Dear Friends,

This past year, we asked ourselves some big questions: How can VOW be of the greatest service to communities impacted by injustice? How do we commit more deeply to this while ensuring we have the tools and resources to remain sustainable? How do we leverage our strengths?

The answers to these questions materialized in our new strategic vision plan, informed by valuable input from VOW staff and board, and our trusted community of funders, educators, narrators, advisors, and advocates. Our vision for growth over the next five years is centered around:

**SUSTAINING + ELEVATING MOVEMENTS**
by prioritizing deeper, power-building partnership with marginalized communities and those who advocate on their behalf

**FORCING SPACE FOR MARGINALIZED VOICES**
to be seen and heard by taking a more strategic approach to outreach and media partnerships that connect audiences to movement efforts

For *Chasing the Harvest: Migrant Workers in California Agriculture* (pub. May 2017), we collaborated with farmworker communities and migrant education experts. And for *Six By Ten: Stories From Solitary* (coming October 2018), we're working with the Prison University Project at San Quentin to develop curriculum for children impacted by incarceration.

This past spring, we received over thirty proposals for the VOW Story Lab, our incubator for new book projects. We've chosen three projects for development that explore displacement and migration in distinct ways: the lives of Puerto Ricans after Hurricane María; refugees resettled in rural Appalachia; and San Francisco as a sanctuary city through the eyes of Central American migrants.

As we continue to amplify a diversity of newcomer and migrant voices in our book series, we are also committed to developing curriculum that directly supports students in migrant and English Language Learner (ELL) communities. Right now, one out of ten public school students is learning to speak English, and this number continues to grow. In response to this underserved need in our education networks and beyond, we've launched our first oral history resource for ELLs, and we'll continue to expand our offerings in this area. I'm extremely proud of the incredible work our education team has been doing this past year, and want to congratulate them again on being the winners of the 2017 Edward O’Brien Human Rights Education Award.

All of our accomplishments this past year are possible because of your support—as readers, funders, advocates, educators, listeners, and storytellers. Your passion and belief in the power of stories, and how we can mobilize them for positive change, has been deeply felt, and has fueled our work over the past twelve months. So I can't wait to celebrate with you next year, as we head into our tenth year as a nonprofit in 2019. The time has flown by! Our anniversary year will see a slew of events and workshops around the country, for the release of *Say It Forward: A Guide to Social Justice Storytelling* in early winter and *Solito*, *Solita: Crossing Borders With Youth Refugees From Central America* in the spring. We'll cap it all off in the fall with a big party in San Francisco—we hope to see you at one or more of these events.

Thank you again for joining us in this work, and for your commitment to being a voice of witness.

Warmly,

Mimi Lok
Cofounder, Executive Director
OUR MISSION

Voice of Witness advances human rights by amplifying the voices of people impacted by injustice.

Cofounded by author Dave Eggers, writer and educator Mimi Lok, and physician Lola Vollen, Voice of Witness fosters empathy, dialogue, and actions that advance human rights through our oral history book series, which uplifts firsthand accounts of injustice, and our education program, which brings these stories and ethics-driven oral history methodology to classrooms across the U.S.

Our work is driven by the transformative power of the story, and by a strong belief that an understanding of crucial issues is incomplete without deep listening and learning from people who have experienced injustice firsthand.

OUR VALUES

» Empathy and Compassion
» Equity and Dignity
» Integrity
» Critical Inquiry and Thinking
» Collaboration
» Literary Merit

THEORY OF CHANGE

In order to create a just and equitable world, we must illuminate injustice in ways that center marginalized voices and build agency and power within their communities.

FOR NARRATORS

Feel validated, heard & believed
Share with own community & inspire more stories
Build agency, dignity & power in community

FOR READERS

Build empathetic connection to others
Think critically and challenge assumptions
Develop real, nuanced understanding of issues

STRONGER ADVOCATES who can mobilize oral history and TAKE ACTION through advocacy, alliance building, and education

ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE TELL A STORY?

Our books are read by readers of all stripes—including students, activists, community leaders, policymakers, educators, journalists, artists, writers, attorneys, and more.

By engaging with firsthand perspectives, readers gain a powerful understanding of crucial human rights issues and a motivation to effect change in and beyond their communities.

