



**Hurston/Wright Foundation
Annual Report**

**Discover • Mentor • Honor
Black Writers**

2018

OUR COMMUNITY

"The Hurston/Wright foundation has acknowledged all of us and what we've tried to do in preserving, promoting, and publishing African American writers and other African diaspora writers."

Charles Rowell, 2018 Madam C.J. Walker Award

"The Hurston/Wright Foundation means a lot to me. It was one of the first places that I took a writing workshop when I decided I would actually try to publish my work. It was an amazing and supportive experience and it stayed with me all these years."

Ladee Hubbard, Winner 2018 Debut Fiction

"I think any writer is thrilled to have their work honored, but for me, the importance of [the Legacy Awards Ceremony] is really because it allows an amplification for some of the topics that are crucial for our community and our nation to think about."

Noliwe Rooks, Finalist 2018 Nonfiction

"I led a masterclass for the Hurston/Wright Foundation a few years ago and as much as I think that the folks in the workshop took something away from what I was talking about, I feel that I took more away from being in that room with them...To be in a room with that many writers of color, doing good work, feeds the soul... And what we've seen is that when you have organizations like this, the flourishing of African American literature can't be contained."

Natasha Tretheway, Former U.S. Poet Laureate



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings,

I am proud to report that the Hurston/Wright team has continued to strengthen and expand this essential organization. In 2018, we focused on activities designed to ensure that the foundation thrives for decades to come. While we continued to produce quality programs, we devoted substantial energy behind the scenes.

We reaffirmed the foundation's mission to serve Black writers and we developed a new vision to provide impactful experiences of Black literary life. We conducted a membership survey and convened a strategic planning session for the Board of Directors. We added board members with expertise in project management, fundraising and other key areas. We hired a communications consultant and an administrative assistant. And, we launched a process to identify our next leader.

In late 2015, I accepted the responsibility of executive director, becoming the first who was not a founder. It was a daunting yet rewarding task. I saw the foundation's value in the crowd commemorating Zora Neale Hurston's birthday, in the tribute Natasha Trethewey paid to Legacy Award honoree Charles Henry Rowell, and in the support from donors, sponsors and grant providers.

I am excited to work with the new executive director, Kesha Lee, to deepen and expand the foundation's reach. I am confident that, with your support, 2019 will be a terrific year.

Deborah Heard
Executive Director



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

2018 was a year of building for The Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation. To better support Black literary communities, we spent this year strengthening operations, improving communications, and adding programs to serve readers and writers.

We secured two grants from the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, including a capacity-building grant that provided workshops on fundraising, human resources, and board development, as well as funds for a professionally led strategic planning process. From that session, we produced a workplan for sustainable operations and expanded programming. We also met with Bain & Company management consultants as part of an initiative to assist nonprofit organizations.

We conducted an extensive survey of our supporters, you, to identify what you appreciate about the foundation and what you would like for us to improve. We published a quarterly newsletter and an annual report for our 4,000-plus email list. We developed an extensive communications strategy to increase our social media presence and revise our messaging to speak to our target audience. From our increased social media activity, we've already noticed an increase in supporters.

For programming, we expanded our writing workshops and public readings. In the spring we added a weekend workshop, taught by acclaimed authors Kyle Dargan, Ravi Howard, and Patrice Gaines. We also continued to provide our summer writers week, led by the brilliant writers Mitchell S. Jackson, Pamela Newkirk, and Tiphonie Yanique. Students came from distances as far as California and Toronto to attend.





In addition, we organized a teen workshop to prepare D.C. students from various schools for a writing contest run by Black Swan Academy.

To continue connecting readers and writers free of charge, we also hosted three public readings featuring almost a dozen authors. In June, we co-hosted a program as part of a new partnership with Mahogany Books, at the Anacostia Arts Center in Southeast D.C. We also co-hosted public readings at the Politics & Prose Bookstore on the Wharf and the Politics & Prose headquarters in Chevy Chase, D.C.

