



# Words Open Worlds

Planet Word • Museum of Language Arts  
ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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# Vision, Mission, and Values



## VISION

To increase literacy, the foundation of a strong modern democracy.

## MISSION

To inspire and renew a love of words, language, and reading through unique, immersive learning experiences for all ages and to provide a space to explore words and language that is grounded in a solid understanding of language arts and science.

## CORE VALUES

Our exhibits and experiences are some combination of:

- fun
- playful
- unexpected
- motivational
- inclusive
- meaningful

## A Message from the Founder and CEO

**The theme for Planet Word's 2024 Annual Report couldn't be more apt: Words Open Worlds. In an important election year when we were constantly bombarded by words and messages from all sides, it was more important than ever to be alert to all the incoming words — to stay open and to listen.**

A case in point: our *Having Hard Conversations* series. Audiences heard from former NPR correspondent Michele Norris about The Race Card Project that revealed Americans' thoughts about race in just 6 words; Tim Shriver described his Dignity Index, a tool to keep difficult conversations from straying into contempt; and Van Jones talked about his successful work with the first Trump administration to reform federal sentencing laws.

And our Eyes on Reading lectures educated audiences about new approaches to teaching beginning reading after decades of curricula that left too many children struggling to read. Our moderator and Journalist-in-Residence, Emily Hanford, was the catalyst for this fresh look at reading instruction, as her award-winning *Sold a Story* podcast brought new attention to

the subject. Both series were supported by a grant from the Ibis Group, new major donors to Planet Word.

We added new voices and stories to our Words Matter gallery, thanks to the support of the Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation. We learned how becoming a reader opened up worlds of possibilities for new father Oliver James. We heard how one daughter and her Cantonese-speaking parents grew closer together when she finally started speaking their shared ancestral language.

A love of words has led to many wedding celebrations at Planet Word. And hundreds of young people enjoyed Wordplay Wednesday date nights at the museum — talk about words opening worlds!

And words have opened up new ideas about what a museum can be. More than 167,000 saw that definition expanded when they stepped through our doors. And we know they walked out with a new appreciation for those too-often overlooked words and the imagination that's built upon them.

.....  


ANN FRIEDMAN  
Founder and CEO



# A Message from the Executive Director

**What a year! Guided by capacity-building strategies established in 2023, we increased visitation, enhanced the visitor experience, expanded beyond our walls, prioritized revenue generation, and strengthened internal systems.**

Attendance grew steadily, surpassing our goal by nearly 10%. Time and time again, visitors — including families, teachers, and school groups — shared how much they enjoyed Planet Word while offering feedback that helped refine operations. Through community events and expanded offerings on YouTube, Bloomberg Connects, and social media, we reached new audiences, while raising awareness about our purpose and mission.

By prioritizing revenue-generating strategies like our free or donation-based admission policy, we communicated to visitors the value of their donation to support not only free admission 6 days a week, 313 days a year, but one-of-a-kind public programs and activities available

to all. In 2024, we raised 15% more than projected and earned 5% more than projected, successfully engaging the philanthropic community while increasing our earned revenue. We also established a systems replacement fund — a crucial step to safeguard our historic home, a National Historic Landmark.

No longer a start-up, Planet Word is well on its way to becoming more than a museum — a valuable community resource and a national institution with a reputation for offering a fun, playful, unexpected, motivational, meaningful, and inclusive experience. We're proud of our accomplishments, but we will not rest on our laurels. We look forward to keeping our content fresh, relevant, and exciting; expanding our reach to even more diverse audiences; and ensuring a sustainable and treasured asset for Washington, D.C. and beyond.

*Nikki Sertsu*

NIKKI DEJESUS SERTSU  
Executive Director



THE ANN AND TOMER GALLERY

# WHERE DO WORDS COME FROM?

The story of English



## Visitor Feedback

**“What a fantastic museum in the town full of extraordinary museums.”**

**“This museum blew me away, with each room a more inventive exploration of language and communication than the last.”**

**“Thank you for bringing world-class speakers to the D.C. area with expertise in the area of reading education.”**

**“The impact of this trip goes beyond the walls of the museum — it has left a lasting impression on the young minds of our third graders.”**

**“There were countless compliments buzzing around the room about the museum and the lively space. It was a fantastic venue, and we felt very fortunate to gather there.”**

**“With every step you take, this museum has a way to interact with you from writing a word that has special meaning to you, recording your story, singing karaoke, and engaging with the word wall.”**



# Exploring Words, Expanding Minds: Galleries and Exhibits

Planet Word’s galleries invite you to discover new worlds — new words and languages, cultures, authors, perspectives, and stories. By the time visitors leave the museum, they should have a good understanding of the power of words to strengthen community and build a more empathetic world.

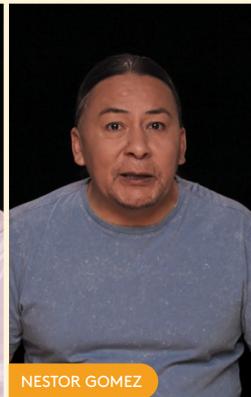
In 2024, we welcomed more than 167,000 visitors, including our 500,000th visitor (shown left), to explore and discover these new worlds. What a milestone!

## EXPANDING THE WORDS MATTER GALLERY

Intentionally situated at the end of a visitor’s experience, the Words Matter gallery displays life-size videos of people sharing personal stories about the power of words and encouraging visitors to self-reflect, an essential part of learning. This year marked the installation of four new stories. Touching on topics like the loss of a first language and learning to read as an adult, these stories — and the broader gallery experience — introduce a diversity of perspectives and perhaps even facilitate visitors to discover something new about themselves.



ANNA DEAVERE SMITH



NESTOR GOMEZ



OLIVER JAMES



JENNY LIAO



## BRINGING SPANISH LANGUAGE BOOKS TO LIFE

Thanks to a generous gift from **Carlos Rodriguez-Pastor**, we added five Spanish Language books to our Library, representing a range of ages, genres, and themes and underlining Planet Word's commitment to inclusivity. Museum guests viewed the books 13,151 times between May and December, an outsized percentage compared to the rest of the collection, indicating that visitors were eager for this expansion. These new books make this magical gallery accessible to more people while opening visitors' eyes to the beauty of other cultures and languages.



**20,000** visitors entered data into our Multilingual Language Visualization, and **70%** reported they use more than one language, underlining our international appeal.



Planet Word earned a **2024 TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Award** in July, recognizing the museum among the top 10% of things to do worldwide based on travelers' ratings. This unsolicited, positive feedback establishes the museum as a top attraction and will encourage new and return visitors.

## LAUNCHING NEW INTERACTIVE DISPLAYS

We designed and launched two new touchscreen displays, or "beacons," that use imagery, data, and storytelling to teach visitors about a topic — in this case, propaganda and multilingualism. The multilingualism beacon proved to be of interest far beyond the walls of the museum, with more than 24,000 likes, shares, saves, and comments on a related social media post that raised Planet Word's profile and drew attention to the societal and intellectual benefits of multilingualism.



# Words That Inspire: Programs and Education

Designed to mirror the fun, unexpected, meaningful gallery experiences, Planet Word's public programs and educational experiences open audiences to new subjects, perspectives, and ways to view the world.

In 2024, we built on existing program series that have proven high demand and tangible impact, like our popular *Eyes on Reading* series that connects educators and practitioners to best practices in reading science. We also launched several programs, bringing timely, relevant topics to new and loyal audiences.