Our stories offer readers:

- **EXPOSURE TO NEW PERSPECTIVES**
- **EMPATHETIC CONNECTION**
- **CHALLENGES TO ASSUMPTIONS**
- **CULTURAL & CRITICAL AWARENESS**

In action, this means:

- **NARRATORS**
  - Feel validated and heard, use their voices as forces for change, build agency and power in their communities

- **CLASSROOMS**
  - Become more inclusive, better serve diverse student populations, inspire future leaders/changemakers

- **THE PUBLIC**
  - Gains a more nuanced understanding of issues, changes their perception, becomes more effective in advocating for justice

Advocacy, alliance building & education take the form of:

- **PROTESTING**
- **DONATING**
- **VOLUNTEERING**
- **PETITIONING**
- **CALLING REPRESENTATIVES**
- **VOTING**
- **SHARING OUR STORIES MORE WIDELY**

And contribute to:

- **ACTIVISTS & MOVEMENTS**
  - Using our stories to inform efforts, mobilizing stories to build and strengthen alliances, and for political and cultural change

- **LAWMAKERS**
  - Using our stories to inform legislative decisions, sharing stories with constituents and other lawmakers, legislating in support of marginalized communities
UPCOMING PROJECTS

As part of our new vision plan, we are prioritizing new projects that address issues in the areas of criminal justice and migration and displacement. We are also treating each new book project as part of an issue-driven initiative that supports advocates and communities impacted by the issues at hand, mobilizing oral histories for advocacy, alliance building, and education.

This past year, VOW provided oral history training, editorial guidance, and project funding to a diversity of human rights storytellers through the VOW Story Lab. We’ve been incubating projects that explore Native American rights, food sovereignty in South Africa and Zimbabwe, and migration and displacement in Puerto Rico, San Francisco, and rural Appalachia.

We’re excited to announce the following new releases for 2019:

OUR ORAL HISTORY BOOK SERIES

At the core of our work is a commitment to oral history as a collaborative methodology that has long served to uplift otherwise marginalized voices in a humanizing, dignified way.

This past year, we released two new oral history books, amplifying vital, unheard voices from the fields of California to the streets of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Both have been positively received by educators, activists, media, and lawmakers, and each release was accompanied by a tour of events including major literary festivals, book fairs, arts and cultural venues, and educational institutions.

2017 RELEASES

"A book about choosing to live and not to die, to fight, to survive, to thrive."  
Edwidge Danticat

"These portraits form a nuanced mosaic of life in the fields—the good, the bad, the mundane, the tragic and the heroic."

Miriam Pawel, author of The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography

2019 RELEASES

"The human brain is just not designed for this type of isolation."

Heather, Six By Ten Narrator

"Having been able to share my story, it’s inspired me."

Soledad, Solito, Solita Narrator

New Publishing Partnership

In 2017 we launched a partnership with Haymarket Books to publish our upcoming titles. Since their founding in 2001, they have published over 500 titles that are “a vibrant and organic part of social movements,” including books by Howard Zinn, Naomi Klein, and Arundhati Roy. Their focus on books that contribute to social movements aligns strongly with our own vision and deepened commitment to narrator communities.
OUR EDUCATION PROGRAM

Our work with students is rooted in the belief that long term, positive change can only be achieved if we foster empathy, inquiry, and critical thinking in young people—our next generation of teachers, leaders, and history-makers. We serve more than 26,000 students annually, providing curricular support in human rights education, oral history methodology, and empathy-based learning.

WORKING WITH NARRATOR COMMUNITIES

The current political climate has left many students feeling fearful and hopeless about the future, especially within minority communities. Meanwhile, public school budgets are being drastically cut and classroom sizes are growing.

As we implement our new vision plan, we’ve been bringing more educational resources to under-resourced schools and communities, particularly those impacted by the issues addressed in our book series. We’ve also been collaborating with community-based educators on curriculum to ensure our resources best fit the needs of their students.

THIS PAST YEAR

» We were awarded the Edward O’Brien Human Rights Education Award.
» We explored the civil rights movement through oral history with 90 high school students in partnership with Sojourn to the Past.
» We brought stories from Chasing the Harvest to communities and schools in farmworker communities across California.
» We released our Oral History Resource Guide for English Language Learners, offering culturally relevant content for a variety of language levels.

