



**WASHINGTON
IMPROV
THEATER**

Sparkling Joy and Connection When They're Needed Most



Béatrice Leydier



Morgan Smalley



Cara Popecki



Erick Acuna



Tess Higgins



Renan Snowden



Alan Prunier



Sarah Bucher

**Washington Improv Theater's Annual Report
July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021 (FY21)**

At the beginning of FY21 (the summer of 2020), the state of the world was wildly uncertain. The road ahead for WIT was equally unpredictable. That March, WIT's in-person activities had abruptly ground to a halt: we canceled the Fighting Improv Smackdown Tournament (an annual competition for players from throughout the DMV, poised to be the biggest ever), winter classes were cut short, and WIT@Work trainings froze.

Three months into the pandemic, WIT staff had adjusted to working remotely but things still felt far from the "new normal." We had just started offering Level 1 classes online and been offering virtual Improv for All workshops for a few weeks. In terms of performances, we were still getting into a rhythm of scheduling shows and understanding how to make virtual content that was satisfying for audiences and artists.

Financially, the hill to climb was steep. Three months into the suspension of our in-person activities, we wrote a budget that called for three-quarters of our revenue to come from contributed sources—grants and donations. This was the exact opposite of a normal year when earnings from classes, shows, and trainings make up 80% of organizational revenue.



AS WIT NAVIGATED THE PANDEMIC, WE SPLIT OUR FOCUS: DELIVERING ON OUR MISSION AND SUSTAINING THE ORGANIZATION FINANCIALLY.

We worked to find innovative ways to deliver on our mission in a time when joy and human connection were needed more than ever. This meant engaging in a period of exploration and innovation to bring learning online, to facilitate creativity in new ways, and to make connections with individuals and organizations whom we may never have encountered on our previous trajectory.

At the same time, like all arts organizations, we fought to preserve our organization financially when our major revenue streams were suspended. Over the course of the year, WIT staff pursued funding from foundations, the DC and federal governments, and from our community of individual donors.

We were also freaking out, along with the rest of the world. Daily check-ins via Zoom helped the WIT team stay at least partially tethered to reality, as that reality shifted severely from day to day.

by
THE NUMBERS

FY21 (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021)

65

Virtual Improv
for All Workshops

160

Total Virtual Shows

590

Virtual Improv
for All Attendees

842

Participants in WIT
@Work Workshops

759

Total Donors

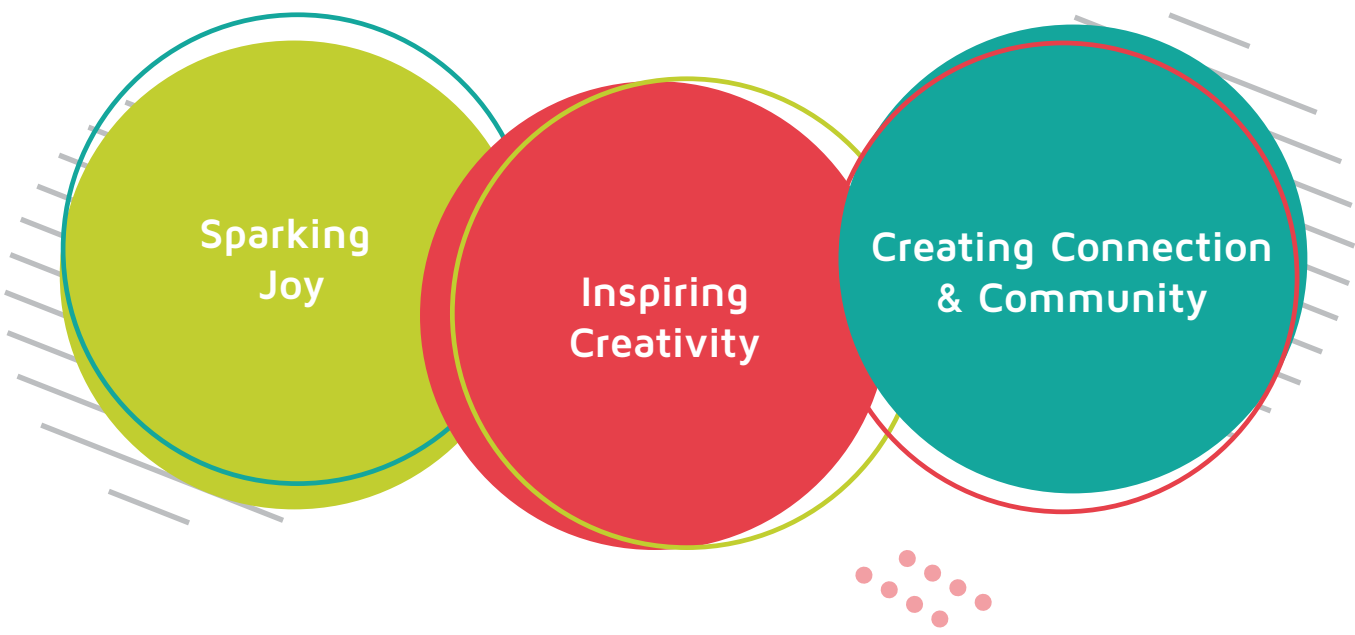
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Number of WIT
Zoom Accounts

344

Total Virtual Students
in Core Curriculum

IT WASN'T A TYPICAL YEAR, SO OUR FY21 REPORT ALSO LOOKS A LITTLE DIFFERENT. WE'VE DIVIDED THE REPORT INTO THREE KEY THEMES RELATED TO OUR MISSION:



While you could make the case that many of our programs span two or all three categories, we've split up the report this way to convey the breadth of our impact. The past year pushed WIT to innovate in every aspect of our work—we're proud to share with you how we managed to creatively connect and delight Washingtonians even when we couldn't physically be together.



