

THE LISTENING



ANNUAL REPORT: 2020

PREPARED BY: NICHOLAS GEORGE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A WORD FROM THE FOUNDER

2020 started out with loads of promise and excitement. We were not prepared for how much things would change. Instead of attempting to make It look like something It wasn't, we decided early on to lean Into our mission, vision and Identity and respond to the needs we saw In the community.

There's nothing that we can say about this year that won't be echoed by nearly every other human on the planet. However, thanks to our community of artists, dancers, poets, singers, activists, educators and learners, donors and community leaders, we were able to not only make it through this crazy year - we were able to stay active and continue serving our community while staying on mission.

All of the things that we were able to do this year (including achieving our Giving Tuesday goal!) could not have been possible without you, and we are beyond grateful. The next year promises more challenges, triumphs and changes, and we look forward to continuing our impact in Lynchburg and the spaces around us. Together, we're on to something great.

May we continue to hear clearly, serve bravely, and create boldly!



NICK GEORGE

FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR





ABOUT THE LISTENING, INC.

In 2012, a group of friends decided to get together and do something very simple: enjoy intentional art. It wasn't enough to chat about it, but to actually pursue a greater, shared appreciation of the music and poetry they enjoyed individually.

A few months later on March 29th, 2013, it was given a name, inspired by the debut album by hip-hop group Little Brother, and this platform was called "The Listening".

After becoming tax-exempt In 2016, we steadily grew. Introducing a host of new programs while continuing engaging our community with the performing arts!

"I love how engaged and committed The Listening is to creating safe spaces for people in our Lynchburg, VA community. This work inspired me to join and help them make a difference."

- Geraldo Alonso



COMMUNITY

We strongly believe in working together, and seek to contribute to a collaborative narrative across sectors, perspectives and ideologies.



THE LISTENING

Our Core Values



CURIOSITY

We serve as a safe space to explore and achieve understanding of our neighbors.



AUTHENTICITY

We seek appropriate transparency in our altruism, recognizing that trust is an investment, earned with openness and accountability. In that same spirit, we honor the investments and charitable intentions of our supporters and donors to meet current and future community needs.



INNOVATION

As a young organization, we champion efforts to discover new methods of engaging the world around us.



CREATIVITY

With the performing arts as our main mode of impact, we strive for creative methods to use spoken word/poetry, dance, music and/or theater to achieve our goals.

CURRENT PROGRAMS

SIGNATURE SESSIONS



A WORD FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Despite this year of social distancing, The Listening upheld its core values and created community at a time when we most needed it. Throughout 2020, the organization found safe, new, and innovative opportunities to bring together youth, artists, supporters, and collaborative partners - allowing us to replace our feelings of isolation with connection. And after George Floyd's murder, The Listening did just that - listened.

It created a safe space where our feelings could be shared, our voices could be heard, and where we can continue to work together toward racial healing and justice.

Thank you, our community of supporters, for making all of this happen. I hope you enjoy reading on page 10 how programming responded to the past year and utilized your investment in The Listening to reinvest in our community.

I hope you feel the impact you've made on the community after reading the testimonials on pages 11-13. Your support "provided a light and a connection that broke through the heaviness hanging over 2020".

The Board of Directors would also like to thank our former Board Chair, Dori Baker, for her years of dedication to The Listening. Under her service, the organization saw exponential growth and the opening of the first Freedom School in Lynchburg. Dori, thank you for your unwavering commitment to our mission to engage, change, and save lives.

