

YR Media

# 2021 Annual Report

Thriving in Challenging Times



"YR Media has taught me so much about media production! Since I've been here, I've worked on coding, writing an investigative journalistic piece, and so much more."

—**Zoe Harwood**, Interactive Department  
Production Assistant

"YR will always be my go-to place of work simply because of the fantastically kind staff and amazing sense of community you can develop with them."

—**Aashir Khan**, Video Peer Teacher

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# Changing the Storytellers.

There is no question that this is a period of deep reflection for this country. Who are we really? And much more importantly, who do we ultimately want to be?

It couldn't be a place with inequity baked into every system, from housing to banking to education to immigration to healthcare. It couldn't be a place where Black citizens die at the hands of police or vigilantes. It couldn't be where willful misinformation builds into a wave of physical violence against Asian Americans or where we separate immigrating families forever for simply striving for a better life in the "land of liberty." It couldn't be where children are ostracized and even outlawed for not identifying with arbitrary gender lines.

At YR Media, our answer to changing the world around us is to tell our stories, the stories of the underrepresented, undercounted, and underestimated. The majority of our YR Stars are Black, Asian American, and Latinx with increasing representation from Indigenous populations. They are predominantly female, with a rising number of LGBTQ+ and nonbinary individuals. They are young during a time when too many equate youth with recklessness, indifference, or worse.

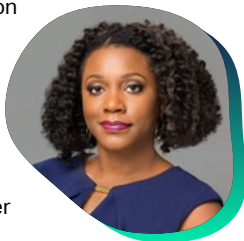
Despite any effort to silence them, these 14- to 24-year-olds I've proudly dubbed YR Stars are weary of the narratives developed about them, their age group, and their communities by newsrooms, record labels, and technology companies who do not know their lives. They demonstrate remarkable resilience and power, even amid a uniquely challenging time in this country's history. I've witnessed it personally, ever since the day I joined this organization as CEO just over two years ago.

I moved to Oakland from Chicago not too long before COVID ravaged the nation, particularly and disproportionately affecting communities of color. Thanks to the incredible team I work with, not one day of programming was lost. Our staff worked together to devise remote learning protocols, delivered equipment, offered mental health services online, and established a mobile pantry to ensure no young person would be left out. We continued to deepen our impact in all corners of the United States, launching a virtual Midwest hub in Chicago that ushered in 20 contributors in Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan.

With so much in flux in this country, YR Media remains a steadfast force, not only a platform but a workplace for youth. We value their voices and impact, as do our partners and supporters who continue to pour into what we do. It is evident in our strong performance over the past two years even despite the pandemic. In fact, in June of 2021, we attracted the largest unsolicited and unrestricted gift in our organization's history.

Together, with our emerging leaders at the helm, we will not only disrupt the mainstream narrative, we'll rewrite it. Our youth content creators will be the authors of a new America, one not so fixated on stars and stripes but on social equity. I hope you'll continue to support us and our YR Stars along that journey.

**Kyra Kyles**  
Chief Executive Officer  
YR Media



# Changing the Story.

Hello Friends,

I am honored to serve as your Board Chair as of 2021. I have been a part of YR Media's Board of Directors since 2014, and I have been involved with the organization even longer than that. In fact, as a former staff member, I helped develop our internship program and professional development support services, which are still a foundational part of our work today. Working at YR Media was a pivotal part of my early career, and it is an honor to be able to pay it forward as a member of the Board and now as Board Chair, so that I can help other young people find their path and support the diversity of voices and perspectives across the landscape of mainstream media, technology, and music.

This report encapsulates some of the high points the organization has reached with the leadership of our outgoing Board Chair, Luc Bellet, who continues to serve on the Board as Vice Chair. During Luc's tenure as Chair, the organization evolved from a mostly local after-school program to a national platform for aspiring leaders all over the country who are eager to share their perspectives and creativity with our rapidly growing audiences. We are working with more young people than ever before, and we now have staff across the country supporting that growth.