To celebrate Zora Neale Hurston's birthday, we convened a discussion that drew an overflow crowd of 70 people to Sankofa Bookstore across from Howard University in Northwest D.C. Zora was the co-founder of *The Hilltop*, Howard's university paper, and former *Hilltop* writers came to discuss her impact and the paper's sustained relevance.

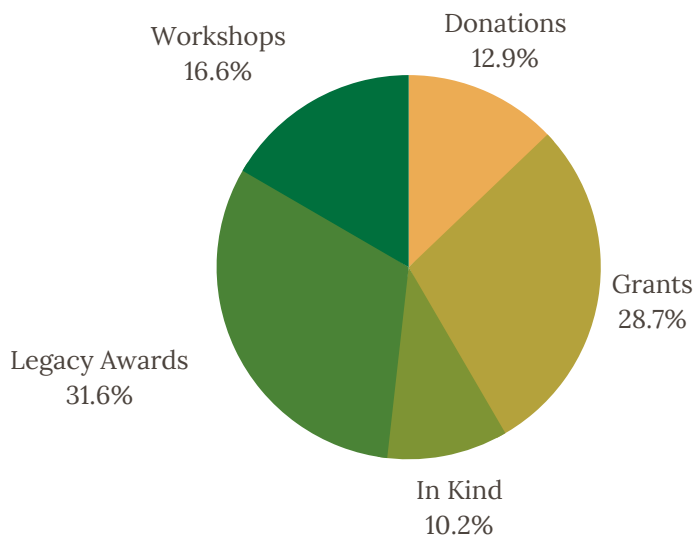
And, at the 2018 Legacy Awards Ceremony we honored two luminaries who paved the way for the future of Black literature, Ntozake Shange and Charles Henry Rowell, and we presented awards to college writers and authors of the preceding year's best books.

We are pleased with the work we've done this year, and we still have more to do. The future of Black literature depends on institutional support. In 2020, Hurston/Wright will mark its 30th anniversary. As we move toward this significant achievement, we continue to look for better ways to support Black literary excellence.

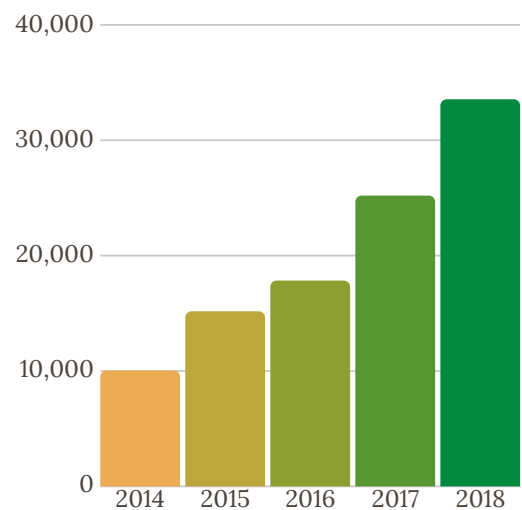
OUR FINANCES BY THE NUMBERS

This past year we aimed to increase revenue and program participation. Contributed revenue jumped by 105% thanks to individual donations, board fundraisers, and philanthropic grants. Program revenue increased 42%. Net income increased 13% and the cash balance increased by 33%. Hurston/Wright ended the year with a cash balance of over 33,000—a 33% improvement over the previous year.