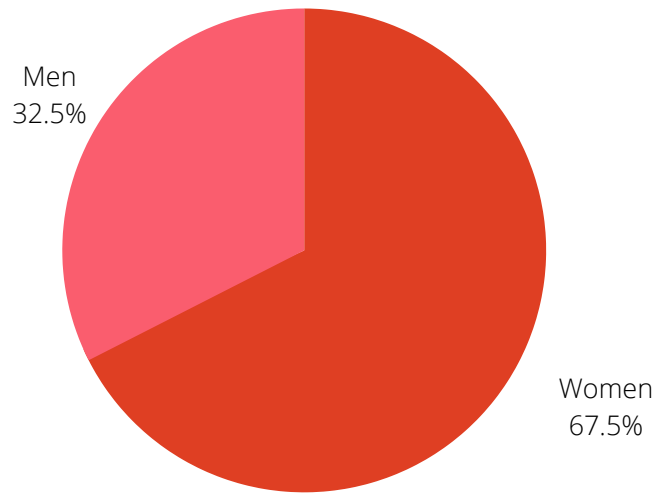
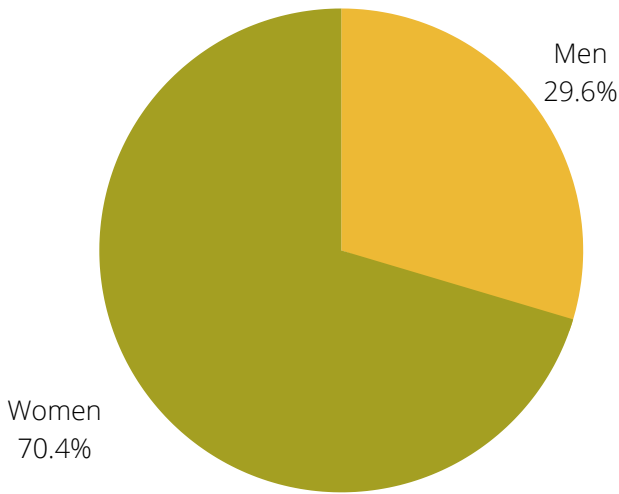
We are so excited to share with you everything that The Listening has in store for 2021!

**With gratitude,
Ashley Graham
Board Chair, The Listening, Inc.**



Facebook Page Likes: 1.8K

Instagram Followers: 1.8K

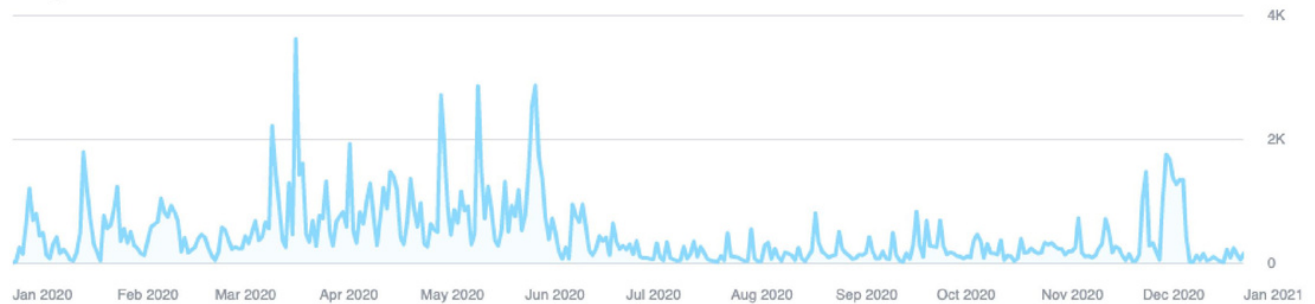


In 2020, we've seen a considerable boost in how we engage with our supporters. As our world become much more virtual, we've been able to continue connecting with supporters like through through our social media account, pivoting and responding to the sounds and needs of our community!

