MCAEL FY2024 - FY2026 Strategic Plan

A. INTRODUCTION

The foundation for MCAEL's FY2024 - FY2026[1] strategic plan is our belief that all English language learners should have easy access to high quality, culturally responsive English language programs that center learner voices and honor their identities and lived experiences. Advancing MCAEL's mission and realizing this belief is increasingly complex as the diversity of Montgomery County's immigrant population continues to increase and the need for English language programs grows. Approximately 32% of Montgomery County residents are foreign-born[2] and an estimated 132,00 adults in the County speak English "less than very well"[3]. In response, MCAEL's strategic priorities include a dedicated focus on increasing access to English language classes for adults in underrepresented communities.

Our strategic priorities for FY2024 - FY2026:

1. **The coalition's English language programs are equipped to provide culturally responsive, learner- centered instruction and reduce barriers to learner participation.**

2. **Adults in underrepresented communities will have access to English language instruction and participate at rates in line with other participants in similar classes, supported by new and existing efforts by MCAEL.**

3. **MCAEL is the recognized resource and advocate for adult English language learning and teaching.**

4. **Our practices and programs support our internal equity goals and the equity goals of the coalition.**

MCAEL maintains and builds the system for all adult English language learning in Montgomery County that meets many types of learner and program needs and provides a range of educational opportunities. The system is complex. We support different types of programs and instructors, who in turn, serve a broad array of learners. We must also respond and adapt to a constantly changing environment.

As MCAEL looked to our future, we decided that an updated mission statement would better reflect our role and what we seek to achieve for adult English language instructors and

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[1] Strategic plan priorities and objectives cover the period from the second half of FY 2023 through FY 2026 (i.e., January 1st, 2023, through June 30th, 2026)
[2] