



WIDE ANGLE YOUTH MEDIA

2601 North Howard St. Suite 160 Baltimore, MD 21218 www.wideanglemedia.org

Wide Angle Youth Media Strategic Planning Overview (FY 2018–2022)

Introduction

Since 2000, **Wide Angle Youth Media (WAYM)** has partnered with more than 4,500 youth in Baltimore City, who in turn have produced hundreds of media projects about their lives and communities. WAYM uses media arts education to cultivate and amplify the voices of youth, engaging them in quality in-school and after-school programming, summer workshops, community events, and other programs.

With a current annual operating budget of over \$750,000 – and having recently completed a capital campaign to expand and outfit their headquarters with a media lab and production space – WAYM is looking to the future with an eye toward innovation, intention, and steadiness. Over the past five years, WAYM has focused on growing programs and audience viewership to serve the community and share youth voice, achieving substantial success. Moving forward, the organization’s leadership, staff, and community stakeholders are resolute that WAYM’s decision making process should be guided foremost by the question of “why” rather than “how many.” In the fall of 2015, the organization conducted a survey of its students, staff, board, and donors to identify what these stakeholders valued about WAYM and what additional opportunities could be offered. The survey results led to a refinement of the organization’s mission and vision, which now includes additional focus on youth media distribution and college and career readiness – expanding the age of youth served to 24.

In discussions leading up to the launch of the plan, WAYM prioritized expanding an older youth workforce development program, building stronger community partnerships, maintaining an equilibrium between process and product so that distribution and fee-for-service work does not influence the integrity of youth voice; and the flexibility to make adjustments in its staffing model to better serve future generations of youth participants.

Strategic Planning occurred throughout 2016 and was made possible with funding by the Goldseker Foundation and consultation and facilitation from Steve Haddad of Sangha Solutions. Throughout the process, WAYM gained clarity on its mission and intended impact; set program priorities around achieving that intended impact; identified the organizational capacity and financial resources necessary to undertake this work; and establish the benchmarks that will make it possible to define success.



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Plan Methodology

To produce a plan that delivered significant value, and to ensure that the organization sought out beneficial input and expertise from a wide variety of stakeholders and supporters, Sangha Solutions worked with WAYM to select a *strategic planning steering committee*, appointed and empowered by staff leadership to carry out some of the necessary work to complete this plan. This working group consisted of twelve individuals:

- *Jeffrey Gillis, Board Member*
- *Jason Loviglio, Board Member & Academic Partner*
- *Sheila Wells, WAYM Development & Communications Director*
- *Moira Fratantuono, WAYM Program Manager*
- *Stephanie Flores-Koulish, Parent & Academic Partner*
- *Dona Clapperton, Parent*
- *Poonam Mukherjee, Library Partner*
- *Da'el Clapperton, WAYM Alumni*
- *Taqi Juba, Youth Apprentice*
- *Stephanie Amponsah, Community Partner*
- *Valerie Young, Alumni Parent & Former Board Member*
- *Dale Meyer, Parent*

The steering committee, supported by Sangha Solutions and WAYM staff, engaged in a few specific activities, including conducting interviews with key stakeholders and providing vital feedback on the organization's core programs. The committee held three in-person meetings in 2016 and carried out much of its work independently. WAYM staff provided significant support by identifying and interviewing a dozen best practice organizations across the country

Sangha Solutions also conducted numerous interviews with full-time staff, part-time staff, and Board members while completing a variety of other tasks, including the collection and analysis of collateral materials such as historical documents, program materials and plans, budgets, marketing and press materials, and other relevant information. The strategic plan is the result of this inclusive and deliberative process and provides the organization with key findings and guidance on how to strengthen WAYM's work and impact over the next five years.



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Stakeholder and Benchmarking Interview Summary

As part of this strategic planning process, a number of WAYM stakeholders –including elected officials, former Board members, donors, and others – participated in interviews with steering committee members and shared their thoughts and ideas concerning the organization’s past, present, and future. These individuals shared a strong confidence in WAYM’s staff leadership and characterized the organization’s vision, mission, and work in remarkably similar ways. Participants encouraged WAYM to expand its focus on career and workforce development while continuing to use media arts to build confidence and self-determination among youth.