(Clockwise from top left) Planet Word inaugural Journalist-in-Residence Emily Hanford; Dr. Stanislas Dehaene, one of the world's foremost experts on learning and the brain; Language science expert Marianne Wolf; CNN correspondent Van Jones; Peabody Award-winning journalist Michele Norris



## LAUNCHING NEW PROGRAMS, EVENTS, AND INITIATIVES

To solidify the museum's role as a hub for literacy, Planet Word announced its inaugural Journalist-in-Residence, **Emily Hanford**, host of the groundbreaking investigative podcast series, *Sold a Story: How Teaching Kids to Read Went So Wrong*. With funding from the Ibis Group, Emily arranged and moderated three of our *Eyes on Reading* lectures, introduced our inaugural Literacy Resource Fair, and served as a thought leader on literacy and reading instruction — bringing key research and expertise to educators, parents, and other adults responsible for helping develop young readers.

Leading up to the election season and in an era of increasing polarization, Planet Word launched *Having Hard Conversations*, a program series intended to encourage attendees to be open-minded and respectfully disagree over critical issues. In the culminating event of the year, CNN correspondent **Van Jones** spoke with *New York Times* columnist and Planet Word Vice Chair **Tom Friedman** about why working with people who don't necessarily agree may be the best way to move the country forward. The recording of this conversation attracted nearly 10,000 YouTube views within weeks, highlighting audiences' interest in learning new tools to bridge divides and foster empathy and civility.



Planet Word Advisory Board member and MacArthur Fellow Jason Reynolds hosts *Between the Lines*

In collaboration with Planet Word Advisory Board member and newly minted MacArthur Fellow **Jason Reynolds**, we launched *Between the Lines*, a 3-part summer series that explored the power of language and storytelling, while encouraging audiences to embrace the written word as a means of personal expression and social change.

Our new *Sensory Friendly* programs created a pathway for the neurodivergent community to explore the museum at quieter, less crowded times. Special adaptations to exhibit elements along with pre-visit materials ensured an accessible, enjoyable learning experience for many who would otherwise be unable to visit our galleries.



**3,639** attendees to public programs, with 91% of post-survey responses indicating the program was excellent or very good



**4,943** students participated in educator-led "Wordshops," more than 50% representing Title I schools supporting the needs of low-income families

## Returning Programs, Events, and Initiatives



- ▶ **New Kid with Imagination Stage**
- ▶ **D.C. Public Schools World Languages Festival**
- ▶ **Language Science Station**
- ▶ **Own Your Story with An Open Book Foundation**
- ▶ **Eyes on Reading series**
- ▶ **Wordplay Wednesday**
- ▶ **Juneteenth Literary Jubilee & Black Author Book Fest**
- ▶ **Wordshops, educator-led lessons for 3rd–12th grade students**

# Spreading the Word: Outreach and Development

As Planet Word approaches its five-year anniversary, it has established an exceptional visitor experience, strong demand, and a healthy financial record. Now the organization is poised for growth — expanding its community of supporters and reaching even more diverse audiences.

## CAPTURING NEW AUDIENCES

With the onboarding of our first Director of Marketing and Communications, Planet Word launched a series of general awareness advertising campaigns, including a 10-second trailer appearing on baggage claim screens in Ronald Reagan Washington National and Washington Dulles International airports, and 25 print and digital bus shelter ads in high-traffic locations along the National Mall, downtown, and in Wards 7 and 8, the lowest income neighborhoods in D.C. and from where we attract the fewest visitors, a result we hope to improve. This campaign increased awareness of Planet Word among residents and travelers, expanding our reach and attracting new visitors.

Hundreds of users visited Planet Word's new digital guide on the popular Bloomberg Connects mobile app, which brings cultural institutions to people around the world, with the click of a button. Throughout the year, we added new content to the app, ensuring that visitors are informed before they arrive at the museum and inspired afterwards to continue to explore our content.

Our presence at external events — from the National Book Festival to the White House Easter Egg Roll to Awesome Con and Kids World in Franklin Park — further underlined our commitment to the local community and brought Planet Word front and center for thousands of tourists and Washington, D.C. area residents.