Edward O’Brien Human Rights Education Award

COMING IN 2019

Six by Ten Lesson Plans
To accompany our book on solitary confinement, we’re collaborating with inmates at San Quentin prison to develop educational resources that benefit children impacted by solitary confinement.

Say It Forward: A Guide to Social Justice Storytelling
To make our ethics-driven oral history methodology more accessible, we’ve put together a guidebook to inspire others to create their own transformative community storytelling projects. Coming January 2019, Say It Forward will offer many strategies and resources, and also share the challenges that arise when engaged in the process of amplifying unheard voices.
**OUR VISION IN ACTION**

This past year through our Sharing History Initiative, we brought free class sets of *Chasing the Harvest* and increased curricular support in high schools, community colleges, and universities from migrant farmworker communities across California, particularly in classrooms with a high number of English language learners.

*Chasing the Harvest* was also used to inform a legislative decision about the use of pesticides in Delano.

"This project helped me think about different ideas toward this community’s future and how I can work with others to make it into a better community."

— Razan Hussin, ELL student at Arroyo High School in San Lorenzo, CA

"Students were deeply engaged in the reading of these oral histories, many of which had significant parallels to their own lives and family histories."

— Trevor Gardner, Teacher at ARISE High School in Oakland, CA

"Support from VOW and our oral history project helped my ELL students get to know each other, improved their listening and speaking skills, and gave them a goal of public presentation. They even improved their writing and editing skills with the book we created."

— Evan de Gennaro, Professor at Laney College, Oakland

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**WHO WE SERVE**

- 67% of teachers are in public schools
- 90% of communities are predominantly low-income
- 65% of classrooms are majority minority or first-generation immigrant populations
- 20% of students served identify as English Language Learners

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**SKILLS LEARNED**

- **COMMUNICATION & LITERACY**
- **CRITICAL THINKING & GLOBAL AWARENESS**
- **EMPATHY & OPEN-MINDEDNESS**

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Our books are read by readers of all stripes—from students to policymakers—and are taught worldwide in courses as disparate as social studies, constitutional law, comparative literature, Middle East Studies, and restorative justice.

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10 MILLION PEOPLE REACHED ANNUALLY THROUGH MEDIA, DISTRIBUTION & EVENTS

8 NEW ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS INCUBATING RIGHT NOW

26,000 STUDENTS SUPPORTED ANNUALLY

55 VOICES AMPLIFIED THIS YEAR
To fully realize our vision plan, we recognize that “centering marginalized voices” must happen on every level of our organization. It means reflecting this in our leadership, at the board and staff level. It means learning from and collaborating with experts from marginalized communities—advocates, educators, organizers, journalists, among others—to ensure that our work does not co-opt their struggle but lends power to them.

We will be growing our staff over the next few years with positions that reflect and support this deepened commitment to marginalized communities. Key roles will focus on community liaison, curriculum expansion, media partnerships, evaluation and learning, and on developing communications competencies at the community level all the way to outreach on the broadest levels.

VOW has experienced steady year-to-year growth since its inception. To achieve our new vision, we have launched an accompanying growth campaign, raising $2.4 million by March of 2019.
As a small non-profit, Voice of Witness relies on the support of individuals, organizations, and foundations to make our work possible. We would like to thank the following donors for the generous support they’ve given us, and for their dedication to amplifying unheard voices everywhere. We are delighted and truly grateful to have such incredible allies.

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Our work would not be possible without the tireless dedication of our network of volunteer researchers, interviewers, transcribers, translators, grant writers, photographers, and designers.

We’re always looking for people who are willing to help out the project. If you would like to contribute your time or skills to an upcoming Voice of Witness project, please visit: voiceofwitnes.org/volunteer.

“"I started volunteering with VOW because the books gave me so much knowledge and hope for solving problems in our world, and highlighted the resilience of people going through hardship. I admire the way that VOW teaches us about world issues, not only using data but also through the personal stories of people involved. Volunteering with VOW and reading VOW books gives me a connection to people across the world and makes me more empathetic in the process.”

Maryam Bledsoe, Volunteer

“I feel honored that we can partner on this new phase of VOW’s deepening in values and commitment to social justice and to the marginalized communities NoVo is most committed to. Thank you for your incredible vision and leadership.”

Stephanie Hartka, NoVo Foundation
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