Trends

Facebook Page Reach ⓘ

70,581 ↑ 98.1%

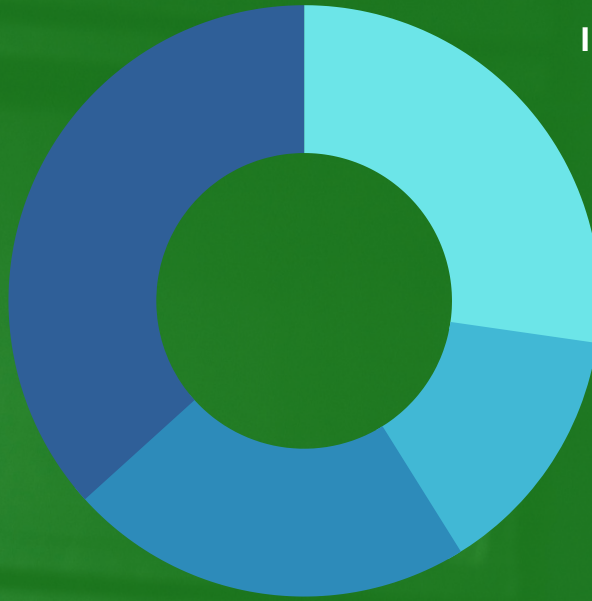


Instagram Reach ⓘ

11,137 ↑ 188%



Organization Gifts
36.7%



Individual Gift
27.3%

Pledges
13.8%

Matching Gift
22.2%

DURING OUR MOST CHALLENGING YEAR YET, WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE SERVING OUR COMMUNITY WITH VIRTUAL EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING!

**500+
hours**

Our community of volunteers and board members have put collectively clocked over 500 hours in support of our mission!

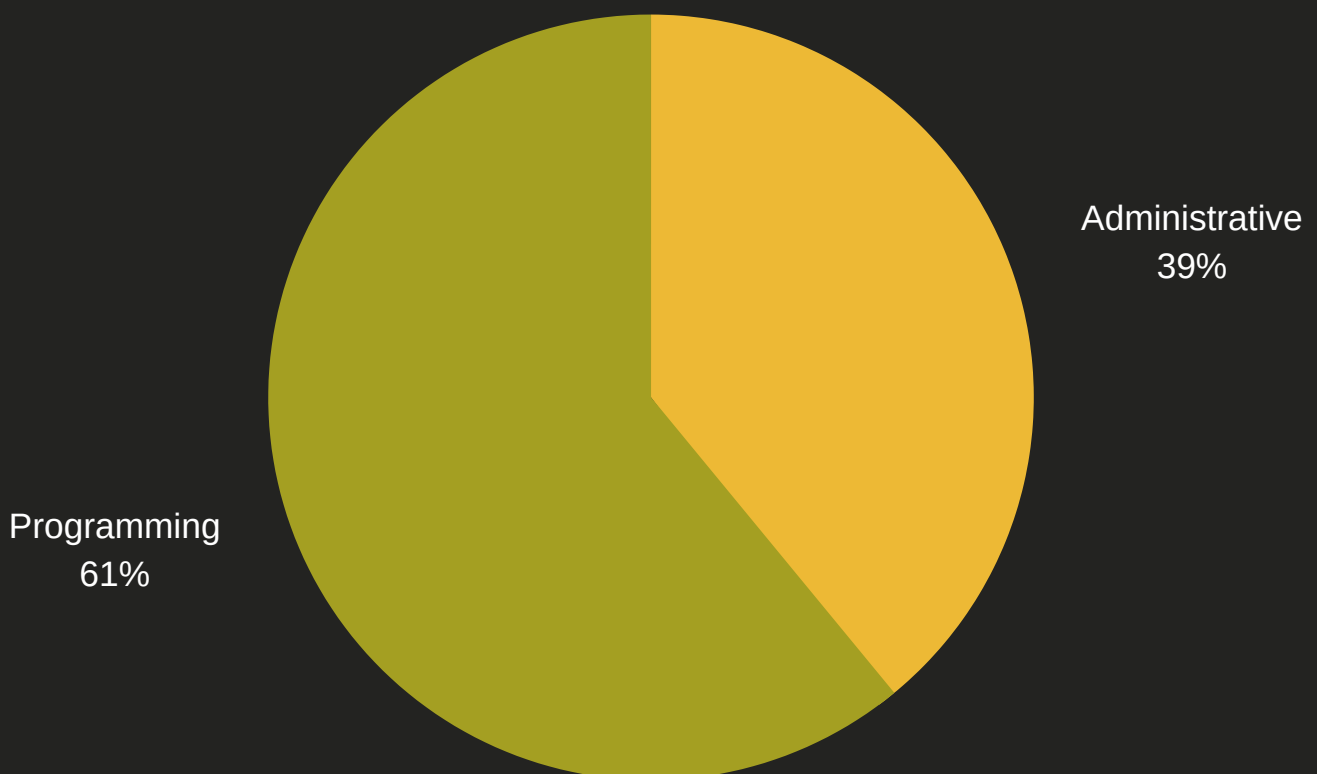


Expenses

One of our core values is **transparency**, and we are proud to be able to share how we've been accountable to the support we've been able to build from supporters and advocates like you.