It is important to note that our accomplishments in the current moment were made possible thanks to nearly 30 years of work and a legacy laid by

our visionary founder Ellin O'Leary, who grew the organization from its humble beginnings in a storefront in Berkeley into a thriving Oakland institution, and passed a brilliantly burning torch to our current CEO Kyra Kyles. Under Kyra's superb leadership, and in less than two years, the organization has expanded its national efforts, increased visibility for our young people's projects, added to an already impressive list of industry and nonprofit partners, and received a host of new major funding opportunities.

Before we go even further, I invite you to give Luc a virtual standing ovation for his term as Board Chair and for his unwavering support for the community, and extend Kyra a round of applause as she takes us onward and upward. I look forward to sharing continued success and community impact with you all.

With gratitude,

**Julius Toledo**  
Board Chair  
Board of Directors



## Board of Directors

\* Denotes those with 10 or more years of service

† Denotes those who are new to the Board in 2021



**Julius Toledo, Chair**  
Key Account Manager  
Warner Bros. Entertainment



**Luc Bellet, Vice Chair**  
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**Paul Smith, Treasurer**  
CEO and Co-founder  
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**Neha Tiwari, Secretary†**  
Founder/Principal  
Version Consulting

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Best Buy Corp.



**Steve Fainaru**  
Senior Writer  
ESPN



**Kevin Guillory\***  
Reporter/Producer



**Darrell Jackson†**  
President/CEO  
The Efficace Group, Inc.



**Julie Jensen\***  
Treasurer  
The Jenesis Group

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Founder & Former President/CEO  
Latin American Youth Center



**Kat Malinowska†**  
Vice President, Audience  
POPSUGAR



**Marlene Millikan**  
Psychotherapist



**Dometi Pongo†**  
Host  
MTV's *True Life Crime*



**Gary Rydstrom\***  
Sound Designer  
Skywalker Sound



**Christopher Shearer**  
Founder and Principal  
Third Sector Strategy LLC



## Section 2

# Activities and Impact

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### Mission

YR Media equips emerging content creators between the ages of 14–24, primarily BIPOC, with an immersive media arts education, top industry mentors, paid career-track employment, and holistic support services including counseling and healthy food. Young people leverage these offerings to become civically engaged citizens driving systemic change and disruptors that diversify the traditional media landscape by creating stories, art, and music that matter.

### Vision

To place power in the hands of young content creators, especially those from historically underrepresented groups, and ensure their diverse voices lead the way in shaping the future of our world.

**“YR has given me so many opportunities to connect with people who share my same passion, and to develop my skills to be able to achieve my goals in the future. I can also thank my coworkers and supervisors for motivating me to create the best work I can and lend a helping hand whenever I need it.”**

**—Kimi Andre, Video Peer Teacher**

# Student Voices

YR

Why YR Media?

YR has really allowed me to explore a future career in journalism. Before joining YR when I was in high school I had no idea I wanted to be a journalist. They taught me everything I know. YR really gave me the opportunity to express myself and get my work out there to larger audiences.

**Nina Roehl**, Newsroom Fellow

Working in YR has been to me the foundation of passion, and the cornerstone for my development for the last four years of my life. With no knowledge of music going into the program, I've come out with a set of skills, and a mindset for creation. I made my first song in the YR music training program, with a barebones set of skills in digital music production. Now I have dozens of fully realized, engaging, and just plain fun songs that I can listen to and share wherever, and whenever, along with two instruments I can now play under my belt. It's been a blast.

**Sam Macleay**, Music Production Assistant

YR helped me understand what it means to be a young journalist and how to do it right. Even if not in person, attending YR was the highlight of my internship. Without their support, I would not be pursuing journalism at the college level.