Those interviewed also urged the organization to focus on sustainability strategies over the next five years, increasing the number of youth program participants while maintaining high quality media outcomes and keeping current with technology trends, expanding marketing and fundraising work, growing and stabilizing the Board of Directors, and providing additional staffing support, including professional development and training opportunities.

Benchmarking interviews were also conducted with a variety of nonprofit and for-profit organizations in Baltimore City and around the country. Key best practices that were uncovered during these interviews included the following:

- An emphasis on helping older youth as they transition to the workforce and college
- Offering training and coursework for youth that lead to certifications and developing key partnerships for wraparound student support
- Regular evaluation, including real-time touch points to measure progress
- Volunteer boards that are fully engaged in the organization’s work, including fundraising
- Targeted impact on specific neighborhoods through community and school partnerships
- Consistent adult mentoring as a tool to build trusting relationships with youth
- Teaching effective communication skills, including writing and critical thinking, to youth

A list of stakeholder and benchmarking best practices interview participants, as well as a summary of results, are included in this plan’s appendices.



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Our Mission: Through media arts education, Wide Angle Youth Media cultivates and amplifies the voices of Baltimore youth to engage audiences across generational, cultural, and social divides. Our programs inspire creativity and instill confidence in young people, empowering them with skills to navigate school, career, and life.

Our Vision: Wide Angle Youth Media fosters a new generation of storytellers whose perspectives evoke empathy, influence important conversations, and create an equitable society.

Strategic Planning Goal: Over the next five years, **Wide Angle Youth Media (WAYM)** will strengthen its successful model of engaging and mentoring young people through media arts education; expanding the age range of participants from 10-20 to 10-24; and building clear pathways for youth development as artists, students, and citizens. WAYM will do this by solidifying intentional recruitment and community partnerships, emphasizing postsecondary success and workforce development, sharing youth voice, and building a staffing culture that echoes the organization’s mission, vision, and values.

Key Drivers:

- **An emphasis on meeting the needs of the whole student, both within and outside of its traditional educational model:** WAYM will create more equitable access to media education for youth. The organization will teach technical and creative skills to equip youth for the media industry and soft skills that lead to student development – in addition to providing quality mentoring and safe spaces for programming. Wide Angle staff will advocate and act as allies for youth as they work to overcome historical barriers to success.
- **A shift toward quality over quantity:** WAYM will emphasize stronger pathways for student success and youth voice that align with its mission and allow young people to successfully pursue their life plans. The organization will engage more purposefully in its programming work, ensuring that it not only serves high-need constituencies and communities, but those more likely to feed the success of its middle and high school-aged programs.
- **An investment in staffing that will emphasize the organization’s sustainability and continuity and steadiness:** After five years of substantial programmatic growth, WAYM will pursue staffing models that facilitate long-term stability. This transition will be characterized by an increased number of staff positions, a clearer reporting flow, and strategic external partnerships that complement its in-house talents and assets.
- **An increased commitment to sharing youth voices:** To influence conversations around social equity, WAYM will increase its commitment to share quality, youth-driven content with local audiences while expanding its use of national and global distribution channels.



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Plan Objectives and Action Steps

