

Torch Literary Arts

Amplifying Black Women Writers

TorchLiteraryArts.org



The logo for TORCH is displayed in large, bold, black capital letters. It is set against a yellow rectangular background that features a repeating pattern of concentric circles. This yellow rectangle is positioned on the left side of the overall image, which has a solid orange background.


TORCH

ABOUT TORCH

Founded in 2006, Torch Literary Arts is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established to create advancement opportunities for Black women writers. We publish contemporary writing by emerging and experienced writers alike in our online publication, [Torch Magazine](#). Our features have gone on to be nominated for the Emmy Awards, the Pulitzer Prize, and have received notable honors including the NAACP Image Award, National Book Award, Lambda Literary Award, and more.

Torch has featured work by Tayari Jones, Sharon Bridgforth, Ebony Stewart, Lisa B. Thompson, Crystal Wilkinson, Sapphire, Evie Shockley, Natasha Trethewey, Shay Youngblood, and many others.

Our programs include the Wildfire Reading Series, creative writing and professional development workshops, an annual retreat, and special events with community partners like the Texas Book Festival.



“...if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

— Toni Morrison



THE ISSUE

Black women writers live and create at the intersection of race, gender, and class. Representation and visibility remain scant across the literary landscape. Creating and supporting spaces for the advancement of Black women writers is vital to ensure our voices are heard and our stories are available for all readers.

While Toni Morrison was an editor at Random House, their first female Black editor, the number of Black authors published increased to 3.3 percent. However, the percentage dropped quickly after her departure. Of 512 books published by Random House between 1984 and 1990, only two were by Black authors: Morrison's *Beloved* and Sarah Phillips by Andrea Lee.

One person cannot be responsible for changing the systems that continue to marginalize and silence diverse voices. From hiring publishing executives of color to supporting emerging writers finding their way to the page, we must encourage, empower, and nurture writers of color for inclusive representation on and off the page.

Torch Literary Arts works to combat these disheartening statistics and make a meaningful impact in the lives of Black women by encouraging and amplifying their work as writers and industry leaders.

11%

In 2018, only 11% of books published were by people of color.
New York Times

5.3%

In 2023, just 5.3% of people in publishing identified as Black or being of African Decent.
Diversity Baseline Survey, Lee & Low Books

8%

Only eight percent of literary journals pay contributors.
The Millions

#1

The number one person most likely to read a book is a college-educated Black woman.
2013 Pew Report / The Atlantic



WHY TORCH

Local & Accessible

Austin has experienced a steady decline in the African American population while the city continues to grow. Studies have attributed this to "a lack of sense of belonging" among other factors. Torch aims to build a community where Black women writers in Central Texas know they belong. A community that welcomes emerging writers and provides them with the resources to cultivate their writing and pursue a literary career. Providing our programs locally at no or low cost makes the dream of living a writer's life a reality for those who cannot afford the increasing expenses of traditional education and writing programs.

Internationally Respected

Torch Literary Arts is a 501(c)3 nonprofit dedicated to the advancement of Black women writers. Our features include writers from across Texas, the United States, and internationally. Our pay rate for *Torch Magazine* is \$150 per piece - a professional rate by industry standards. All of our online features, presenters, and facilitators are paid for their creative work and professional experience. To fulfill our mission, Torch has received support from the Austin Cultural Arts Division, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Amazon Literary Partnership, Culture Ireland, and is an active member of the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP).

AMPLIFY



Torch Magazine

Monthly and Friday features celebrating creative writing by emerging and experienced writers. To date, we have featured over 250 Black women writers. All features are paid, promoted, and their work is archived on our website for posterity. Many talented writers receive their first publication credit from *Torch Magazine*.



Wildfire Reading Series

Our reading series features notable authors from across Texas and the United States. We build community with independent bookstores and other community partners to foster a welcoming literary experience for all.

UPLIFT



WORKSHOPS

We offer in-person and virtual adult creative writing and professional development workshops for BIPOC womxn writers of all levels. Writers may explore a craft element in a generative writing workshop or learn how to submit to literary awards and fellowships with experienced facilitators.



RETREAT

Located in Austin, the week-long retreat welcomes Black women writers with manuscripts-in-progress to write freely, connect with peers, rest, and receive advice from guest speakers and industry professionals during their stay. Fellows share their new works with the Central Texas community in a public reading.

CHAMPION



WRITING CIRCLE

Sometimes the hardest part of writing is getting started. The Torch Writing Circle provides a biweekly meet-up for BIPOC womxn to gather and write freely with other writers. Over 300 writers have registered internationally to attend the circle.



SPECIAL EVENTS

Torch partners with organizations to curate impactful special events, such as our annual Juneteenth Remembrance at the Texas Capitol, readings and panels with the Texas Book Festival, and a monthly salon at the historic Antone's Blues Nightclub.