**Pratham Dalal**, Newsroom Intern

YR Media has taught me what it takes to be a journalist at a high level. Being shown what the workload is like has taught me that I have to be consistent and I always have to continue to improve as a journalist. My editor NaTyshca always pushes me to be better than I was the week before and I have seen constant improvement.

**Markel Collins**, Freelance Correspondent

The beginning of COVID was horrible for me; I had to finish my freshman and sophomore years at home. During sophomore year I found a way to make myself feel better which did not include being on a cell phone like other adolescents and did include the thing I love most: music. Joining YR Media has not only taught me new skills in music but has also brought myself inner peace in getting through this pandemic and spending time with people who have the same interests as me.

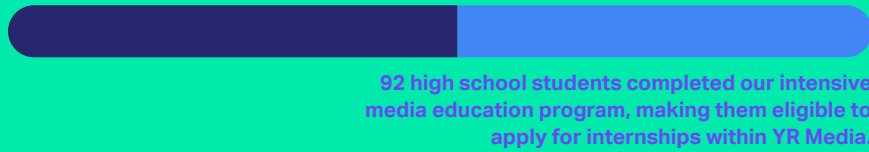
**Nina Ochoa**, Music Intern

# Our Impact Across the Country

## Our Program

In 2021, YR Media deeply engaged 206 emerging creators in our Oakland programs.

We employed 114  
14-to-24-year-olds in 257 paid,  
three-month internships.



## Our Emerging Leaders and Content Creators

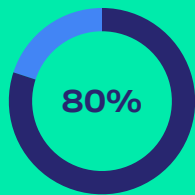
In our Oakland programs, at least 50% of our students are Oakland residents, with almost all youth living in Alameda County.

YR Media serves a growing population of trans, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth.

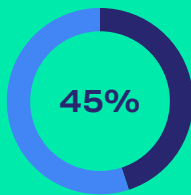
We engage youth in the foster care system, youth experiencing homelessness and youth who have had touch points with the juvenile justice system.



BIPOC Youth



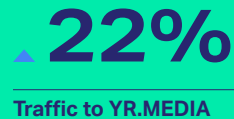
Low-to-moderate income, or qualify for free lunch at school



Young Women and Girls

## Our Content

Content by our YR Stars reached audiences of millions via our platform YR.MEDIA, through our distribution partnerships with outlets like NPR, KQED, KCBS, POPSUGAR, Medium and our newest partner: The Washington Post.



## Our National Network

In addition to our work in Oakland, our national network continued to grow, showcasing emerging voices from all across the country.

28  
states

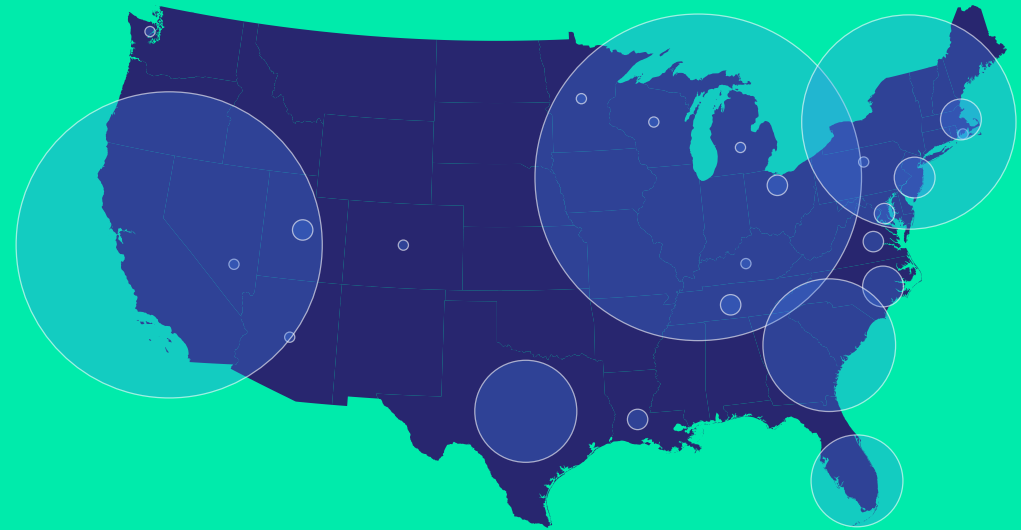
YR Stars published content from 28 states and Washington DC, as well as three countries outside the US: Tunisia, India, and England.