1. **Recruitment and Outreach** – WAYM will place increased emphasis on participant recruitment and outreach strategies, utilizing *Community Voices* and *Youth Speak Out* as feeder tracks for the organization's more intensive program offerings.
 - A. *Community Voices (formerly Youth Photography Traveling Exhibit)*
 - Expand the number of annual workshops while maintaining the current, four-hour format.
 - Organize workshops with greater intent in location, purpose, and partnership; serving communities with high levels of need, interest, and geographic overlap that fuel middle and high school-aged youth programs.
 - Share content through public events such as *Market Matters* (formerly Farmers' Markets), community events, and festivals - engaging audiences in more participatory ways.
 - Develop new ways to engage audiences across generational, cultural, and social divides.
 - B. *Youth Speak Out (YSO)*
 - Operate YSO primarily as fee-for-service work, actively marketing this program to schools, community centers, and other organizations and agencies.
 - Increase focus on YSO partnerships as a recruitment vehicle for middle and high school-aged youth programs.
 - Explore yearlong programs and other innovative pilot projects, including but not limited to multi-day and weekend programs in libraries and community centers that offer exchanged resources to Wide Angle staff and students.
2. **Program Tracks** – WAYM will bolster and expand its key middle and high school-aged youth program offerings, continuing to deliver these high-quality models to participants in community settings during the academic year.
 - A. *Baltimore Speaks Out (BSO)*
 - Achieve higher retention rates from middle school to high school-aged youth programs through increased summer opportunities, high school choice placement assistance, and more frequent communications and check-ins.
 - Explore the demand for programming and consider increasing the number of middle school-aged youth program sites.
 - B. *High School Programming*
 - Plan and launch summer programs that assist rising high school-aged youth identify their ideal media education tracks and prepare more advanced youth for WAYM's workforce development programs.
 - Lead three advanced mentoring tracks – *Video*, *Design*, and *Audio* – increasing the number of participants in each track while exploring niche focus areas including animation, podcasting, and sound engineering.
 - Provide opportunities for more advanced students to work on select fee-for-service projects.



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3. **Workforce Development and College-Bound Culture** – WAYM will embrace whole student development by strengthening career and college pathways for program participants, expanding its apprenticeship program, connecting youth to needed resources, building the organization’s college-bound culture, and creating exit strategies for high school-aged students who are not pursuing related careers or degrees.
 - A. *Apprenticeship Program*
 - Expand WAYM’s apprenticeship program, providing paid professional opportunities each year through Wide Angle Productions (WAP) and teaching and design apprenticeships.
 - Ensure a high-quality and diverse WAP apprenticeship pool through competitive application processes and teacher referrals, and by further developing compensation models that are based on hourly wages rather than monthly stipends.
 - Assess tools to strengthen the apprenticeship program, including certification programs, professional programs enrollment, trainings on resume building and other topics, and stronger community college linkages.
 - B. *College Pathways*
 - Strengthen WAYM’s college-bound culture through campus visits, application and financial aid workshops, and regular student conversations around higher education.
 - Create stronger partnerships with colleges and universities that allow WAYM to build relationships with guidance counselors, admissions officers, and other administrators while exploring models that provide course credit for college-bound youth.
 - Develop a plan to recognize and support graduating students.
 - Strategize parent and family engagement methods within all tiers of programming.
 - Create an alumni engagement model for students who have exited or aged out of WAYM programs.
4. **Sharing Youth Voice** – WAYM will heighten its focus on content distribution through all layers of staffing and programs to engage diverse audiences, create broader awareness of content, and generate increased exposure for the organization.
 - A. *Partnership Building*
 - Develop three to five primary distribution partners to share WAYM’s work with larger media audiences.
 - Build annual toolkits to share with these partners that highlight key content, themes, and messaging.
 - B. *Distribution Models*
 - Implement local strategies including advertising and PSAs, community screenings, traditional local media, and grassroots models with a youth-to-youth focus.
 - Launch national efforts including public television and radio, mainstream media, film festivals, temporary exhibitions, educational distribution partners, and youth media exchange partnerships.



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- Emphasize global efforts around increased online presence and web channels, film festivals, and international conference presentations.
5. **Organizational Development & Culture** – WAYM will continue to increase investment in staffing, providing team members with training and professional development that support program participants and its overall mission and vision.
- A. Provide training to staff, interns, and apprentices around trauma-responsive approaches that both meet the educational and socio-emotional needs of program participants and encourage their success at WAYM, at home, and in life.
 - B. Provide regular technical training to staff, interns, and apprentices in advanced digital media skills with a goal of staying current with evolving technology trends.
 - C. Prepare WAYM teachers to become key local amplifiers of student work, making content distribution part of the staffing culture throughout the organization.
 - D. Engage in regular conversations with teaching staff around core organizational values, including diversity, inclusivity, voice youth, and community ownership.