Sparking Joy

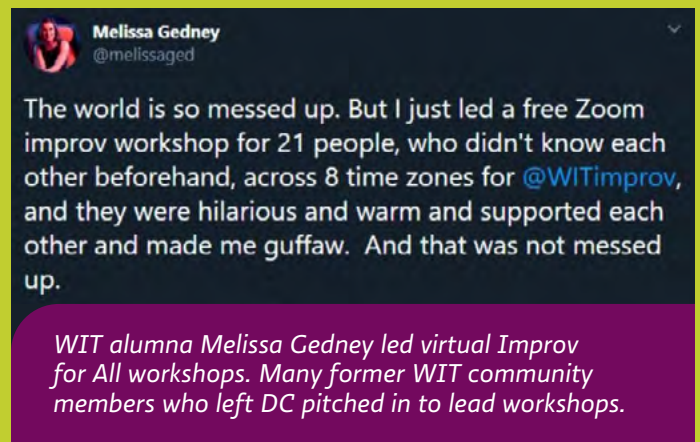
VIRTUAL IMPROV FOR ALL WORKSHOPS

Starting in spring 2020, WIT adapted our free Improv for All workshop for the Zoom format. Staff including Education Director Jonathan Murphy and WIT@Work Director John Windmueller took the lead on finding ways to translate our typical exercises to confines of Zoom and to even add new exercises that worked with the virtual format.

In FY21, WIT hosted 65 online Improv for All workshops—including two done in American Sign Language. These workshops provided a dose of laughter and joy for all attendees, many of whom were feeling isolated and depressed from quarantine. One participant wrote to us about their experience:

“I had an amazing time engaging with the instructor who was very welcoming and allowed us to ease into the improv experience. I absolutely loved the classes we did, and look forward to taking another improv class in the future. It was great to meet new people despite being socially distanced and virtual.”

—Improv for All attendee



Some 590 people from around the DMV (and around the world) have taken WIT's Improv for All online workshops between July 2020 and June 2021. A large number of the online Improv for All workshops were led by WIT's performer and teacher alumni. Eight of the 27 teachers leading workshops were part of WIT's extended family outside the DC region.

WIT Artistic/Executive Director Mark Chalfant led multiple workshops. “At the end of one of my workshops, a high-school student was still in the meeting and she had to ask ‘How do I hang up?’ Our improv workshop had been her first time ever using Zoom, and I cried a little to learn that.”

Improv for All Instructor Geoff Blizard:

I loved meeting people from all over while running online workshops. The farthest was calling in from the Philippines! It was really excellent to see everyone bring their own experiences and style.



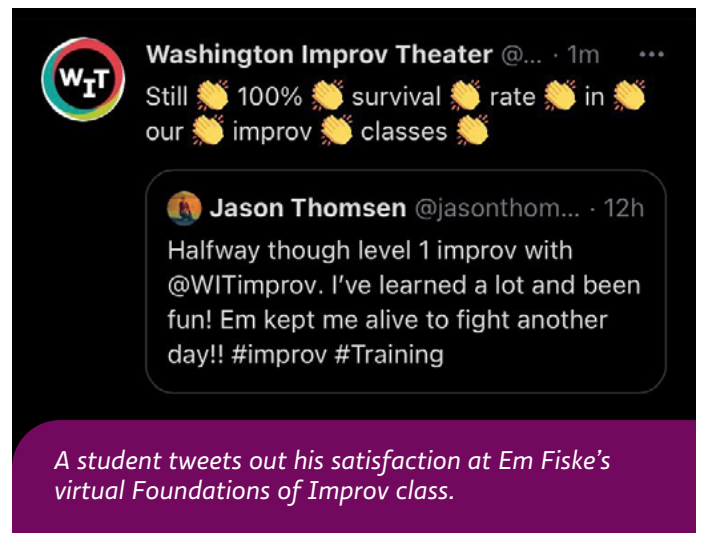
Improv for All Instructor Clyde Thompson:

It was just so much fun seeing people laugh and get silly. I always made it a point to stay on a few minutes after the class to answer any questions, and the amount of times that people simply said that they really needed to laugh and that this workshop gave them that opportunity made it worth it every time.

**VIRTUAL CLASSES:
WIT TAKES TEACHING ONLINE**

After piloting virtual learning through Improv for All workshops and electives, WIT’s education team took on the ambitious project of bringing the entire core curriculum online. Not only did this process require the huge effort of adapting our curriculum to Zoom, it required training teachers to teach virtually and supporting them as we learned more about how to best facilitate learning and maximize fun virtually.

The popularity of WIT’s virtual classes demonstrated that improv helped tap into joy. In FY21, we enrolled 143 Level 1 students, 64 Level 2 students, 58 Level 3 students, 48 Level 4 students, and 31 Level 5 students. That’s a total of 344 enrollments.



SPARKING JOY

WIT's diversity scholarship continued through the pandemic, supporting 13 students through virtual classes. WIT's diversity scholarship was created in FY17 to increase access and inclusion for students of color in our training program and, to date, it has supported 61 students of color. Of these, 27 have completed the training program and 20 have been cast on WIT teams and projects (including four individuals on company ensembles).

WIT began offering Level 5 Harold classes in the winter 2021 session, enabling 24 people to complete our program online. Three people have completed our curriculum entirely online. By the end of June 2021, many students had formed unique bonds during the pandemic and stuck with virtual classes so they could finish the curriculum with their peers.

“During the pandemic, our students wanted to connect with others in a way that brought levity and moments of joy into their days. Even with online classes that people attended from their homes, students were still able to create shared experiences and relationships with each other. Online classes were definitely a different way to explore improv, but the students who took those classes really found what they were looking for: connection and joy in times of isolation.”

—Kacie Peterson, Education Manager



Students in Jordana Mishory's Premise-Based Improv elective perform their showcase in July 2020.

In addition to our core curriculum, we tapped into the skills and expertise of our teacher and performer community to produce a broad array of electives, which were taken by 176 students.

