



House of SpeakEasy

WRITERS + AUDIENCES

2025 Impact Report

HOUSE OF SPEAKEASY IS

BRINGING BOOKS TO READ

THROUGHOUT NEW YORK CITY AND BEYOND



Dear Friends,

In 2013, when Amanda Foreman, Jonathan Barton, and Lucas Wittmann founded House of SpeakEasy to support writers and audiences, they imagined many things. The first being that the little engine could.

We can, and we do. On stage, in schools, and on the road.

On stage, *Seriously Entertaining*, our flagship literary cabaret at Joe's Pub, brings together both renowned and emerging writers to share beautifully crafted, intimate, and poignant stories on a common theme. Each show is the exquisite orchestration of four writers from different genres, coming together like a "mixtape," to quote the New York Times. The experience is thrilling for the audience and rewarding for the writers. We are so grateful to the writers who invest time and commitment to craft an original narrative for our stage, and in doing, illuminate the world around us and within us.

In schools, we connect writers with students in meaningful, energizing ways. Through our Author Talkbacks, writers share their craft and their passion, helping young people see that their voices are powerful tools—for expression, for emotional understanding, and for shaping their futures. Our poetry workshops give students the language to identify, articulate, and hold their feelings. And sharing their poems strengthens friendships into community.

On the road, the House of SpeakEasy Bookmobile travels across New York City year-round with our partner organizations. We support writers at book festivals, build home libraries with partner organizations, prevent summer slide, and share our love of books by distributing new books to babies, children, students, adults, and English-language learners.

Our partners enable us to serve communities meaningfully, efficiently, and cost-effectively. Our skilled and committed board guides, questions, and champions our mission. Our staff is lean and mighty, smart, engaged, invested, and enthusiastic.

An impact report looks back at the year past, a year made possible only through your support. But reflection also invites imagination, and we step into the future with the same determination that has always been House of SpeakEasy's special sauce: big dreams and a steadfast commitment to making them real.

We are so grateful to those who pioneered the organization, and we warmly welcome new voices on our board and staff who will help carry out our mission.

And we are deeply grateful to you. We hope you'll come along into 2026, adding new chapters to what is now our shared story.

Sincerely,



Amanda Foreman
Chair



Alison Davis Curry
Executive Director

House of SpeakEasy

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Our Supporters

House of SpeakEasy thanks the following for their support of our mission.
On Stage. In Schools. On the Road.

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Seriously Entertaining

Connecting writers & audiences.



“This was something else altogether. I knew and loved all the writers I was sharing the stage with. ... Plus the audience and the other writers and folks running the event were beyond kind.”

— Junot Díaz, (“Seriously Celebrating *The New Yorker*’s 100th Anniversary: Fiction,” September 2)

Seriously Entertaining, House of SpeakEasy's flagship program, is a literary cabaret where authors take the stage to riff and ruminate, dinner theater-style, on the evening's theme.

Since our debut in 2014, House of SpeakEasy has been proud to feature a range of diverse authors and performers, from Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists to acclaimed novelists and poets, as well as comedians, musicians, and emerging writers.

“It was truly such a joy! I’ve been buzzing from it ever since.”

— **Tyler Wetherall** (“My Family and Other Tragedies,” November 18)

“Working with [House of SpeakEasy] was an absolute highlight of my year.”

— **Laurie Woolever** (“Either/Or,” June 10)

“It was truly a magical night for me. I had so much fun, and House of SpeakEasy is a great organization.”

— **Boo Trundle** (“My Family and Other Tragedies,” November 18)

9 shows in 2025

46 writers on stage

1,201 audience members

participating writers

Torey Akers • Todd Almond • John Avlon • Bill Buford
Ada Calhoun • Billy Collins • Junot Díaz • Glory Edim
Kelly Jean Fitzsimmons • David Flores • Mary Gaitskill
Peter Godwin • Jean Grae • Astead W. Herndon
Don P. Hooper • Rebecca Keith • Amitava Kumar
Nora Lange • Joan Larkin • Yiyun Li
Henry Lien • Paul Lisicky • Roya Marsh • Isaac Mizrahi
Brittany Newell • Kaytie Nielsen • ZZ Packer
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Gary Shteyngart • Margot Singer • Bianca Stone
Jordyn Taylor • Martha Anne Toll • Deborah Treisman
Boo Trundle • Mia Arias Tsang • Amanda Vaill
Tyler Wetherall • Laurie Woolever • Monica Youn
Kevin Young • Carl Zimmer

SpeakTogether

House of SpeakEasy's educational initiatives.

