



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
**POETRY CENTER**



## **'THE INDISPENSABILITY OF POETRY'**

2025-2026 ANNUAL REPORT

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

# POETRY CENTER



Dear Friends,

We're thrilled to be returning to the practice of publishing a Poetry Center annual report! As we complete the first year of our new strategic direction, the Belonging Initiative, the moment is right to reintroduce this form and highlight the activities at the Poetry Center.

It's always good to begin with magic: step inside the Poetry Center, and you're instantly in the company of some eight million poems.

That's eight million invitations—in exceptional, singular language—to see the complexity and splendor of the world through another's eyes, and in doing so, to imagine something beyond ourselves.

Here's the not-so-secret secret: each of those poems has been made for you, a reader.

That's what makes poetry indispensable. At her powerful reading for the Poetry Center last fall, Tracy K. Smith spoke of the “indispensability of poetry in human life,” that our ability to listen, reflect, and make connections is crucial to building bridges across experiences.

Through your generous gifts and collaboration, you've supported the completion of the McCauslin-Smith Gardens at the Poetry Center; powered our Teacher's Institute and former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith's visit; and welcomed the Indigenous Nations Poets Retreat—hosted for the first time in Southern Arizona. We had exceptional participation in our Writing the Community school residency program and announced three new endowed readings in our acclaimed Reading and Lecture series. You've helped us do all this and more—what a year it has been!

Among many exciting things in the year to come, we'll be working diligently on our digital spaces—including a robust website redesign providing global access to our singular collection.

Thanks for helping us celebrate these accomplishments and for being a part of the life of the Poetry Center!

*Tyler Meier*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA POETRY CENTER

## AT A GLANCE

**47** Visiting Poets

**106** Educators served

**7,000** Reading Series  
Attendees

**7,390** Podcast Downloads

**10,000** Library Visitors

**10,200** Sealey Challenge followers

**27,000** Students served

**308,000** Website + Voca users

**\$ 730,900+** Funds raised

**TOTAL SERVED**

**376,000 +**



*“TO READ A POEM is to move close enough for its breath and your breath to mingle, for the boundaries between self and other to blur.”*

– MATHIAS SVALINA

# BELONGING INITIATIVE

## BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH POETRY

We launched the Belonging Initiative this year as the newest strategic direction at the Poetry Center. This work is built on guiding questions that have animated our actions for some time: how can poetry and poetry experiences help build the conditions for belonging? How can poetry help us renew our community-making resources and tools?

The opportunity is ripe: we know from both research and experience that poetry has an essential role to play in how we understand ourselves and our relationship to one another.

In our first year, we’ve focused on making commitments to communities essential to Tucson’s identity and cultural imagination, seeking to endow readings that would anchor voices from

each in our Reading and Lecture series annually, and in turn, create a growing record in Voca, our archive of recorded poetry readings. These include the H.D. and Bryher Residency for LGBTQ+ Poets, the Alison Hawthorne Deming Residency for Environmental Writers, and the Ofelia Zepeda Reading for Indigenous Poets.

We also know that our digital presence has the potential to create spaces of belonging on a global scale. On the horizon is a major website overhaul and redesign—to launch a digital space on par with our landmark library here in Tucson.

With the continued support of the Poetry Center’s community, we look forward to the important work ahead!

## 2026 INDIGENOUS NATIONS POETS RETREAT

The Poetry Center hosted the fifth annual week-long retreat for emerging Native poets from the Indigenous Nations Poets community. More than 20 poets—including Kimberly Blaeser, Laura Tohe, Rob Arnold, and Ofelia Zepeda—presented their compelling work over two evenings of readings.



## THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES McCAUSLIN-SMITH GARDENS

Reclaiming an alleyway that had been maintained as a utility easement, this donor-funded greenspace completes a vision for a welcoming landscape that will support public engagement, quiet reflection, and native wildlife.



## 2025 TEACHER'S INSTITUTE

The inaugural Teacher's Institute welcomed more than 40 classroom teachers, community educators, and librarians, empowering them to deepen their affinity and understanding among diverse students, schools, and communities—through the power of poetry.





## THE LARGEST POETRY-READING INITIATIVE IN THE WORLD

The Sealey Challenge is an ambitious reading enterprise: to read 31 books of poetry in 31 days, engage with diverse voices, and connect with a world-wide community of poetry enthusiasts.

In the past 10 years of The Sealey Challenge, we estimate more than **25 million poems** have been read globally!

# #SEALEYCHALLENGE

### UNIQUE CATALOGUING EFFORTS

## 32% OF ACQUIRED BOOKS WERE FIRST CATALOGUED AT THE POETRY CENTER

The Poetry Center has a very special library. One measure of our collections' uniqueness can be found in a hidden, vital part of our librarians' work: original cataloging.