ADVANCE



ACROSS THE DIASPORA

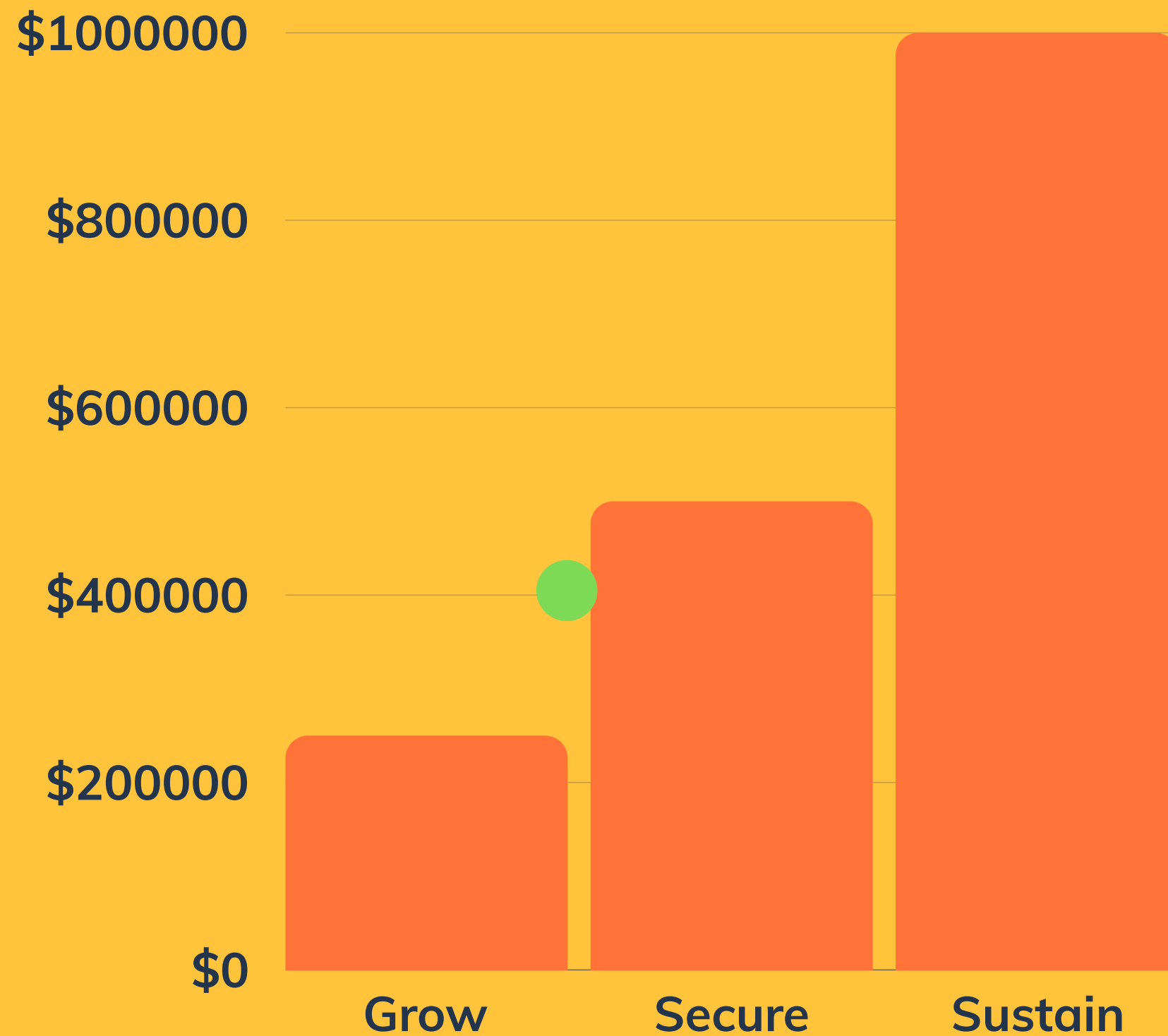
Torch Literary Arts is a global resource and destination located in Austin, TX. *Torch Magazine* has featured writers from Nigeria, Tanzania, Jamaica, Canada, Germany, and elsewhere. A new program, *Writing Across the Diaspora*, features readings and workshops by international authors.



IN CONVERSATION

Launched in February 2024, Torch's In Conversation series brings writers, artists, and scholars together for inspiring conversations that amplify the contributions of Black women writers.

**"Budgets are moral documents."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.**



FINANCES

2024 Budget - \$412,000

Because we believe artists should be compensated for their creative talents, all features and facilitators are paid. Our budget prioritizes people first; those who receive our services and those who work diligently to provide them. Our goal is to sustain Torch Literary Arts as an impactful literary resource today and for future generations.

GROW \$250k+ In 2023, Torch secured funding for its first full-time Executive Director and part-time staff to lead the organization and deliver core programs with paid opportunities for Black women writers.

SECURE \$500k+ Secure operational leadership with the addition of a full-time Programs Manager, Development Manager, and dedicated editorial staff to grow *Torch Magazine* and deliver the programs our community has come to enjoy and expect.