THESE ELECTIVES INCLUDED:

- Intro to Stand-up Comedy (three sections) with Stacey Axler and Elizabeth Fulton
- Writing Your First TV Pilot with Greg Tindale
- Improvising for the Camera with Ian Farley
- Scene Study: The Bat (two sections) with Jordana Mishory
- Scene Study: The Dusty with Jordana Mishory
- Fiction Writing for Improvisers with Robin Doody
- Creating Expressive Characters (two sections) with Jenna Hall
- Intro to Pretty Flower Format with John Windmueller
- Creating Three-Dimensional Characters with Jordana Mishory
- Intro to Clown for Improv with Tara Demmy
- Advanced Stand-Up Comedy with Stacey Axler

WIT ALSO OFFERED A NUMBER OF ONE-OFF WORKSHOPS:

- Plan your TV Pilot with Greg Tindale
- Active Listening (two sections) with Jordana Mishory
- Play More. Think Less. (two sections) with Jonathan Murphy
- Improv Skills Tune Up with Jordana Mishory
- Sketches that Say Something with Monique Moses
- X Marks the Spot: Mapping Only for Improvisers with Monique Moses
- What's Funny to YOU? with Erick Acuña
- Top of the Scene to You with Jordana Mishory
- Creating Characters through Voice Accent Workshops (11 sections spanning Scottish, Bostonian, Cockney, South African, Australian, and more) with Sarah Nichols

In summer 2020, WIT offered two week-long virtual improv camps for a variety of age groups spanning 5th to 8th graders. Samantha Watson taught the classes.



Robin Doody



Monique Moses



Stacey Axler



Erick Acuña



Sarah Nichols

WIT STUDENTS SHARE WHY THEY TOOK VIRTUAL CLASSES

Yong Lee: 2020 was really hard for me, as it was for many people. I took Level 1 RIGHT before the pandemic hit in January/February 2020, and I was SO excited about improv. Then ... well you know. I didn't want to sign up for an online improv class, but decided to do a workshop in December of 2020 via Zoom and had a lot of fun! It got me excited for improv again, so I signed up for Level 2, followed by Level 3, and it was something I looked forward to every week!! Improv gives me so much, including some of the best, bravest, funniest people I've ever met. I'm so happy and excited to be taking Level 4 in person!!!



Hannah Cole: [Improv] gave me a creative outlet to self improve and really just be open and meet new people. Really special and great. Me gushing about improv wouldn't be complete if I didn't give a shout out to Em Fiske, who was the best damn teacher I could've asked for. I loved how open she was about how we were all gonna be figuring out the Zoom improv thing together.

Amy Broadbent: I was so nervous I took my first Zoom improv class from our walk-in closet, because my spouse and I share a small space, so this way the clothes surrounding me would muffle anything crazy I might say. Eventually, I felt comfortable and confident enough to move to the bedroom while he was in the main room, and maybe even open the door a crack. I am so grateful for becoming involved during the pandemic.



Inspiring Creativity

WIT engaged improvisers of all experience levels and across the country to stay engaged during the pandemic. While there was no template for how to produce a virtual show, WIT gave improvisers the resources and support to keep creating. As a result, WIT's family of performers (including many alumni performers who had left the DC area) staged a variety of content that we released through Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms.



Screenshot of an episode of *Hold Up* featuring Slli'm Williams, Lee Bennett III, Stephon Duncan, Erica Johnson, Mary C. Parker, Karyn Wilson, Krystal Ramseur, and Derek Hayes.

WIT's virtual stage featured more than 160 performances during the pandemic. Pivoting to a digital landscape was an all-hands-on-deck experience that reimaged what WIT's programming could look like.



“The move to digital was at first a showcase of true improv vulnerability on jumping in and figuring it out together,” said WIT Production Manager Raymond Simeon. “Then we turned to how we can showcase and excel while keeping the needs of the show and the audience top of mind. We now have a digital footprint that is as dynamic as our shows: we showcase audience comments live on screen, embed improv and sketch seamlessly in one show, play live sound effects, and use all functions of Zoom to provide a unique digital WIT experience.”

OUR SHOWS INCLUDED:

POTUS Among Us: The fifth iteration of WIT's quadrennial election satire went entirely virtual. WIT created a multi-platform online experience that embraced the chaos of the election season. Current WIT performers as well as WIT alumni and newcomers across the country participated by devising characters ranging from a Russian operative to a talking crocodile. POTUS was a combination of live performance as well as social media content. The virtual show operated 24-7

for the weeks leading up to the real presidential election. More than 140 individuals participated in the show as either a performer or a member of a creative team.



Brianna Lux as Oda "Pock" Garrett, a candidate in POTUS Among Us.



Kaley Gurlbaus, the eventual winner of POTUS Among Us' presidential election. Kaley's participation was enabled by her fictional and real-life mother, Michelle Swaney.

People of the District: This weekly show explored the DC experience through interviews with fascinating locals Washingtonians. Special guests included DC Councilmember Christina Henderson, sexual health educator Twanna Hines, and TBD Immersive Producing Artistic Director Strother Gaines. Each interview inspired an improv set. Produced by Erick Acuña, People of the District featured interviews with 40 different DC residents during its run.

Hold Up: Created by Krystal Ramseur and Derek Hayes, Hold Up showcases Black performers from across the country dissecting literature in a way that wasn't always comfortable in grade school. Full of laughter and energy, this panel show also delves into poignant academic assessments of the text while weaving in modern context and individual perspectives. Hold Up has aired 24 episodes in FY21 and continues on a biweekly basis. The show had its first-ever live edition during a weekend of shows in July 2021.

For Love or Funny: Created by WIT staff members Kacie Peterson and Ray Simeon, this live dating show used improv games to help DMV singles connect. A total of 53 people participated in the show, 85% of whom were featured in a WIT show for the first time.

This Zoom Life: A web series created by Erick Acuña, the show chronicled the lives of fictitious millennials during the pandemic. DC Metro Theater Arts gave it five stars saying "Its wit and absurd verisimilitude are an utter delight."

Reunion: Elizabeth Fulton produced a weekly series of Harold team reunions from the program's 10-year history. Members from almost every WIT Harold team participated, and post-show talkbacks shed light on the lore of each era of the Harold program.



DC Councilmember Christina Henderson was a guest for WIT's weekly People of the District show.



Led by hosts Kacie Peterson and Ray Simeon, contestants play WIT's virtual dating show For Love or Funny.



James Jelin performs in the web series This Zoom Life.

DUOKAY: Produced and hosted by BEST PARTY EVER (Elizabeth Fulton and Seth Payne), DUOKAY celebrated improv duos with performances by both new and established two-person teams.

and, Scene: WIT's new production, directed by Ray Simeon and Alex Kazanas, created multiple digital episodes playing with a structure where half of a scene is scripted and the other half is improvised.