Libraries across North America share catalog records in a common database to speed up and standardize the cataloging process. The Poetry Center, however, routinely acquires books held by no other library on the continent. In those cases, Poetry Center librarians write the catalog record that other libraries will use. This year alone, we were the first library to catalog 375 of the 1,200 books we acquired—a staggeringly high percentage of original cataloging for a library workflow, and a marker of just how unusual and important our collections truly are.





— *Inaugural* —

## **H.D./BRYHER RESIDENCY FOR LGBTQ+ POETS**

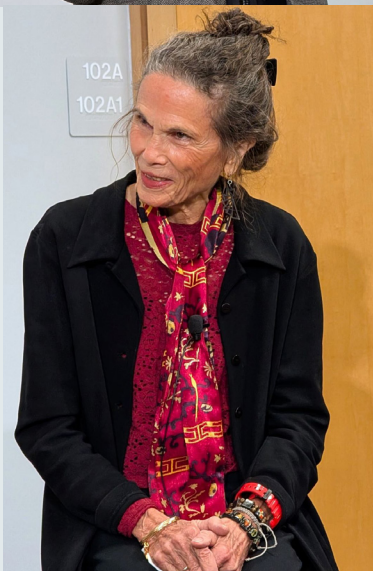
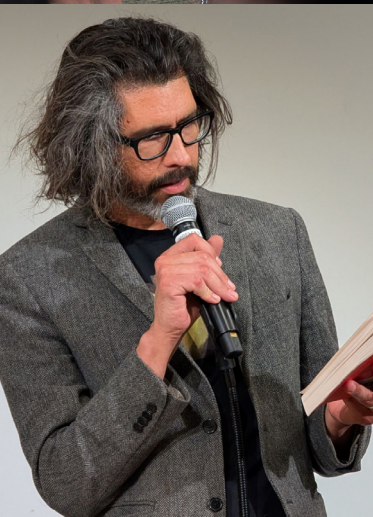
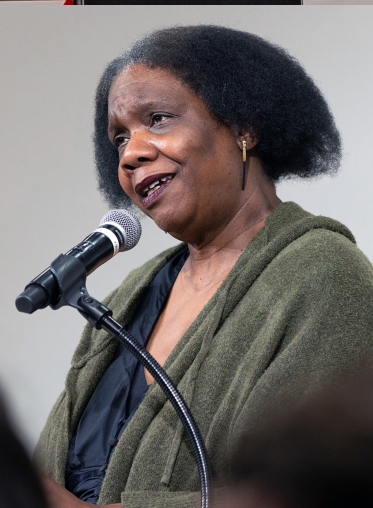
Named for the modernist poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and her longtime companion Bryher, the program celebrates the work of LGBTQ+ poets and their essential contributions to the landscape of contemporary poetry. The inaugural reading featured award-winning poets Cameron Awkward-Rich and Franny Choi.

# **VOCA**

**POETRY RECORDINGS**

Voca, the Poetry Center's archive of historical recordings, has one of the world's largest collections of recordings of Indigenous American poets reading in English and in their native languages, including Diné bizaad, O'odham, Tlingit, Zapotec, CHamoru, and Anishinaabemowin among other languages.

**FUN  
FACT**



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## POETRY CENTER BY THE NUMBERS

### Reading Series & Events

|                                   |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Reading and Lecture Series events | 23    |
| Visiting Poets                    | 47    |
| Event attendees                   | 3,450 |
| Virtual attendees                 | 3,592 |

### Poetry Library

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| New additions to collections      | 1,200    |
| Tours & field trips               | 1,300    |
| Visitors                          | 10,000   |
| Total books in library collection | 61,650   |
| Total library items               | 135,000+ |

### Digital Reach

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Email subscribers      | 6.4K  |
| Podcast downloads      | 7.3K  |
| YouTube views          | 10.1K |
| Social media followers | 24K   |

*Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, Bluesky*

|                       |      |
|-----------------------|------|
| Voca website visitors | 79K  |
| Website visitors      | 229K |

### Education & Outreach

|                      |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| K-12 students served | 27K |
|----------------------|-----|

*Poetry Out Loud, Anthologies of student work, Field Trips*

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| K-12 educators served | 146 |
|-----------------------|-----|

*Teacher's Institute, Poetry Out Loud, Anthologies, Field Trips*

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Adult education students served | 184 |
|---------------------------------|-----|

### Fundraising

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Grant funds awarded          | \$117K |
| Whitman Circle contributions | \$143K |
| Programs Endowment           | \$189K |
| Sponsorships + Other Gifts   | \$281K |