158  
correspondents

158 national network correspondents published stories with us, either on YR.MEDIA or in one of our partner outlets.

361  
YR stars

361 YR Stars are active in our Slack community, submitting pitches, attending workshops, and engaging with other young creators and YR editors.



**“Through YR I learned a lot about media production. Despite my time with YR being online, it was still a fun process and a great learning experience.”**

**—Ryan Pham, Video Intern**

## COVID Response

The unprecedented challenges of the past few years have also created a year of change and opportunity here at YR Media. In April 2020, we transitioned overnight from in-person learning to a 100% virtual learning experience. In many cases our students and creators did not have the technology needed to stay involved. To address this, we have distributed 192 laptops and tablets since the beginning of the pandemic to support their ability to participate from home, and we adjusted programming to provide innovative virtual media arts training.

Through the obstacles of having to pivot, with the generosity of dedicated individuals, corporations and foundations, we were able to continue critical support services, including our mobile pantry and grocery gift cards to young people who previously relied on hot meals at YR Media every day. Through it all we were able to continue our paid internships, paying \$482K in wages to interns, production assistants, fellows, and freelance contributors in 2021.

## Project Spotlight

# Unadopted

With the generous support of our foundation partners, we were able to bring our first-ever feature documentary from ideation to execution with the premiere of *Unadopted*.

It is an open secret among children in the foster care system: Once you reach your teens, your chances of adoption drop abysmally. In fact, of the more than 400,000 kids in foster care in America, approximately 25% are over the age of 12. But what happens to those who grow up and “age out?” The answer unfolds in *Unadopted*, a 33-minute documentary produced by YR Media and youth employee Noel Anaya (pictured below).

Noel’s incredible work, done in partnership with a production team that consists of our founder Ellin O’Leary, Bob Calo, Paula Neudorf, Arianne LaPenne, and Hanna Miller has garnered national attention and prestigious journalism awards, including the Edward R. Murrow Award, the Media for a Just Society Award, and an AVA Digital Award; and placements in the BronzeLens and Salute Your Shorts Film Festivals. The film has aired on KQED Arts, nationally on PBS, and through a partnership with innovative streaming platform GOOD DOCS. We have hosted in-person screenings in Oakland and Bozeman, Montana, in partnership with local Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs, and created a digital media campaign with original content and unseen documentary footage that brought *Unadopted* to new audiences on social media. The film has led to new partnerships for the organization centered around our continued coverage of the foster care system, from the perspective of those who have experienced it.



Noel Anaya, pictured left with the Edward R. Murrow Award, drew from personal experience and from his foster care reporting for YR Media to create *Unadopted*. Above, Anaya shows off the award with *Unadopted* director Paula Neudorf, CEO Kyra Kyles, and Director of Communications Angela Serna.



# Program Highlights

Our YR Stars tell stories that are otherwise absent or downplayed in mainstream media. Here are just a few of our favorite original investigations, projects, and campaigns from the past year:

January



## Type Beat Challenge

Our music team created an NEA-backed virtual studio experience that highlights new genres of music and facilitates connections between the best up-and-coming music producers nationwide. Over 300 young people contributed to our instructional audio resource bank, resulting in 1,500+ website visits to download free audio resources.

February



## Behind Our Masks

This multimedia series shines a light on how COVID is affecting the lives of young people throughout California. Underwritten by The California Endowment, this project was a collaboration between Boyle Heights Beat in Los Angeles, The kNOW in Fresno, Coachella Unincorporated in the Eastern Coachella Valley, and YR Media.