In spite of the challenges of the past year, we've been more equipped than ever before to 'pivot' and 'respond'. As seen below, our costs are broken up in these two categories: **Administrative Costs & Programming Costs.**

- **Administrative Costs**
 - *Accounting Services*
 - *Advertising & Marketing*
 - *Banking*
 - *Insurance*
 - *Office Supplies & Software*
 - *Travel*
 - *Licenses*
- **Programming Costs**
 - *Artist Stipends*
 - *Intern Stipends*
 - *Program Training for Staff*
 - *Program Materials/Curriculum*



RESPONDING, NOT REACTING

In spite of having to suspend many of our traditional activities and programs, supporters like you empowered our programs and activities throughout the year.

WE THE PEOPLE

Way back at the beginning of the year, we were wanting to kick things off with a two-part event series, focusing on a crucial piece of the U.S. Constitution. We hosted an open mic session at Speakertree, then followed it up with Story Circle, thanks to our friends at the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture, where community member gathered and responded to prompts around our place in the community.

DAILY READ ALOUD

As the 2019-2020 school year met an abrupt end, we invited over 40 community members to join us on our platform and read some of their favorite books to our community of Freedom School scholars and families!

VIRTUAL OPEN MIC SESSIONS

As our ability to gather together changed this year, we were able to transition to holding space online. Responding to social events, we continued to host sessions for those of us who perform with passion and purpose.

FREEDOM BAGS

Together with the Junior League of Lynchburg, we were able to provide over 30 families with survival kits, packed with creative tools resources to help students cope with our changing environment.

LIFE THESE DAYS

This collaborative project between us at Opera on the James matched classically trained composers with original poetry, written by four young poets. Inspired by the world around them!

GARDENING KITS

Thanks to a grant from the Virginia Cooperative Extension, we were able to provide over 30 families with gardening kits, an alternative learning opportunity while providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables!

RACIAL HEALING/JUSTICE JOURNEY

With support from our friends from The People's Supper, we co-hosted 5 weekly sessions of dinner and discussion with Refuge, another local collective of culture-changers. These conversations, facilitated by community members and Creative Citizens, journeyed across racial lines, as well as among those who share the same racial identity. Quoted from the Racial Justice Guidebook, this series was for those "who wish to have an honest conversation about race, and to chart a collective path forward."

TESTIMONIALS

"THE LISTENING OCCUPIES A SPACE IN THE NON-PROFIT WORLD IN CENTRAL VIRGINIA THAT NO OTHER NON-PROFIT CAN TOUCH. THEIR INNOVATION AND COMMITMENT TO PROMOTING THE ARTS AS A MEANS TO HEAL AND MAKE A CHANGE IN THE WORLD IS ABSOLUTELY INSPIRING. I'VE WATCHED THEM BLOSSOM AND GROW OVER THE PAST 7 YEARS AND I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT ELSE IS IN STORE!"

- LASHONDA D.



Board members and volunteers conducting Free Listening at a local Black Lives Matter demonstration In Summer 2020



Local teens In the audience at a Young, Lit & Free Open Mic Session In Spring 2020

"I ATTENDED MY FIRST OPEN MIC DURING THE PANDEMIC AND AFTER THE KILLING OF GEORGE FLOYD. I DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT, BUT I WAS COMFORTABLE TUNING IN VIRTUALLY. I WAS ASKED TO SHARE SOME FORM OF SPOKEN WORD AND I READ "MOTHER TO SON" BY LANGSTON HUGHES. IT WAS GREAT TO READ THAT PIECE AND BE ABLE TO SHARE AND RELATE WITH THE OTHER ATTENDEES AT THE VIRTUAL EVENT. I LOVED THAT CONVERSATION WAS PART OF THE EVENING - NOT JUST A PERFORMANCE. AND WE WERE ALL THERE TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER, COMFORT EACH OTHER, VALIDATE EACH OTHER. I'VE GONE TO OTHER OPEN MICS WITH TLI AND IT'S ALWAYS A SURPRISE AS TO WHO WILL BE LISTENING AND WHO WILL BE SHARING; BUT IT'S ALWAYS WORTH IT."