“This class has prepared me significantly. ... I feel like I have an advantage compared to other students who haven’t done the program.”

— College Readiness Program Participant



SpeakTogether is House of SpeakEasy's educational initiative that offers a range of storytelling and writing programs, including in-person student matinees, poetry workshops, and college readiness programs in New York City schools.

House of SpeakEasy's educational initiatives produce a vibrant and accessible literary culture in New York City classrooms, anchored by acclaimed authors and creative pedagogy.

12 events in 2025

6 school partners

600 students served

participating writers

Gina Chung • Lilly Dancyger

Tembe Denton-Hurst • Kristen Felicetti

Kelly Jean Fitzsimmons • Ellen Hagan • Don P. Hooper

Luis Jaramillo • Ebony LaDelle • Paul LaTorre

John Manuel Arias • Isle McElroy • Sofia Montrone

Katie O'Conner • Corey Sobel • Tyler Wetherall

The state of reading comprehension across the U.S. and in New York City is in dire need of support. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress test (known as “The Nation’s Report Card”), only 29% of New York City eighth graders scored proficient in reading comprehension in 2024.¹

Within literacy research, it’s understood that motivation to read and write is an essential component of reading comprehension. In 2015, McGeown et al. found that adolescents’ reading motivation “predicted significant variance in their reading comprehension and summarisation skills.”² We also know that students’ motivation to read tends to decrease as they progress in school.³

Through our educational initiatives, House of SpeakEasy brings joy, motivation, and inspiration to NYC classrooms in the hopes of inspiring students to write their own stories powerfully and beautifully.

After a recent author event at a high school in the Bronx, we asked students to write one thing they wanted to do differently in their own lives after the program. Two-thirds of the students wrote that they wanted to read or write more often or more seriously.

That’s the impact we’re aiming for: joy, purpose, and motivation in reading and writing.



Annie Kiyonaga

Manager of Educational Initiatives

¹ The Nation’s Report Card: 2024 Reading Trial Urban District Snapshot Report (*Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics*, 2024).

² Exploring the relationship between adolescent’s reading skills, reading motivation and reading habits (*Reading and Writing*, 2014).

³ Children’s Attitudes Toward Reading: A National Survey (*International Literacy Association*, 1995).

“The SpeakEasy program was eye-opening for me. ... It was a really unique experience.”

— Brianna, Junior at Union Settlement

“It helped with my writing. ... SpeakEasy helped me express my creativity better.”

— Jael, Junior at Union Settlement

“Enlightening ... that’s the word.”

— Che, Junior at Talent Unlimited High School

“I found who I really was this summer through art. It made me feel like I can tell a story about my life.”

— Danielle, Junior at Union Settlement

SpeakTogether Spotlight: ***Poetry Workshop Series***

“This program helped me put my emotions on paper.”

— 2025 Program Participant

Our Poetry Workshop series is a six- to eight-week writing and performance series, culminating in a showcase of student work. In 2025, we worked in partnership with teachers at Williamsburg High School for Art and Technology to provide a six-week, eight-session writing and performance workshop.

Our Poetry Workshop provides an opportunity for students to work on both their writing skills and, just as importantly, their self-expression and emotional awareness.

Student alumni of this workshop series then read their poetry at our September 2025 *New Yorker* show. Held in celebration of *The New Yorker*'s 100th anniversary, the show highlighted both the work of our amazing student poets and the work of acclaimed poets Billy Collins, Vijay Seshadri, Monica Youn, and Bianca Stone.



The Bookmobile

Bringing literary culture on the road.

The SpeakEasy Bookmobile is a direct response to the proliferation of “book deserts,” neighborhoods where bookstores are in short supply—or worse, nonexistent. Our modified box truck is outfitted with 54 linear feet of shelving that accommodates a variety of books for all ages. We partner with independent bookstores, literacy organizations, community boards, and arts institutions to curate appropriate titles.

Across New York and beyond, we deliver books and book culture, ensuring that books can be made available to readers everywhere.



Reading for pleasure is at an all-time low. A YouGov poll conducted at the end of 2025 found that four in 10 Americans didn't read a single book this past year. Of those who picked up a book, nearly half read less than four books.¹

A 2025 study done by the University of Florida and the University College London has found that, overall, the percentage of Americans who are reading for pleasure has dropped by 40% over the last two decades, falling by an average of 3% per year.²

One of the study's coauthors, Jill Sonke, notes, "Reading has historically been a low-barrier, high-impact way to engage creatively and improve quality of life. When we lose one of the simplest tools in our public health toolkit, it's a serious loss."³

To counter this trend, we must remove any barriers whatsoever, and on this front, the House of SpeakEasy bookmobile has distributed 15,000 books across NYC's five boroughs this year, providing them to readers of all ages for free.