March



## Teachable Moments

This multifaceted campaign details what young people have been going through for the past two years with distance learning, and simultaneously supplies educators with the tools they need to make the experience better, whether that's through racial equity—centering action or simple tips to stave off Zoom gloom.

April



## Adult ISH Season 5

Our advice, culture and storytelling podcast launched seasons 5 and 6 to widespread acclaim in 2021, including recognition as a finalist in the Ambie Awards for Best Wellness or Relationship Podcast. *Adult ISH* features dynamic co-hosts Merk Nguyen and Nyge Turner, along with a stellar lineup of guests sharing hilarious, poignant, and surprising stories about the transition to adulthood. *Adult ISH* is produced by YR Media and brought to audiences by the Radiotopia podcast network from PRX.

## Beyond Self-Care

In a virtual three-day summit, our YR Stars, *Adult ISH* hosts and more explored how our Gen Z journalists are grappling with mental health while covering some of the most heartbreaking news that has defined the past year, from #BlackLivesMatter to AAPI anti-hate efforts to voter suppression and the continued quest for a more equitable society overall.

May



## Surveillance U

The pandemic has led to a rise in schools using virtual test-proctoring software. Through interviews, FOIA requests, and analysis of over 79 petitions opposing these tools, we explored students' experiences, and their concerns around digital privacy and racial bias of the technology. As one first-year college student put it: "You feel like they're expecting you to cheat."

June



## Surround Sound

With support from the City of Oakland's Cultural Funding Program, we put a spotlight on four of our favorite Oakland DJs and celebrated the neighborhoods they lived and worked in as they built their careers.

July



## Teens in America, with *The Washington Post*

We teamed up with *The Washington Post* and teen contributors from New York to Illinois to Kentucky to California in a five-part audio series exploring their perspectives on race.

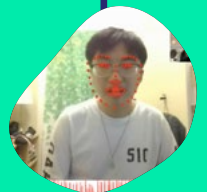
November



## Virtual Proctoring Simulator

As a companion to our Surveillance U reporting, the YR Interactive team created a highly original simulation tool that exposes the inequities of virtual proctoring software. This playful interactive experience has super serious implications for pandemic-era education, equity, and beyond.

December





## Section 3

# Financials

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Dear Friends and Community Members:

I am pleased to share an overview of YR Media's 2021 financials, along with additional information to show our growth over the past few years. The theme of this year's annual report is perseverance through difficult times, and indeed we have seen major accomplishments with our finances this year that have strengthened the organization and enabled us to provide excellent support for youth.

This year's success built on the financial strength of 2020, which began with uncertainty with the global pandemic. With the aid of the PPP loan, we sustained and grew our operations, providing top-notch education and training to our youth without missing a beat. We received additional unsolicited emergency COVID support from our active funders; many of these funders then increased their level of program support as a show of their commitment to our mission. We ended 2020 by exceeding our operating budget goal by 17%, hence setting the stage for 2021.

In 2021 we conservatively increased our operating budget by 5%, but thanks to our growing pipelines of institutional and individual donors, we ended the year exceeding our operating budget by 37%. We welcomed the organization's largest-ever single donation of \$2.5M, from the MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett Foundation, and our grassroots individual donor campaign, the Freedom Campaign, raised \$128,623. We are grateful for our financial supporters at all levels, all of whom are indispensable partners who recognize the urgent needs of our youth during these especially difficult times.

We are thankful for the incredible support of our community and partners, who make our work possible.