**21,310** followers on Instagram  
in 2024, 27% increase from 2023



**70,800** views on YouTube  
in 2024, 47% more than 2023



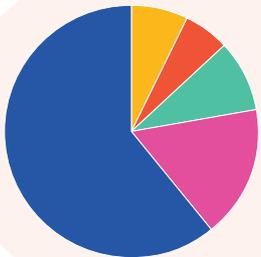
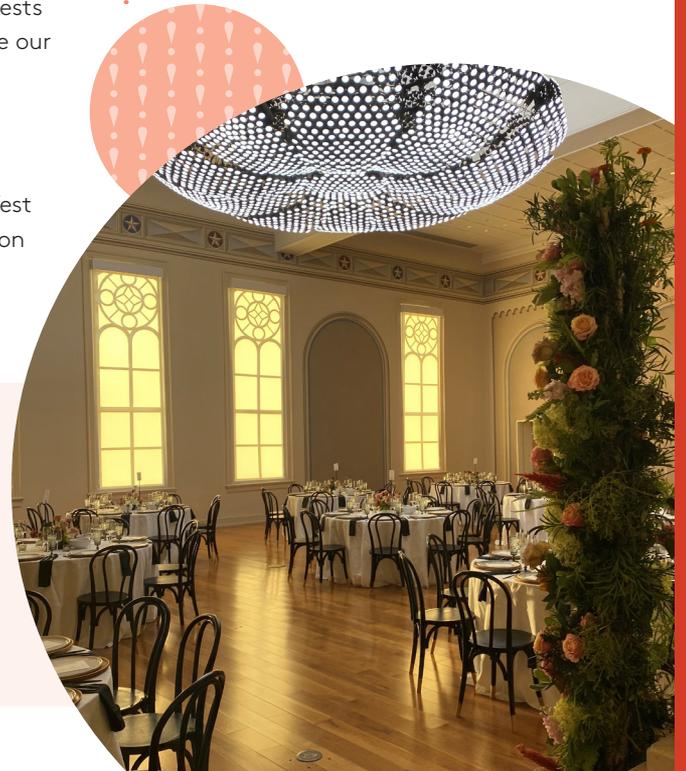
## CULTIVATING OUR DONOR COMMUNITY

**Judy Woodruff**, PBS News Senior Correspondent, delivered the inaugural Patty Isacson Sabee Word Fellow lecture, sharing the stories of political division that she uncovered during her journey across America. Her talk, and the ensuing private dinner for Planet Word’s Founders Circle, reminded guests that we must navigate these divisions to bridge our differences.

**Board Member Puja Kaul** and her husband hosted a beautiful and stimulating evening at their home in the Bay Area, introducing new West Coast friends to Planet Word’s mission and vision and expanding our community of supporters outside of the D.C. area.

## GROWING PRIVATE EVENTS

Our private events continue to open doors (literally!) to new funders, community leaders, and high-profile figures. Whether it’s an event with the Washington Commanders, a reception featuring prominent elected officials, or a conference on topics connected to our mission, these events helped to sustain the organization and grow our community.



## 2024 EARNED REVENUE STREAMS

- 61%** Private Events
- 17%** Gift Shop
- 9%** Group Admissions
- 6%** Restaurant
- 7%** Programs

# Board of Directors *As of December 31, 2024*

Planet Word's governing Board of Directors includes leaders in education, media, real estate, technology, the arts, and museums. Board members serve by contributing their advice and service through committees and ad hoc working groups, as well as with financial support through annual and endowment gifts.

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PLANET WORD

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*Executive Producer of Booking and Specials*  
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# Advisory Board *As of December 31, 2024*

The Advisory Board is a group of national and international scholars, linguists, and creative practitioners. Advisory Board members help generate ideas and decide how people will experience the museum through different displays of language and communication.

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# 2024 Annual Report Donor Honor Roll

We are deeply grateful to these donors who made gifts, pledges, or pledge payments of \$1,000 or more during fiscal year 2024. These contributions are vital in fulfilling Planet Word's mission. We also extend our thanks to the many guests who made donations when registering to visit the museum.

## \$500,000-\$999,999

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## Give a Gift

To become a member or donor or to learn more about why your support matters, please visit [www.planetwordmuseum.org/support](http://www.planetwordmuseum.org/support) or email [giving@planetwordmuseum.org](mailto:giving@planetwordmuseum.org).