OUR REVENUE



5-YEAR CASH BALANCE



33%

Increase in our Cash
Balance

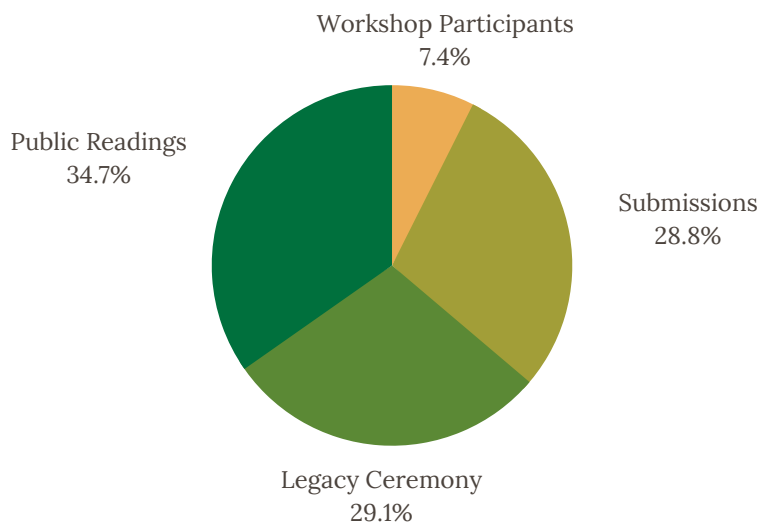
42%

Increase in Program
Revenue

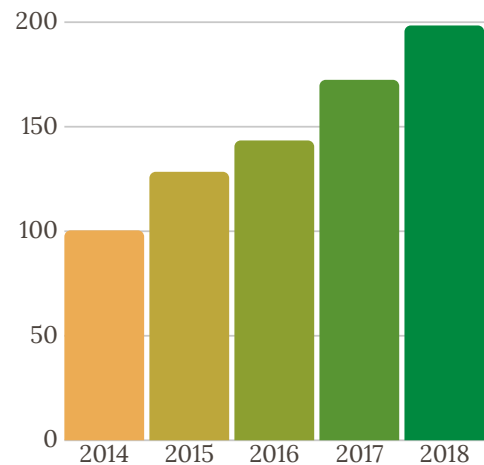
OUR PROGRAMS BY THE NUMBERS

Workshop participants increased by 122% due to the reintroduction of the weekend and teen class and the increased submissions. Public reading attendance increased 35%. Competition entries for the Legacy Awards increased by 15%. And college award submissions increased by 52%.

PARTICIPATION IN OUR PROGRAMS



5-YEAR SUBMISSIONS



35%

Increase in attendance
at Public Readings

52%

Increase in College
Award Submissions

OUR PLANS

Hurston/Wright has 3 key areas of focus for 2019: (1) effective and sustainable management, (2) a stronger financial profile, and (3) expanded programming. Our plans include supporting emerging and established writers, promoting the cultural impact of Black literature, and expanding our partnerships.

In addition to bringing on an executive director for this new phase of our development, we are planning several initiatives for the Board of Directors. For instance, we will secure specialized coaching to expand fundraising skills and we will participate in Board Match and other networking opportunities to fill gaps.

We currently are producing and implementing a communications strategy that includes more audience research, targeted content, and community building. Our goal is to identify the programming resources our community needs, such as additional writing instruction and information on the business of publishing.

From the comments on our survey, we also heard that a wider group of emerging writers are looking for recognition and support. To further support these writers, we are planning to expand the Award for College Writers competition to include nonfiction submissions in addition to the current fiction and poetry categories. We also are working on an additional competition open to all writers who have not published books. This award will highlight writers who display special talent for innovative storytelling, original reporting, and provocative commentary.



In 2019, we are hosting more free public readings to showcase the exemplary writing of Black authors and highlight the literature's cultural importance. At the public readings, authors come from around the world to read from their works and discuss contemporary issues with our D.C.-based audience. As part of our mission to connect readers with writers, we are exploring ways to make the public readings available to our community outside the Washington area.

Recognizing the need to further promote established authors, we are experimenting with a format for literary salons. In contrast to the public readings, the salons charge admission, generally feature one or two authors, and are held in smaller, more intimate settings. The salons create an opportunity for intellectual exchange, while providing financial support for our programs.

We also are expanding our partnerships with different organizations, including the District of Columbia Libraries, universities and independent bookstores.

Our guide is the vision statement we adopted in 2018:

We envision the Hurston/Wright Foundation as an organization that provides unique, impactful and memorable experiences of Black literary life that live far beyond the moment. We will strive to offer participants and supporters distinctive programs that enrich, fortify, and uplift the Black literary community.