A Rona Election: Isabelle Solomon and Simone Webster created two seasons of A Rona Election, a web series chronicling an assortment of high school-aged characters as they navigate a student body election in the age of COVID.



Isabelle Solomon and Simone Webster created and starred in the web series of A Rona Election.

Tenure Track: Former WIT Harold Team Captain Ph.D. performed shows based on interviews with doctoral candidates about their fields of study.

Sequels from the Vault: Created by Saleh Karaman and Alex Kazanas, this offering created improvised sequels to popular movies based on the original movies' trailers.

Nox! WIT's ensemble produced bi-weekly shows with alumni from the group's history.



Erin Murray and Sarah Ann Houghton perform as Dreamspooners in DuoKay.

New Year's Eve Eve: WIT's New Year's Eve spectacular (held the day before New Year's Eve) featured performances submitted by members of the WIT performer and student community.

Blockbuster's Ghost: The FIST 2019 finalists gave a behind-the-scenes look at local businesses in shows based on interviews with the leaders of The Black Cat and Miss Pixie's.

Spin the Dreidel: Helmed by Heather Marie Vitale, this show featured a cast of all-Jewish improvisers celebrating Chanukah.

The Broken Bones Breaks the Internet:

The Broken Bones performed a number of shows based on a guest's injury stories.

Til Death: New York-based WIT alumni Amanda and Jordan Hirsch made a web series about marriage during a pandemic.

Wittypedia: WIT played host to this Boise supergroup performing a show based on the universal experience of heading to Wikipedia and accidentally wasting hours looking up related articles until you've forgotten what you initially went there for.

Instant Film: In Spring 2021, Bill Nelson produced a series that challenged improvisers to create a short film in just 90 minutes. Over the course of three episodes, Instant Film produced 12 original films.

Nelson created unique posters for each film in the series.



POTUS Among Us cast member Michelle Swaney (San Francisco): Participating in WIT's POTUS Among Us was a desperately needed source of joy and community in 2020. Honestly, it was one of the few reasons I had to change out of my pajamas (at least on top). Even though I live 3,000 miles away these days, WIT still feels like home.



Performer Brianna Lux: Holidays are a time when friends and families usually come together, but during the pandemic, most people were not able to do this. Our WIT ensemble, Nox!, realized that being virtual provided us a unique opportunity where we could do shows with our former teammates who had moved away from DC. We did two reunion shows, a Thanksgiving show in November and a gift exchange show in December, and it filled our hearts with joy, the way that holidays should. I was able to connect with friends, new and old, and laugh during a time when this was rare across the country and world.



POTUS Among Us creative team member Bill Nelson: My career is in theater. And as the pandemic progressed I saw every theater organization shrink and shrink until finally they all seemingly popped out of existence. It was personally and professionally devastating for me and my colleagues.

I began working with the production teams of POTUS Among Us 2020, an event that would by necessity be very different than its past productions. It became clear to me very early how those differences would grow into advantages.

POTUS Among Us 2020 was the only theatrical experience that seemed to be expanding instead of shrinking. The shift to the virtual stage allowed WIT to build a world across platforms, with the largest cast I have encountered, and improv formats that would not have been possible onstage. With the webcam, geography was no longer a limiting factor for participation. With the cameras we carry around with us all the time, content and creation was literally at the fingertips of anyone who wanted to be involved. It was a joy and a blast to see what WIT's creative community could do with such an open platform.



POTUS Among Us cast member Jeff Bollen:

POTUS Among Us allowed my team to stay connected through the initial quarantine summer period. Zoom calls and email chains filled a void and turned an otherwise lonely time into one of the more creative improv experiences I've had. Improv shows normally let our imaginations run wild for 20-30 minutes, but this time it lasted weeks!



Performer Ian Farley (Los Angeles): Getting to perform with my former Harold teams Gone Baby Gone and People Like Us made me very nervous. I felt like I was going to an actual class reunion. It was mildly stressful remembering how to do a Harold again. Fortunately, we didn't make it to the third beat scenes so it all worked out. The improv shows and activities during quarantine were very uplifting and reminded me that I still had a place in the WIT community. I felt included!



Performer Alex Beard (Chicago): 2020 was a really hard year for my family; my wife is a resident physician who works in the ICU. There were so many unknowns, and being given the opportunity to create safely with some of my best friends from all over the country while COVID cases were re-surfing gave me a place of mental respite. For 30-60 minutes whether we were rehearsing, crafting, or performing, I was able to let my mind distance from the fears for my wife's safety and for the safety of our community. I'm thankful that WIT provided a platform, and I'm thankful for everyone who chose to perform virtually instead of in-person during this tumultuous time.



Performer Justine Hipsky: During a time when most everything—personally and collectively—felt scary and uncertain, being involved with WIT remained a powerful grounding force in my life. From teaching virtually to performing in People of the District and Harold reunion shows to helping plan and produce an unprecedented run of POTUS programming, I was empowered to feel purposeful, reminded to play, and to connect with old and new friends alike. My year-plus in quarantine would have looked and felt radically different without my WIT community.



Creating Connection and Community

Over the course of the pandemic, the need for people to connect to one another was acute. Beyond simple one-on-one Zoom catch-ups, improv tapped into people's playfulness and facilitated joyful connection—often between complete strangers.

All of WIT's activities helped participants forge connections with each other—in particular our classes program. The consistency of scheduling time for play helped students create bonds. As the city opened up in the early summer of 2021, virtual friendships became in-person friendships.

Throughout the winter and spring of 2021, WIT hosted online monthly game night activities, dubbed Second Saturday events for the night they fell each month, as a way to help forge connection and joy. These events include an '80s murder mystery party for performers and teachers, games of Codenames, and a Broadway Sing-Along helmed by Karyn Wilson and Katie Munn.

In May 2021, WIT dedicated the month to fostering connection between people across DC and the world. The event included:

- Virtual Improv for All workshops with partners including All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, the DC Center for the LGBT Community, DC Public Libraries, TheatreWashington, and DC Fray.
- A virtual game night.
- A global improv jam with participants across the world.
- World Wide Improv Connection: A weekend of five mash-up shows featuring improvisers from DC and across the globe. These performers, many of whom had never met before showtime, hailed from 12 cities across the U.S., as well as from Scotland, England, Sweden, and New Zealand—and joined DC performers and students on the virtual WIT stage.