Sincerely,

**Ai Le**

Chief Financial and Administrative Officer  
YR Media

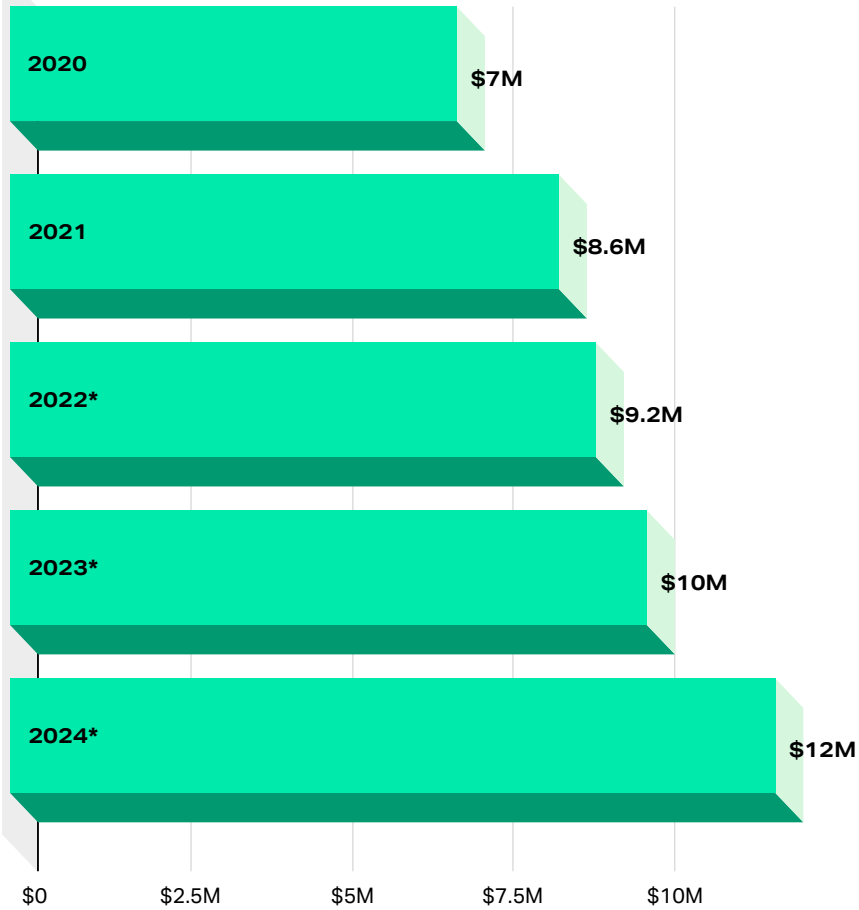


**"I believe that YR Media provides a free and expressive space for you to learn media skills and write about current events and personal experiences. As an intern they've taught me how to manage money and figure out job searching and negotiating for the future profession. Even though distant and over Zoom, I've been able to have the same experiences as in person and was taught how to reach my goal in journalism."**