- VICKI H.

TESTIMONIALS



Singer Kay B. Rose, performing at an open mic session in late winter 2020

"UNFORTUNATELY, I DON'T LIVE IN THE AREA AND HAVE YET TO GET TO A LIVE EVENT (BY THE LOOKS THOUGH THEY ARE INCREDIBLE). I STARTED TUNING IN TO THE LIVE SESSIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC AND THEY GAVE ME LIFE! SERIOUSLY, THE LIVE BROADCASTS PROVIDED A LIGHT AND A CONNECTION THAT BROKE THROUGH THE HEAVINESS HANGING OVER 2020. THE ARTISTS IN EACH SESSION ARE INCREDIBLY TALENTED AND INSPIRING. BEING ABLE TO TUNE IN BREATHED LIFE INTO A LOT OF NIGHTS. THANK YOU!"

- SALINA S.

THE LISTENING IS AN INVALUABLE ORGANIZATION IN OUR COMMUNITY. **THEY PROVIDE AN OUTLET FOR SO MANY TO FIND THEIR VOICE AND BE HEARD.** THEY SERVE THE YOUTH IN MANY OF OUR SCHOOLS AND PROVIDE ADULTS WITH A VEHICLE TO PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS. LONG LIVE THE LISTENING!

- DERRICK B.



Davion W., participating in our Daily Read Aloud in Spring 2020

A Letter from a Parent

In June of 2019, The Listening hosted Lynchburg's first Freedom School. By every measure, the school was a success. Beyond the expected educational and cultural enrichment, relationships were formed. Our faculty, servant leaders, and scholars became friends. Even after the summer ended, our staff were intentional in maintaining those friendships.

My perspective is not solely based on my experience as a board member of The Listening. I am also the parent of two of the Freedom School scholars. Whether it was a card in the mailbox, or an email- my children were thrilled to hear from their Freedom School family.

As you can imagine, we were all looking forward to this summer. My children, Marquis and Savannah, were initially happy when school went virtual in March. As the weeks passed, that excitement began to fizzle. None of us knew when they would be able to see their friends again. Suddenly the Freedom School became even more important. It was devastating when we all realized that we would be unable to have the school this summer.

However, our leadership team didn't skip a beat. They were able to pivot and create an action plan. They went above and beyond to find different ways to engage our scholars. When Rox and Davion showed up on my doorstep, my children raced to the door. I watched them, masked in the doorway, tell Rox how much they missed her. I watched their eyes light up during the subsequent Zoom sessions.

There were weeks that Rox was the only face my kids saw other than family. Our staff was a light to families, even while dealing with same trauma that we are all living through.

And that is priceless.

- Nakesha Moore

OUR COMMUNITY



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ASHLEY GRAHAM,
BOARD CHAIR

GERALD GRIFFIN,
VICE CHAIR

JANICE BENEJAN,
BOARD SECRETARY

LAURA DUPUY,
BOARD TREASURER

NAKESHA MOORE,
MEMBER AT-LARGE

SAMANTHA CITYT,
BOARD CHAIR

VICKI HUBBARD,
BOARD CHAIR

ELIZABETH PERRY-
SIZEMORE,
BOARD CHAIR

CREATIVE CITIZENS

Nicholas Steven George

Larry Taylor, Jr.

Erin "Rox" Cruz

Faith Perry

Maliyah Harris

Stephen Morton

Seymone Simmons

Jessie Head

Arianne Damiano

Geraldo Alonso

Jaylin Randolph

Sarah Fleet

Davion Washington, Jr.

Leah Thompson

THE LISTENING

write. dance. sing. speak. listen.

P.O. BOX 515 | LYNCHBURG, VA, 24504
| WWW.WELCOMETOTHELISTENING.ORG

PHOTO BY GUILHERME STECANELLA
ON UNSPLASH

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey denim jacket and black pants, stands in profile looking upwards. She is positioned in front of a large, curved, white structure that appears to be illuminated from within, creating a bright glow. The background is a plain, light grey or white wall.