“Game nights were a great chance to bring people together from across DC and across the country in fun and levity. COVID times felt so much less isolating when you were enmeshed in a heavy game of Codenames or belting your heart out to a Dear Evan Hansen song!”

—Jordana Mishory, Operations Manager



WIT student Alissa Platz: One of the things that was special for me was forming an indie team/practice group with people I met in my virtual Level 3 class last summer. We continued taking classes together through the completion of Level 5, and it was nice to consistently play with the same people who loved improv as much as me to the point of doing it virtually. I loved watching us grow together as players and those ‘aha’ moments that still happened over Zoom. As things open back up we’re excited to hopefully meet in person and perform together on a real stage.



WIT student Stacey Pelika: On an improv front it was so important to be able to continue learning and practicing, particularly since the pandemic set in just as I was about to start Level 5. On a personal level, WIT helped me stay connected to a world outside of my pandemic bubble!

WIT Student Rob Falk: This was “sanity in a box.” At a time where many things felt like gloom and doom, it was great to have time scheduled to play, to be silly and to laugh.



CREATING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

WIT'S ONLINE COMMUNITY OUTREACH GROWS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Because improv, even done virtually, has such a powerful ability to help people connect and form community, our community partnerships grew during FY21. Part of the secret was the complete removal of barriers. Without the constraints of space logistics, it was easier for partners to take a chance on an improv workshop.

Education Director Jonathan Murphy found that people loved the experience and single workshops turned into multi-week programs faster than ever before.

Often, community partners were not always sure how improv was going to be received. The response in every case was universal praise from the participants—they wanted to know when improv was coming back immediately after the first workshop. One epiphany Murphy had during the year was that WIT's core offerings addressed the needs of most community partners.

Murphy cited WIT's teachers for this success, including Jack Novak, Samantha Watson, Justin Carty, and Tara Demmy.



“We don’t need to start with a program designed to tackle specific problems like mental health, or social emotional learning, or job skills. Improv helps with these things without having to force it! We can provide the sandbox for people to play in and make their own discoveries for how improv applies to their lives.”

—Jonathan Murphy,
Education Director

CREATING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

DURING FY21, WIT'S COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDED:

Capital Village Public Charter School: This new partnership was WIT's first in-school program. Conducted virtually, the twice-weekly classes were part of the school's enrichment curriculum rather than being an optional after-school activity. In the coming school year (FY22), WIT will run a twice-weekly 36-week program. Jack Novak was the lead instructor.

Marie Reed Elementary: Our longest-running after-school program evolved to include youth in first grade. The school notes the benefits of improv classes and wants to see the outcomes for students who learn improv each year from first grade until fifth grade. Jack Novak was the lead instructor.

Project Create: WIT's newest partner is an Anacostia-based after-school enrichment organization. Jack Novak taught virtually in spring 2021 and led the summer session in-person. This

work was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Sitar Arts Center: WIT's ongoing relationship with Sitar Arts Center picked up again early in the pandemic with virtual workshops for youth.

Armed Services Arts Partnership: Taught by Tara Demmy, WIT continued to program Level 1 classes for veterans returning to civilian life. Many participants continue the curriculum on their own.

Calvary Women's Services: WIT programs 8-week sessions for Calvary's community of women experiencing homelessness three to four times a year. After halting classes due to COVID, WIT picked up again with virtual classes taught by Samantha Watson.

Capitol Hill Village: WIT offered an eight-week session for Capitol Hill Village, a community center for seniors. The overwhelmingly positive feedback has fueled continued work planned in FY22. Samantha Watson was the lead instructor.



CREATING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

Capital Village PCS Teacher Daralyne Davis:

If you want to see growth, improv is one of the best places to see it. Had we recorded the very first lesson and the very last lesson, it would have been night and day. And some of these students were extremely shy. They didn't even want to turn that camera on, only wanted to communicate in the chat, didn't want to give their voice in the space. That was completely different by the end of the road.



WIT Teacher Samantha Watson on work with Calvary Women's Services: I walked in and the ladies were not particularly excited to see me and then by the end they were welcoming. They were already like, I hope you come back ... What I love about teaching is watching people grow and change and find the light, and I don't know the specifics of these ladies' lives, but I can imagine they're rather tough. So finding an hour for joy, and the level of joy I saw in a couple of them just moved me.

Calvary Women's Services Education Coordinator

Elaine Johnson: Watch[ing] women come down to class and watch them leave class—it's two different sets of women. They come down. They're tired. They're fulfilling an obligation sometimes. And then it's an hour of fireworks. It's an hour of joy and popcorn and movement and energy. Then they head up the stairs (we're in a basement), just laughing and exuberant. I want to be the megaphone for delight in social services. I truly believe that we resign anyone at the poverty line to a life devoid of delight, and have for years saying that once you fix all your problems, then you can be delighted. But until then, you're grinding away at these forms and these lines and these deadlines for nine years or wait. Delight is what gets our women to do the hard work.





WIT@WORK WORKSHOPS PROVIDE CONNECTION AND CATHARSIS

As working remotely became the norm across the world, the need for organizations to find ways to bring people together grew. WIT’s organizational training arm WIT@Work proved to be an effective way to break people out of their rut and forge connections between colleagues at all levels.

WIT@Work Director John Windmueller demonstrated speed and leadership in thinking through how to make the pivot to teaching, learning, and performing improv online. Windmueller led an Introduction to Online Improv workshop in March of 2020 (FY20) with over 200 people in the class. This served as a proof-of-concept of how virtual trainings might work online.

“This was a challenging year for WIT@Work, but also one of which I’m exceptionally proud,” said **WIT@Work Director John Windmueller**. “It was an opportunity to ‘walk the talk’ of the concepts we teach in applied improv workshops—how to be creative and find new opportunities when facing change. In the midst of widespread Zoom fatigue, we helped teams build new skills and find genuine connection and joy. There was laughter and learning, and the exuberant positive feedback from clients was deeply rewarding and a reminder of the value and relevance of improv in the workplace.”

CREATING CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY

The work paid off: Cigna Mid-Atlantic President Monica Schmude raved about her team's virtual training sessions with WIT@Work.