Don Geci

Bookmobile Program Manager

¹ "Most Americans didn't read many books in 2025" (YouGov, 2025).

² "The decline in reading for pleasure over 20 years of the American Time Use Survey" (National Library of Medicine, 2025).

³ "Deeply concerning': reading for fun in the US has fallen by 40%, new study says" (The Guardian, 2025).

5 boroughs served in 2025

53 outings

15K+ books distributed



I new Bookmobile!

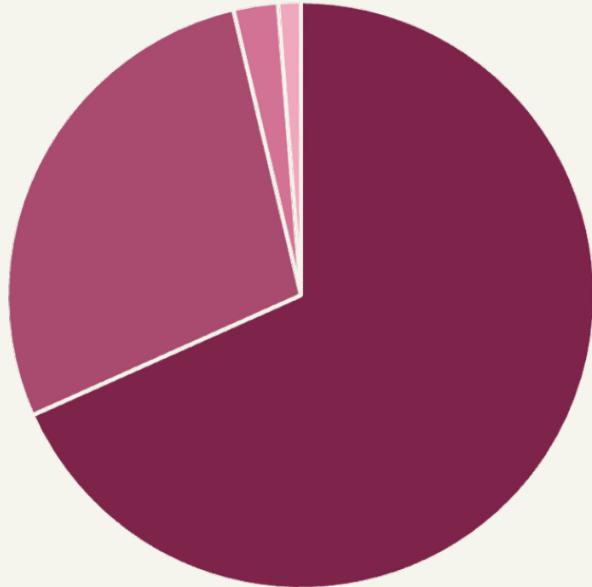
This fall, we purchased an electric-powered, mobile library from Grandview Heights Public Library in Ohio.

This “PopUp Library” is a low-speed electric vehicle specially customized to transport and display books. It’s an exciting step forward for the Bookmobile program, and it makes a perfect, nimble addition to our resources as we work to bring more books and literary culture to New Yorkers.

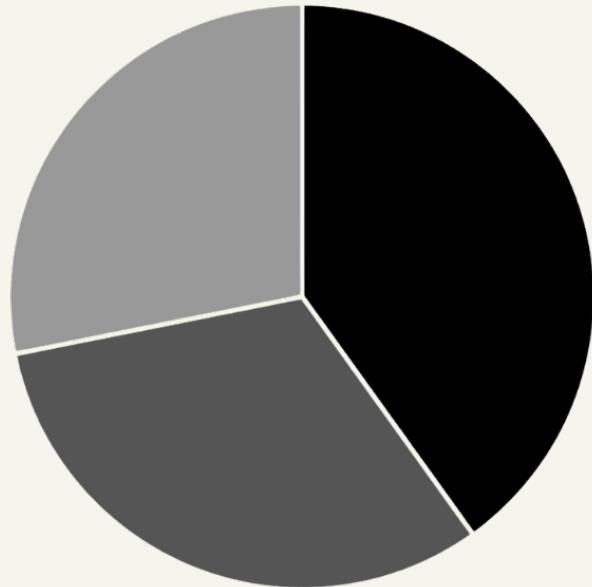
We’re working with a brilliant artist to customize this new Bookmobile.



Our Financials



Revenue & Support



Operating Expenses

About House of SpeakEasy

House of SpeakEasy is grounded in the belief that the ability to read and write enables a person to know their rights, be confident in their identity, and engage boldly and empathetically with the world around them. Our programs support reading, writing, and public participation in literary culture.

On Stage. In Schools. On the Road.

On Stage

Seriously Entertaining, our monthly literary cabaret at Joe's Pub at The Public Theater, focuses on how writers become writers, how their ideas shape their writing, and how their writing shapes the world. We feature ideas and storytelling for all genres of writers.

In Schools

From in-school matinees and storytelling workshops to college readiness programs, SpeakEasy's educational initiatives bring our authors off the stage and into schools, connecting published authors with students.

On the Road

The SpeakEasy Bookmobile brings books and literary culture across New York and beyond, nurturing the literary landscape wherever it goes. From live readings and author performances to free book distribution, the Bookmobile partners with communities to make reading and writing an accessible resource for everyone.

Discover more at houseofspeakeeasy.org.