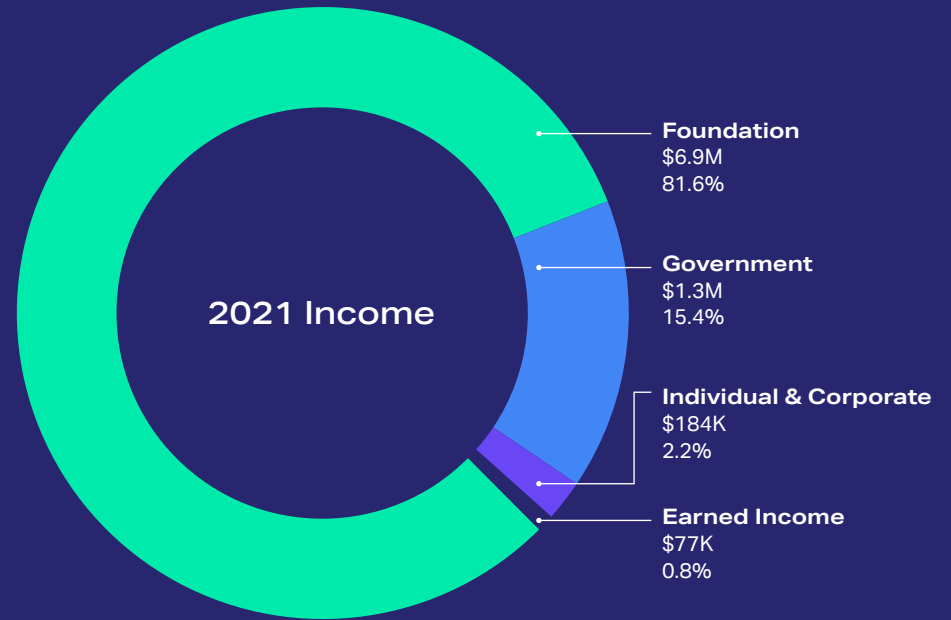
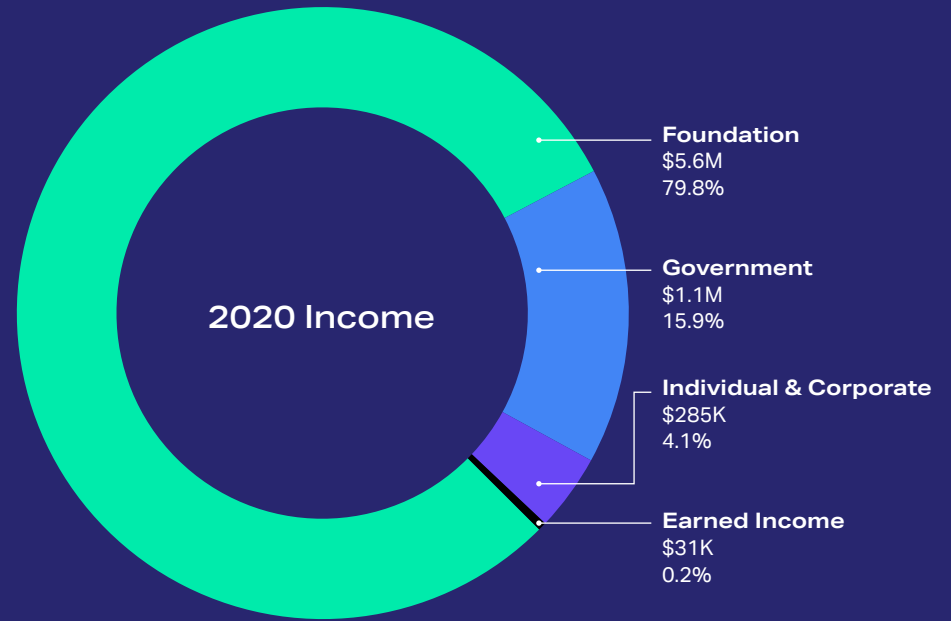
—Tiya Birru, Newsroom Intern

# Income and Expenses Overview

## Operating Revenue



\*Projected figure





## Section 4

# Donor Acknowledgements

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The generosity of our YR Community continues to impact the lives of our emerging leaders, both here in Oakland and across the country. This journey would not be possible without you. Here at YR Media, our YR Stars are our superpower. Their creativity, tenacity, and determination fuel our “why.” They are why we share the mission of YR Media and ask for your support.

Asha Richardson, a former YR Star and staff member who dedicated more than ten years to YR Media, exemplifies the mission and vision that we strive for each day in supporting the next generation of content creators. She co-founded YR Interactive, which continues to provide STEAM pathways for current YR participants, and she has gone on to become Director of Data Quality at Grabango.

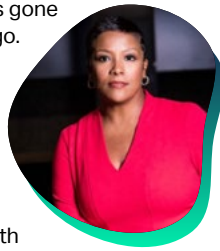
Your investment enabled us to provide the tools for Asha and those following in her impressive footsteps to dream and create. We are beyond grateful for your time, talent, and treasure and hope through our first annual impact report, you will see that YR Media has been a good steward of your gifts and that a generation of youth continues to benefit from your investment.