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● Founder's Circle Member

● Bequest

# Audited Financial Reports

## Statement of Activities

For the Year Ended December 31, 2024

REVENUE AND SUPPORT	2024	2023
Gifts, grants, and corporate support	\$4,523,970	\$6,436,808
Group admissions, less donated admission fees	\$1,138,828	\$1,111,866
Shop, net of cost of goods sold	\$284,370	\$284,665
Rental income	\$93,727	\$91,643
Program income	\$107,605	\$70,181
Contributed goods and services*	\$182,958	\$292,262
Other revenue	\$92,158	\$139,370
<b>TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT</b>	<b>\$6,423,616</b>	<b>\$8,426,795</b>

EXPENSES	2024	2023
Program Services	\$6,425,306	\$6,735,603
Management and General	\$592,962	\$505,350
Fundraising	\$283,591	\$436,356
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES*</b>	<b>\$7,301,859</b>	<b>\$7,677,309</b>
<b>Change in net assets from operations before other items</b>	<b>(\$878,243)</b>	<b>\$749,486</b>

OTHER ITEMS	2024	2023
<b>Changes in net assets</b>	<b>(\$878,243)</b>	<b>\$749,486</b>
<b>Net assets at beginning of year</b>	<b>\$55,499,103</b>	<b>\$54,749,617</b>
<b>Net assets at end of year</b>	<b>\$54,620,860</b>	<b>\$55,499,103</b>

The summary information presented here is derived from the museum's audited financial statements. A full copy of these statements is available from the museum upon request.

## Statement of Financial Position

As of December 31, 2024

ASSETS	2024	2023
Cash and cash equivalents	\$3,347,326	\$2,206,513
Contributions and grants receivable, net	\$725,499	\$1,242,316
Other assets	\$250,279	\$280,566
Property, exhibits, fixtures and equipment, net**	\$50,695,998	\$52,119,695
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$55,019,102</b>	<b>\$55,849,080</b>

LIABILITIES	2024	2023
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$358,453	\$334,358
Other	\$39,789	\$15,619
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$398,242</b>	<b>\$349,977</b>

NET ASSETS	2024	2023
Without donor restrictions	\$53,474,315	\$53,609,101
With donor restrictions	\$1,146,545	\$1,890,002
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$54,620,860</b>	<b>\$55,499,103</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>\$55,019,102</b>	<b>\$55,849,080</b>

\* Includes depreciation and amortization costs of \$1,910,487 in FY24 and \$1,953,793 in FY23 allocated across all three expense categories.

\*\* \$36,900,000 of the total represents the gift of the Franklin School in 2022 to Planet Word.

# Larry's Puzzle Corner

The family of Larry Jeffers, an avid puzzler and language lover, made a donation to fund Larry's Puzzle Corner in our newsletter, *Word on the Street*. Subscribe for exclusive access to word puzzles created in Larry's memory by *New York Times* crossword editor and Planet Word Advisory Board member Will Shortz.

Each line has two clues. Move the first letter of the answer to the first clue to the end to get the answer to the second.  
(Ex. Fruit that's the source of a prune/Unit of sugar  
→ PLUM, LUMP)

## FRONT TO BACK

By Will Shortz

1. Elevation/Like H's position in the alphabet
2. Southwestern farm for raising cattle/  
What holds a ship in place
3. Restaurant chain with doughnuts and coffee/  
Mean-spirited
4. Suddenly in love/Child's hand-warmers
5. Dessert that jiggles/Making very happy
6. Leaves a mess, as a hotel room/Most impetuous
7. Transfer across a border illegally/Non-magical people in the *Harry Potter* books
8. Flow out (from)/Ocean creature known as a sea cow
9. Expert's class in the language of ancient Rome (2 wds.)/Precious metal in Spain
10. Resists under difficult circumstances (2 wds.)/Dixie before the Civil War (2 wds.)

# Planet Word

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