“The one thing I didn’t expect is some of my top leaders had a true reluctance to join the event. In fact, some of them tried to make excuses of why they couldn’t be attending the event and. When I said, you don’t have to be scared or intimidated at these kinds of things. You’re not going to be called out, or embarrassed, they trusted me and they joined the event. Those were the people at the end of the event that refused to drop off the Zoom call because they wanted to talk about it.”

“They made inroads to others within the team, during the breakout sessions that help them to have those inside stories and funny things that they could refer to in the future that they didn’t have before. And they did it through fun and through laughter and through getting silly, that was an unexpected result of this event for me and for my leaders. They continue to reflect back on



as part of the power of participating in events like this.”

WIT@Work found ways to convert trainings to online for pre-existing clients. We also gained new clients from across the US, made possible by the online format.

WIT@WORK’S CLIENTS FOR FY21 INCLUDED

*(*indicates pro bono engagement)*

- Appian
- Association of Fundraising Professionals
- Capital Area Food Bank
- Cigna
- College Tracks*
- DC Bar Foundation
- DC Public Libraries*
- Leadership Cleveland
- Leadership Greater Washington
- Leadership Montgomery
- NexGen Financial
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
- Twitter
- U.S. Government Publishing Office
- U.S. State Department
- University of Maryland Baltimore County
- Young Professionals Network—DC*

KEEPING WIT GOING

How we continued operations
during the pandemic

WIT's nimble and adaptable staff collaborated diligently throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, working to both sustain the organization financially and carry out its mission. While the year began with tremendous uncertainty, by the end of FY21 WIT was on solid footing.

“We are exceptionally proud of the WIT community this year. Although there was no roadmap for the unexpected challenges we would all face over the past year, our board and staff persevered and adapted creatively to maintain our momentum. WIT's mission and the value of our work is clearer than ever—we will continue to provide levity and connection for DC for many years in the future.”

—Krystal Ramseur, Board Chair



KEEPING WIT GOING

WIT weathered the pandemic thanks to a committed network of donors as well as WIT's pursuit of emergency funding. All full-time staff remained on payroll at 80% salary during the pandemic, and WIT ended the year in the black, with contributed revenue outpacing projections and classes revenue reaching an ambitious target.

WIT's individual donors stepped up in a major way, bringing in record-setting levels of giving and more than doubling our projected goal for the year. In total, 759 people supported WIT including 92 monthly donors. Much of the success of our individual fundraising was due to generous matching gifts from Sean Ellis and Melanie Harker as well as our board of directors.

Grant funding was a huge part of WIT's financial health and continued operations. Artistic/ Executive Director Mark Chalfant and External Relations Director Dan Miller pursued grant and emergency funding from governmental and private sources.

On a federal level, WIT secured a second round of Paycheck Protection Program funding (the first was at the end of FY20). WIT also won its second-ever grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, which was tied to programming at Project Create.

At a local level, WIT secured its largest-ever General Operating Support grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities. The Commission also awarded WIT two grants under the Facilities and Buildings program—one to help with office rental expenses and another to enhance WIT's website to increase accessibility for all users and improve the site's speed and performance.

In winter 2021, the DC Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development awarded WIT a grant through the Entertainment Bridge Fund program, which supports entertainment venues and organizations impacted by the pandemic.

In private foundation funding, WIT continued to receive support from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation and Bloomberg Philanthropies.



“I can’t express how meaningful it was to see our donor community step up during the pandemic. There was this very real and legitimate fear that WIT could cease to exist, and the generosity of the donations that came in was a testament to the value that we bring to people’s lives. People gave meaningful gifts (including some people who donated their stimulus checks), and each one was deeply appreciated.”

—Dan Miller, External Relations Director

AS PART OF ANTI-OPPRESSION WORK, WIT RE-EXAMINES STRUCTURES FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

Throughout FY21, WIT's staff and board examined our existing processes and power structures to determine how we can become an anti-racist and anti-oppressive organization. Our participation has included multiple trainings and feedback sessions with board and staff, as well as guidance on establishing/revising WIT policies ranging from non-retaliation policies to hiring policies. The most significant part of this work was a comprehensive stakeholder assessment done in collaboration with Young Playwrights' Theater's AROW program (Abolishing Racism and Oppression in the Workplace). The report included candid, anonymous feedback that illuminated concerns related to several themes such as the inclusion

of people of color in performance/education programming, venue and program accessibility, organizational transparency, and participants' ability to report harassment.

Moving into FY22, WIT is making fundamental changes based on these findings. WIT created a statement of our organizational values that will inform a revisit of our mission and vision statements. These documents will provide a foundation for our next strategic plan which will be finalized in the coming months. The values statement, in particular, will serve as a guide for future decision-making on both a large and granular level.

“A crucial step for those of us who love WIT has been to move past either/or thinking and embrace two truths: First, that WIT has had a positive impact on thousands of lives in the DMV and, second, WIT has sometimes caused harm for people in underrepresented and/or marginalized populations. Our work with AROW helped surface many policy and practice revisions we are now processing. At the same time, WIT has codified our organizational values to make sure that anti-racism is woven into WIT's fabric going forward.”

—Mark Chalfant, Artistic/Executive Director





Looking ahead

As DC began to open up in early summer 2021, WIT started registering in-person classes and hosted two weekends of free shows and jams for the student and performer community. The Welcome Back Weekends drew a broad cross-section of community members, all of whom were eager to do improv live again.

These weekends were a testament to improv's ability to bring people together through joyful creative expression. Student Hannah Cole told us a story from the event:

"After one of the Welcome Back jams, one of the players suggested getting drinks, so a group of us went out together and just enjoyed being back in person. I mentioned I was going to another jam that evening, and a couple of other people in the group signed up right then and there. By the time we got to the next jam, we had people ask us how long we knew each other and were shocked to hear we had all met some three hours ago."

As of this writing in August 2021, WIT navigates an FY22 that is in many ways just as uncertain as FY21. WIT's staff and board remain committed to the idea that improv can create joyous bonds

between people and serve as a tool for creating community—whether in person or virtually—in a world that can be isolating. With our newly codified organization values and a renewed focus on inclusive programming, WIT is grateful for the support of our community.