On behalf of all my colleagues, I thank you and ask that you stay on the journey with us as we continue to educate, employ, and empower the next generation of content creators.

With gratitude,

**Rochelle Reeder**

Chief Development and Growth Officer  
YR Media



"There is something magical about making something, no matter what it is. There's something magical about 'I made something that didn't exist.' Now it exists. That can be music, that can be art, that can be a website, that can be an app. YR Media is centered in the tech hub of the world, okay? And technology has a lot of different career paths. But technology is one of the main driving economic factors of financial stability, opportunities. That's the industry that we have here in the Bay Area. And I think it is critical, no matter what it is that you're passionate about as a young person, to know that you could — you don't have to, but you could — be in one of these high-salary positions that fuels your area, that changes your area, that ultimately creates technology that changes the world."

—Asha Richardson, Former YR Media Star

We are grateful for our donors who contributed at all levels from January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2021, and we would like to recognize our Board of Directors highlighted for 100% participation in donating.

Jennifer Abele  
Denny Abrams  
Malik Adan  
James Agate  
Erika Aguilar  
Amenah Alsrogy  
Veronica A. Thigpen  
Christine Angeles  
Amy Arbreton  
Eli Arbreton  
Linda Artel  
Jerome Atendido  
Brian Auerbach  
Rachelle Axel  
Paula Baessler  
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Karin Buckley  
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Leslie Campbell  
Christopher Campisi  
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Harvey Co Chien  
Amy Cohen  
Bonnie Cohen  
Edward Cohen  
Donald Cooper  
Abigail Cothran  
Simone Coxe  
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Tom David  
Elissa Dennis  
Danielle Denny  
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Susan Dos Santos  
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Calvin Eng  
Barbara Englis  
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Krystal Farmer  
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Kristy Feck  
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Larry Frost  
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Adi Gevins  
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Hannah Gordon  
Emily Greenwell  
Lisa Greif  
Ashley Gross  
**Keven Guillery**  
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Heather Hanly  
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Amber Haywood  
Daniel Heidebrecht  
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Madison King  
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Janice Kulma  
Christopher Kutz  
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Lila Lahood  
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Crystal Limbaugh  
Tiffany Lintner  
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Lynette Lockett  
Emily Loeb  
Meghan Long  
Tristan Loper  
Stacy Lorish  
Barbara Ludlum  
Laura Luster  
Nicholas Lyndon-Williams  
Grinling Mac Clelland  
Pam MacKinnon  
**Kat Malinowska**  
Celia Manley  
Julie Marcus  
Audrey Mardavich  
Kathryn Marple  
Courtney Martin  
Greg Martin  
Joseph Martin  
Rebecca Martin  
Noah Martin-Ruben  
Ben Masaoka  
Stephen Matava-Knighten  
Rob Matthew  
Susan Mattmann  
Sharn Matusek  
Jennifer McGlynn  
Mary Ellen McKey  
Tiffany McNeil  
Barbara Meislin  
Tavia Meredith  
Karen Meryash  
Pat Mesiti-Miller  
Robin Miller  
**Marlene Millikan**  
Richard Millikan

Holly Minch  
Seed Minkin  
Norma Minor  
Sulagna Misra  
Paul W. Monts  
Evan Moore  
Jazmin Mora  
Albert Moreno  
Mariana Moreno  
Della Mundy  
Lindsay Murdoch  
Matthew Myers  
Russell Nadel  
Mike Nahrstedt  
Adrienne Narcisse  
Joshua Nederhood  
Matt Neely  
Davia Nelson  
Merk Nguyen  
Donna Nicoletti  
Bridget E. Niland  
Nicole Noren  
Margaret Norman  
Ellin O'Leary  
Kara Obradovic  
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Carol Pierson  
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Megan Post  
Scott & Channing Power  
Jim Quay  
Alexandra Quinn  
Thomas Quinn  
Robert Raburn  
Helen Raiser  
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