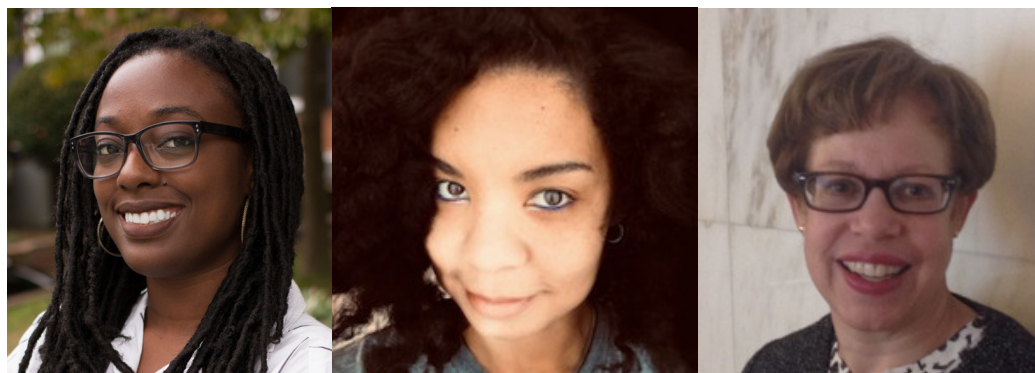
LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Executive Director

In November 2018, we announced our search for a new executive director. More than 80 people applied. We are pleased to introduce you to our choice, Kesha Lee. Kesha has over 15 years of experience leading domestic and global education and social policy projects in education, culturally responsive book access, and literacy attainment. She also is the founder of #Ward8Reads in Southeast D.C. She is especially passionate about advancing equity and uplifting radical and transformative ideas that shift the balance of power to community-based, often marginalized, talent and innovators.



OUR TEAM



Communications Director

Gloria Jirsaraie was recently promoted to Communications Director. Gloria is leading a communications strategy to expand our reach and speak directly to the needs of our audience.

Social Media Specialist

Evelyn Alfred has served as social media specialist since 2015. She is the Associate Editor at Linden Avenue Literary Journal and has had her poetry published online and in print.

Administrative Assistant

Helen Fox Fields is a veteran administrator who provides support coordinating our programs.

BOARD CHANGES

Melanie S. Hatter stepped down as chairman of the Board of Directors in January 2019, as she prepared to launch a new novel “Malawi’s Sisters,” which won the inaugural Kimbilio National Fiction Prize. We ask that you join us in congratulating Melanie and thank her for her two years as chairman. Melanie was instrumental in expanding the Board of Directors, leading the Legacy Awards ceremony, and improving Hurston/Wright’s governance process.

We are happy to announce that Audrey Hipkins was elected to be the next chairman. Audrey has served on the board as treasurer since 2014. She has over 20 years of product development and strategic planning experience in both corporate America and in the nonprofit sector. We believe this experience, her commitment to institution building, and her love for Black literature makes her well-suited to lead the organization in this new phase.

Our new treasurer is McIntosh Ewell. McIntosh has over 35 years as a project manager in the information technology industry, with extensive experience developing and managing budgets. Our secretary is Dionne Peart, an attorney for the District of Columbia government and the author of two novels. Their experiences, skills and passion for literature are welcome additions to the Executive Committee.



Our Partners & Sponsors



The Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation, founded in 1990, is a literary nonprofit whose mission is to discover, mentor, and honor Black writers. The foundation conducts workshops, master classes, public readings, competitions and an awards ceremony. Through these programs, the foundation helps writers produce high-quality literature, preserves the voices of Black writers, creates a supportive community for writers, provides financial support to college writers, and celebrates artistic excellence.

Deborah Heard - Executive Director
Marita Golden - President Emeritus

The Board of Directors
Audrey Hipkins - Board Chair
McIntosh K. Ewell - Treasurer
Dionne Peart - Secretary
Jovonne J. Bickerstaff
Brittnay Buckner
Damien T. Frierson
Melanie S. Hatter
Natalie Hopkinson
Andre Perry
Charles Lucious Perry
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The Hurston/Wright Foundation is a 501(c)3
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HURSTON/WRIGHT FOUNDATION
A WORLD OF BLACK WRITERS