Participants in WIT's Welcome Back Weekends mingle after a jam.



Candid moments from WIT's Welcome Back Weekend jams and performances, here and on pages that follow.

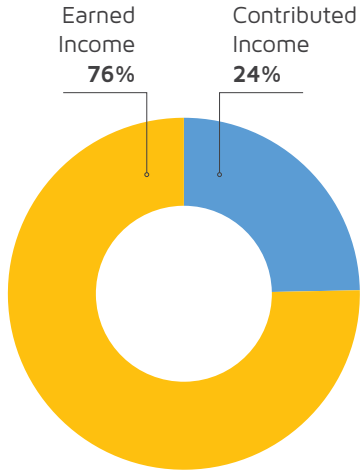


Dahlia Haddad, Spring 2020 WIT intern: My time at WIT has been a beautiful and dynamic confluence of good work and great people. The real gem, however, is having observed and been a part of a caring and trusting workplace. I sincerely admire the respect and play with which you approach each other and your work. I hope to carry that into my future along with the tools and skills I've accrued over the past four months. I wish you all, and WIT, the very best and cannot wait to bump into you at shows in the fall. I'll be the gal in an eighties tracksuit who seems far too emotional to be attending Harold Night. There's also a good chance that I'll be hollering, "It's me! Dahlia! You worked with me for a bit!"

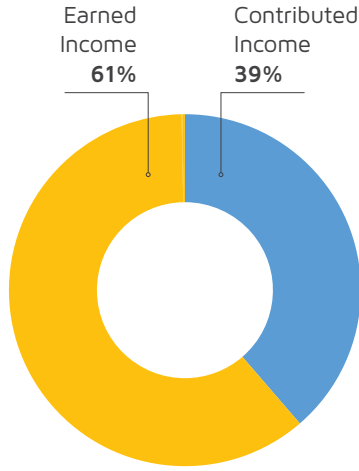
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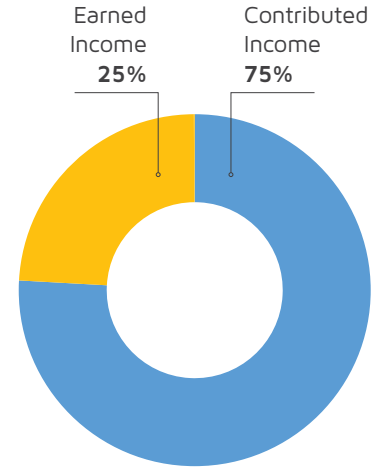
FINANCIALS



EARNED v CONTRIBUTED REVENUE FY19



EARNED v CONTRIBUTED REVENUE FY20



EARNED v CONTRIBUTED REVENUE FY21



EARNED, CONTRIBUTED AND TOTAL REVENUE

FINANCIALS

ASSETS	FY21*	FY20	FY19
Current Assets			
Checking/Savings	893,791	609,577	558,378
Accounts Receivable	105,102	17,961	30,060
Total Current Assets	1,007,655	648,650	624,515
Other Assets	2,900	2,900	2,900
Total Assets	1,011,062	652,057	628,926
LIABILITIES & EQUITY			
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities	56,616	84,441	89,379
Total Liabilities	56,616	84,441	89,379
Equity	954,447	567,616	539,547
Total Liabilities & Equity	1,011,062	652,057	628,926

* Minor adjustments to FY2021 year-end figures may still occur.

FUNDING SOURCES

Federal Government

Paycheck Protection Program (second draw) — **\$79,322**

National Endowment for the Arts — **\$10,000**

DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities

General Operating Support — **\$101,010**

Facilities and Buildings — **\$9,000**

Facilities and Buildings (Rent Relief) — **\$18,338**

DC Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development

Entertainment Bridge Fund — **\$100,000**

Foundations

Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation — **\$25,000**

Bloomberg Philanthropies — **\$10,000**

WIT received a \$150,000 grant from EventsDC in late FY20. WIT has not spent down funds from this grant yet and will use this money to stabilize the organization in FY22.

THANKS TO:

Erick Acuña, All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, Bloomberg Philanthropies, DC Center for the LGBT Community, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, DC Fray, DC Office of Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, DC Public Libraries, Elizabeth Fulton, EventsDC, Derek Hayes, Saleh Karaman, Michael Kaiser, Alex Kazanas, KRPR, Len from Tracks, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Bill Nelson, Seth Payne, Krystal Ramseur, Jeff Salmore, Jared Shamburger, Isabelle Solomon, TheatreWashington, Simone Webster, Jamila White, Brigitte Winter

WIT'S DONORS

Initiators – \$1,000+

Mark Abman, Lura Barber, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Sarah Caffee, Anuj Christian, Geoffrey Corey, Laura Crary, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, DC Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, Juliana Duffy, Sean Ellis and Melanie Harker, Carolyn Ellison, Ian Farley, Terrell Fuller, Meaghan Griffith, Ehmonie Hainey, Jenna Hall, Thomas Harris, Michael Hendrix, Oxana Holtmann, Oxana Holtmann, Graziella Jackson, Kirra Jarratt, Dennis Johnson, Michael Kitces, Tyler Korba, Kim Martin, Turner Meeks, the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Phil Morton, Elizabeth Mulkey, Sean Murphy, Krystal Ramseur, Nikki Rogers, Goli Samimi, Shane Sarver, Jeffrey Waggett, Hope Woodard

Ambassadors – \$600-999

Stacey Axler, Mark Benjamin, Madeline Black, Brent Buxton, Mark Chalfant, Matt Coit, Elizabeth Cutler, Mikail Faalasli, Johanna Franzen, Elizabeth Fulton, Amanda Fulton, Meredith Garagiola, Derek Hayes, Michael Hendrix, Steven Karig, Taylor Kniffin, Al-Hassan Koroma, Svend Larsen, Christopher Lewitzke, Robin Miller and Bob Levine, Eli Okun, Catherine Porter, Jason Re, Sean Rossman, Greer Smith, Isabelle Solomon, David Standish, Kaelan Sullivan, Tandra Turner, John Wambach, Bobby Williams, Sarah Wilson



