



## PLAYWRIGHTS FOUNDATION REIMAGINES PURPOSE AND PROGRAMS TO DEEPEN SUPPORT FOR PLAYWRIGHTS

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (May 9, 2023) — Playwrights are the foundation of the American Theatre, telling important stories that need to be heard. For theatre to thrive, so must our playwrights. For 45 years, **Playwrights Foundation** has invested in the next generation of playwrights writing today’s stories that transform the world of tomorrow. Today, Playwrights Foundation announces their new purpose and reimagined core programs to deepen their support for playwrights.

Playwrights Foundation’s purpose is to support and empower playwrights’ artistic growth and careers while championing their voices on a national level. The new purpose shifts organizational emphasis from new play development towards a greater commitment to playwrights’ overall artistic growth and career advancement.

After listening closely to playwrights and other constituents, Playwrights Foundation has reimagined its core programs: the **Bay Area Playwrights Festival** will shift from an annual festival to a biennial hybrid festival in order to expand the pre-festival program from 4 to 12 months, and the **Resident Playwrights program** will shift from a 4-year to a 2-year residency with public presentations of new work in their second year that will alternate with the BAPF public readings and heighten the visibility of the local resident playwrights. These changes will allow staff to be more intentional and responsive to playwright’s needs and increase the amount of time, care, and resources dedicated to each program.

“Being a playwright is heart centered work,” says Executive Artistic Director **Jessica Bird Beza**. “Playwrights are visionary leaders illuminating the depths of our very souls with their stories. In our theatre industry, the focus often is primarily on the development of the script towards a reading with playwrights working under extremely tight deadlines and without much input on their needs or support afterwards. These past few years have highlighted how broken many of our collective systems are. It’s crucial to re-examine how we do things and prioritize the people in the process over the product. We want to give playwrights greater agency, more money, and support them holistically, by not only supporting play creation but also their mind, body, and spirits, which will lead to even more impactful storytelling.”

Playwrights Foundation is among the few organizations that focus specifically on the playwright’s artistic process, giving them tools, resources, community, and an artistic home to



express their voice on their own terms. The organization has been an early artistic home to playwrights such as Lauren Gunderson, Katori Hall, Lauren Yee, and Christopher Chen, among many others.

**Lauren Gunderson** shares, “For over a decade, I’ve experienced the impact of Playwrights Foundation first hand as a playwright and now board member. Losing so many beloved national programs that were dedicated to playwrights and the development of new work over these past few years has been devastating, but Playwrights Foundation’s dedication to center playwrights in a deeper way than ever before is inspiring and makes me exhilarated, energized and hopeful for the future.”

Other significant changes Playwrights Foundation has made include: increased playwright agency and leadership in artistic decisions at all levels of the organization, increased wages for all staff and artists, eliminated unpaid internships and free artistic labor, created more year-round part time staff positions as well as increased diversity amongst board and staff.

“I’ve witnessed first hand how committed all of the staff and board are to ensuring the organization and programs reflect our purpose and align with our stated values, which has been inspiring,” says playwright and board member **Octavio Solis**, “We’ve had years of conversation with our community to get to where we are today. This feels like the beginning of an exciting transformation in the future of Playwrights Foundation, and I hope that other organizations take notice and do the same.”

Playwrights Foundation is also **sunsetting their Rough Readings program** following a 15-year partnership with the National Center for New Plays at Stanford University.

**David Goldman**, Director of the National Center for New Plays and Founder of National New Play Network says, “I’m proud to have partnered with Playwrights Foundation on over 70 new play development processes. Although sad to not be working together, Playwrights Foundation’s strategic shifts create greater alignment with who they are and will have a deeper impact on the playwrights they work with.”

Finally, these changes allow staff to **develop new engagement initiatives to serve all playwrights** over the next few years, including stronger alumni engagement, educational programming, and networking opportunities.

“Playwrights Foundation has diligently engaged with alumni like me in the process of defining the future of their programs. By expanding alumni initiatives, PF can foster the ongoing



development of individual playwrights, well beyond our initial experience in the core programs. Additionally, these initiatives can create a vibrant ecosystem, enabling playwrights to maintain strong connections with their peers and the broader theatre community,” says playwright **Geetha Reddy**.

The reimagined programs put Playwrights Foundation’s purpose and values into action and lay the foundation for a sustainable organization that will be here for many years to come to champion the future voices of the American Theatre.

“I’ve witnessed leadership double down on commitments to community, to centering playwrights’ voices, and to trusting the expertise of the marginalized voices who have been so often overlooked in these conversations,” says **Dawn Monique Williams**, Associate Artistic Director at Aurora Theatre. “It has been thrilling to observe Jessica breathe new life into Playwrights Foundation, which is the main reason I joined the board this year. The work Playwrights Foundation is doing remains vital to the American Theatre, perhaps now more than ever, and they are answering the call to find even better ways to do this.”

The 46th Bay Area Playwrights Festival public readings will be held April 12-21, 2024 and the Resident Playwrights program will open applications to Bay Area writers in July 2023 for a 2024-2025 residency.

Playwrights Foundation is inviting their community to engage around these changes through a series of town hall conversations. For more information and to register, visit [playwrightsfoundation.org](http://playwrightsfoundation.org).

## ABOUT PLAYWRIGHTS FOUNDATION

Founded in 1976, **Playwrights Foundation** is widely recognized as one of the top playwright service organizations and new play incubators in the U.S. Led by Executive Artistic Director **Jessica Bird Beza**, Playwrights Foundation is dedicated to supporting and empowering playwrights’ artistic growth and careers while championing their voices on a national level and envisions a future where playwrights are radically centered as visionary leaders who transform the world through storytelling. Serving early and mid-career playwrights from the Bay Area and around the country, PF has identified over 500 exceptional writers early in their careers and given them space, time, community, and professional artistic collaborators to explore new theatrical ideas free from the pressures of the marketplace for more than 40 years. Playwrights it has worked with have won every award in the theater including the Pulitzer, the Tony, the Obie, the National Critics Circle Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Award, and many more. In 2017,



on its 40th Anniversary, **Playwrights Foundation** was recognized with a Theatre Bay Area Legacy Award for its substantial impact on the field. PF has received two Glickman Awards for best new play to premiere in the Bay Area through its Producing Partnership Initiative. More than 80% of the plays it has developed have gone on to successful productions, winning awards and accolades. Among the many PF-developed works that have premiered across the country are Katori Hall's *The Mountaintop*, Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, Jihae Park's *Hannah and the Dread Gazebo*, Lauren Gunderson's *The Revolutionists*, Lauren Yee's *King of the Yees*, Madhuri Shekar's *House of Joy*, Mike Lew's *Teenage Dick*, and Mona Mansour's *We Swim, We Talk, We Go To War*, and many more. [playwrightsfoundation.org](http://playwrightsfoundation.org)

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**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available here:  
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