SUSTAIN \$1m+ Sustain Torch Literary Arts with diverse multi-year revenue sources, 100% staffed, enhanced programs, increased educational opportunities, and the addition of an international retreat to connect Black women writers across the diaspora.

Current Major Funders The City of Austin Cultural Arts Division, The Burdine Johnson Foundation, The Poetry Foundation, Amazon Literary Partnership, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Austin Community Foundation Black Fund.

SUSTAIN TORCH LITERARY ARTS

a global resource and destination in Austin, TX

Torch's Impact

Torch Literary Arts attracts and engages thousands of writers and cultural arts influencers from across the globe. Applications for our programs grew 62% over the last year and attendance increased by 80%. Over 80 writers and artists were paid for their creative writing, facilitating workshops, and presenting at conferences and festivals. Featured writers from *Torch Magazine* were recognized with notable awards and nominations including the Pushcart Prize, National Book Award, and NAACP Image Award. Torch creates professional opportunities for advancement in the literary field with employment, internships, and fellowships.

Financial Need

While Torch continues to make financial gains, committed multi-year funding is necessary to sustain the organization's staff, programs, and the impactful services we provide. Sadly, Black feminist social movements receive less than half of one percent of global funding. A significant financial commitment from the City of Austin would enable Torch Literary Arts to continue the path of institutional growth made possible by the initial investment of the Thrive Grant from the Austin Cultural Arts Division.

Permenant Space

As Austin continues to grow, BIPOC communities continue to be displaced due to rising housing costs and a lack of a sense of belonging. This impacts Black nonprofits' access to space as well. While Torch is grateful to partner with local organizations that provide space to deliver our programs, we are still subject to their availability, which impacts the level of work we can provide to meet the needs of our community. Access to affordable dedicated space for Torch Literary Arts is needed to further develop our administrative team and provide equitable programs and events.

Request

Torch Literary Arts requests multi-year funding to sustain our level of institutional growth toward a 1m annual budget for personnel, programs, operational expenses, and office and performance space. This necessary home for literary arts will secure Torch's professional staff and resources that support and amplify Black women writers as an equitable member of the Austin arts community.



WHO WE ARE

THE TEAM



Amanda Johnston

Founder/Executive Director

Amanda Johnston is a writer, artist, and the 2024 Texas Poet Laureate. She has over 20 years of experience in nonprofit management and earned a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Southern Maine. She is a former Board President of Cave Canem Foundation, a member of the Affrilachian Poets, cofounder of Black Poets Speak Out, and founder of Torch Literary Arts.



Faith Miller

Programs Associate

Faith Miller has a BA in Communication and Public Relations from Southern Methodist University and a masters in Higher Education and Student Affairs. She has worked at the University of Texas at Austin to support diversity initiatives and helps curate and deliver Torch's literary programs and special events.



Jae Nichelle

Associate Editor

Jae Nichelle is the author of *God Themselves* and the chapbook *The Porch (As Sanctuary)*. She is a finalist for a 2023 Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship and won the inaugural John Lewis Writing Award in poetry from the Georgia Writers Association. Her poetry has appeared in *Best New Poets 2020*, the *Washington Square Review*, *The Offing*, *Muzzle Magazine*, and elsewhere.



Brittany Heckard

Communications Associate

Brittany Heckard is a freelance creative writer at the intersection of policy and strategic communications based in Austin, TX. She has lobbied for companies and organizations like Ancestry, Texas Cultural Trust, Texas Access to Justice Foundation, Vera Institute of Justice, and others. Previously, she led public affairs campaigns for AT&T's legislative and corporate social responsibility units in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri.



Anea Wilson

Social Media Associate

Anea Michelle is a multi-faceted creative. She has a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Texas State University. Anea has always used writing as a sanctuary, a space where her thoughts and emotions dance on paper. But her passion doesn't stop there. Anea has skillfully blended her love for writing with her practice of yoga, allowing each discipline to enrich and inspire the other.

WHO WE ARE

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Parneshia Jones
Director, Northwestern
University Press

Support Torch Literary Arts

Invest in the Future of Black Women Writers

Your support will help sustain Torch Literary Arts, grow our diverse literary community, and ensure generations of Black women's voices are amplified for readers to enjoy everywhere.

Amanda Johnston
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TORCH



In The News

[Torch Literary Arts seeks to light the path for Black women writers](#)

- Austin American-Statesman

[Torch Literary Arts on Studio 512](#)

- KXAN, NBC

[Torch Literary Arts on We Are Austin](#)

- KEYE, CBS

SOURCES

[Black flight from Austin linked to missing sense of belonging](#)

- Austin American-Statesman

[Gentrification pushing some Black Austinites out of East Austin | Black History Month](#)

- KVUE

[Diversity In Publishing 2023](#)

- Lee & Low Books

[The Most Likely Person to Read a Book? A College-Educated Black Woman](#)

- The Atlantic / Pew Report

[A Conflicted Cultural Force’: What It’s Like to Be Black in Publishing](#)

- New York Times

[Reading Between the Lines: Race, Equity, and Book Publishing](#)

Pen America