Compatriots – \$480-599

Matt Berman, Andy Blomme, Graceanna Enzinger, Aimee Imundo, Debbie Kaplan, Alex Kazanas, Michael Kopalek, Brianna Lux, Naib Mobassir, Katie Munn, Analia Comez Vidal, Elise Webb, Andrew Weld, Douglas Wiltsie

Allies – \$120-749

John Ariail, Sarah Arkin, Sarah Armstrong, Cassandra Barnum, Neil Baron, Corey Barton, George Bass, Rich Bergen, Amanda Shafer Berman, Madeline Black, Mark Caffee, Brian Callahan, Jack Callender, Christopher Carbery, Andrea Carey, John Carroll, Jimmy Cassese, Sabahat Chaudhary, Larra Clark, Cathi Cohen, Cathi Cohen, Christine Colburn, Elaine Colwell, Julie Corey, Caitlin Coslett, Lauren Cross, Archie Cubarrubia, Edmund Curran, Olivia D'Aoust, Niv Elis, Carolyn Ellison, Jennie Ellwanger, Robert Falk, Cristine Fargo, Shawn Fisher, Jason Fliegel, James Freeman, Jeffery Friedman, Abby Fu, Stephen Gabauer, Lauren Gabel, Craig Gagel, Esther Garcia, David Gleave, Matthew Grabowski, Jordan Haedtler, Amanda Hahn, Mary Lauran Hall, Maria Halloran, William Hancock, Joseph Haw, John Heiser, Lisa Hendrix, Luke Hennig, Diego Hernandez, Jeff Hewitt, Justine Hipsky, Devin Horne, Olga Howard, Nina Hsu, Carlic Huynh, Jennifer Hyman, Pyper Davis Imperial, Graziella Jackson, Jennifer Jackson, Peg Jobst, Anne Jordan,

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Citizens up to \$119

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Aaron Mosby, Adam Fishbein, Adam Koussari-Amin, Adam Levine, Adrian Vasquez, Adrienne Picciotto, Agnes, Aidan Hughes, Aimee Lee Savage, Alan Prunier, Alex Beard, Alex Kazanas, Alex Remington, Alex Taliaferro, Alex Waddell, Ali Little, Alissa Platz, Allison Yolo, Amanda Barber, Amanda Fulton, Amanda Hahn, Amanda Hirsch, Amanda Magnavita, Analia Gomez-Vidal, Andrea Mosee, Andrea Quach, Andrew Cawley, Andrew Detweiler, Andrew Dickinson, Andy Braden, Angela Karpiniak, Anna Cooper, Anna Ross, Anne Polsky, AnneLynn Gillian-Daniel, Annie Barry, Ari Glatman Zaretsky, Aron Baum, Ashton Schaffer, Aubrey Peterson, Austin Von Johnson, Bam Alston, Béatrice Leydier, Becky Webb, Ben Cedars, Ben O'Hara, Ben Taylor, Bethany Coan, Bethany Stokes, Bill Nelson, Bizzy Fain, Blue Cavell, Brady Peters, Brandin Bowden, Brent Buxton, Brianna Lux, Brianna McGowan, Brianna Rooney, Bridget Wood, Brooke Miller, Bryan Jackson, Bryanda Minix, Bryce Slinger, Caleb Tvrdy, Cameron Dee, Cara Popecki, Carlic Huynh, Carly Kraybill, Caroline Chen, Caroline Howe, Caroline Kelly,



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A special thanks to all the contestants on For Love or Funny, and the special guests who appeared on WIT shows throughout the year.

Teachers: Erick Acuña, Stacey Axler, Eileen Breslin, Ryan Brookshire, Dan Brown, Anuj Christian, Tara Demmy, Robin Doody, Darnell Eaton, Ian Farley, Em Fiske, Elizabeth Fulton, Matthew Gibeson, Molly Graham, Jenna Hall, Justine Hipsky, Dave Johnson, Jordana Mishory, Monique Moses, Jonathan Murphy, Erin Murray, Sarah Nichols, Jack Novak, Ashley Siebels, Donna Steele, Donna Steele, Greg Tindale, Jason Walter, Samantha Watson, Karyn Wilson, John Windmueller

Improv for All Instructors: Thomas Achilles, Pete Bergen, Jamie Bingner, Geoff Blizzard, Jeff Bollen, Dan Brown, Mark Chalfant, Anuj Christian, Tara Demmy, Madeline Dunsmore, Christina Ferrari, Johanna Franzen, Melissa Gedney, Amanda Hahn, Justine Hipsky, Caroline Howe, Tim Hunt, Dave Johnson, Kara Kinsey, Yuliya Malamud, Erin Murray, Peter Narby, Kacie Peterson, Alan Prunier, Jo Scott, Ray Simeon, Renan Snowden, Martin Steger, Clyde Thompson, Jason Walther, John Wambach, Samantha Watson, Ari Zaretsky

Remembering Rebecca Roy

WIT Board Member Rebecca Roy passed away on May 24 in Alexandria, Va., following a courageous 11-month fight against large cell neuroendocrine cancer.

“I don’t think there was anyone who met Rebecca who did not immediately feel the warmth and playfulness of her spirit,” said WIT Artistic/Executive Director Mark Chalfant. “She will be missed by all who knew her. We hold all of Rebecca’s family and loved ones in our hearts during this difficult time.”

Rebecca was a former WIT student and an Equity Actor. She began her professional career with The Barter Players Company at Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Va. During her tenure with Barter, she served as an actor, stage manager, company tour manager, and in a variety of other roles, ultimately serving as the Director of Outreach. Rebecca relocated to Alexandria, Va. in 2012, where she continued performance studies at the Studio Theatre Acting Conservatory in Washington, D.C. She also served the conservatory as a work-study volunteer.



WIT'S PERSONNEL

Artistic/Executive Director	MARK CHALFANT
External Relations Director	DAN MILLER
Education Director	JONATHAN MURPHY
Education Manager	KACIE PETERSON
WIT@Work Director	JOHN WINDMUELLER
Operations Manager	JORDANA MISHORY
Production Manager	RAYMOND SIMEON
Bookkeeper	KELLY MATTHEWS

Interns

LIZ BRODIE
HEIDI WALDENMAIER
DAHLIA HADDAD
ABIGAIL YAEGER

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