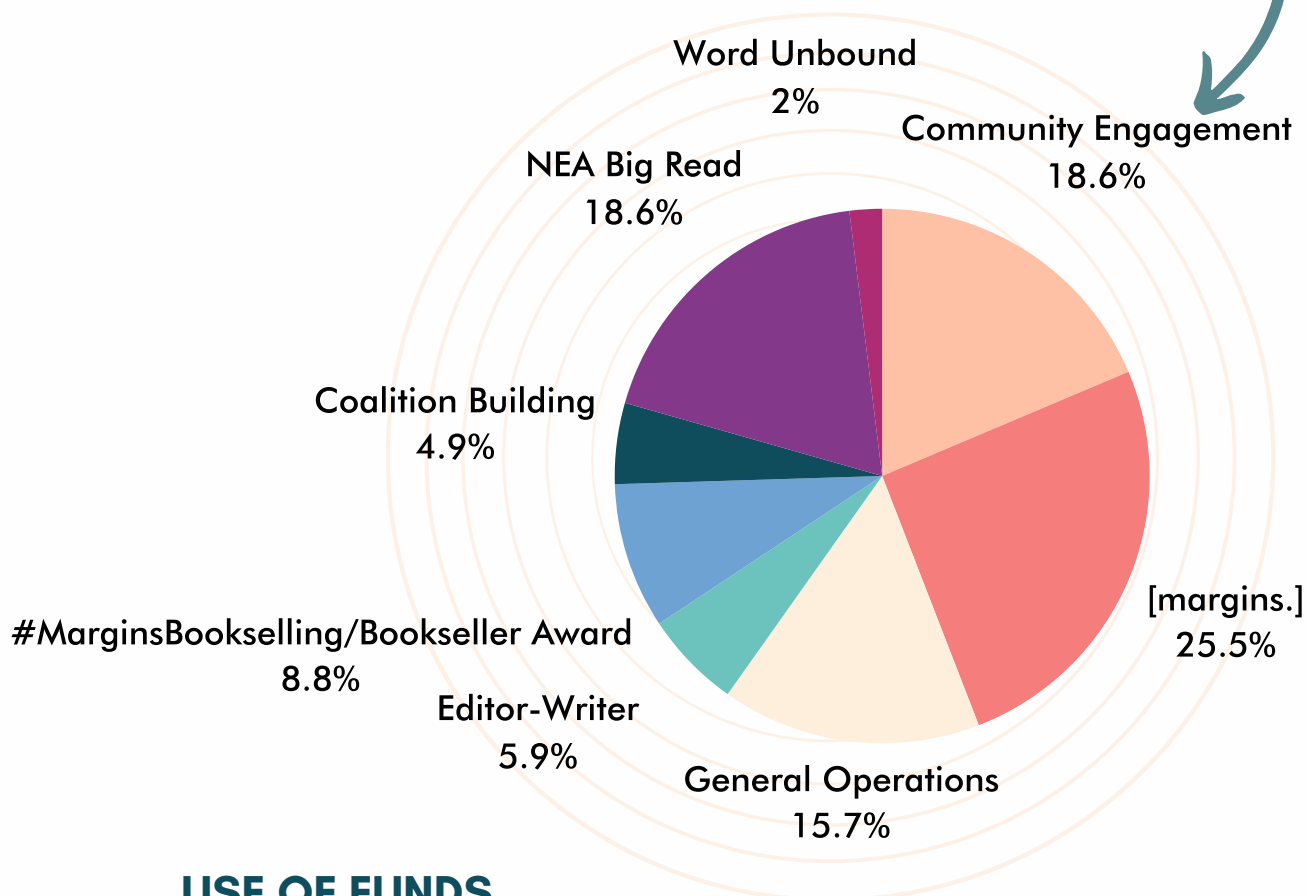
2023-2024

View Form 990

OUR INCOME

Individual Donations	\$ 80,238.67
Corporate Sponsorship	\$ 35,001.10
Grant Funding	\$ 223,750.00
Program Income	\$ 10,228.53
In-kind	\$ 34,330.33
Other Donations	\$ 7,100.00
Other Revenue	\$ 1,489.80
Total Income	\$ 392,138.53

HOW WE USED FUNDING



USE OF FUNDS

Total	\$ 416,409.45
Use of prior funds	\$ -24,271.02

Staff

- Aida Lilly, Program Coordinator
- Alyssa Reynoso-Morris, Program Deputy
- Blaire Bridges, Operations Coordinator
- Chris Aguilar-Garcia, Programs Director
- Jesse Martinez, Interim Development Director
- Michelle Malonzo, Interim Co-Executive Director
- Viniyanka Prasad, Co-Executive Director, Founder

Board

- Andrea Giron Mathern
- Bunmi Ishola
- Chris Aguilar-Garcia
- Deidre Dumpson
- Jenna Nishimura
- Manuel Aragon





Thank you

TO ALL OF THE PARTNERS WHOSE SUPPORT HELPED
UP EXPAND OUR IMPACT AND MISSION IN 2024.

American Booksellers Association
Art From Ashes
Art Students League of Denver
Bel Canto Books
Belonging Books
Bonfils Stanton
Books Are Magic
Bookshop.org
Center for Colorado Women's History
Center for Visual Arts
Chinook Fund
Chronicle Books
City & County of Denver
Cleo Parker Robinson Dance
Colorado Association for Libraries
Colorado Creative Industries
Colorado Humanities
Colorado Trust Foundation
Comma Bookstore & Social Hub
Community First Foundation
Councilwoman Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez
Creative Strategies for Change
Denver Art Museum
Denver Arts & Venues
Denver Botanic Gardens
Denver Center for the Performing Arts
Denver Film
Denver Foundation

Denver International Airport (DIA)
Denver Nuggets
Denver Parks & Recreation
Denver Public Library
Duende District
Edelweiss+
Emerging Diné Writers' Institute
Fiction Beer Co.
Focus Points
Forney Museum
Fort Collins Book Festival
Fuse Literary
Gallt & Zacker Literary Agency
History Colorado
Holiday Theater
ISWI/I Am An Immigrant
Jaipur Literary Festival
Libro.fm
Lighthouse Writers Workshop
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Lost City Books
Melville House
Museum of Contemporary Art Denver
National Endowment for the Arts
Odom Media Management
One World
Palabras Bilingual Bookstore
Penguin Random House

Queer Asterisk
RedLine Contemporary Art Center
Regis University
Riverhead Books
Rose Community Foundation
Sacred Voices
SHOP at MATTER
Sidewalk Poets
Slam Nuba
Swansea Recreation Center
The Black List
The Dial Press
The Forney Museum
The King's English Bookstore
Townie Books
Visit Denver
Wilkes University

HOW TO SUPPORT

MAKE YOUR GIFT TODAY!

There are many of ways to get involved:

MAKE A GIFT

Support the community in flourishing in 2025 and beyond.



JOIN OUR SUSTAINING CIRCLE

Our monthly donor giving circle provides vital year round support for the organization (and in turn we gift you with special giveaways and discounts!)

SHOP OUR READING LISTS ON BOOKSHOP.ORG

Your book purchases can support the storytellers who are published and the ones who are fighting to be.

BECOME A JOY AMBASSADOR

Joy Ambassadors are authors who have demonstrated a commitment to centering joy, have multitudes of experience in their writing, and who help spotlight and raise energy for the #MarginsBookselling Month celebrations.

READ AND LEARN MORE

about the values that guide our equity work. This is how we reimagine the literary ecosystem.

Get in touch with us.

MAILING ADDRESS

The Word, A Storytelling Sanctuary, Inc.
3758 E. 104th Ave. #733
Thornton, CO 80233

VISIT US:

www.thewordfordiversity.org

*Thank you for all
your care and
support!*

THEWORDFORDIVERSITY.ORG



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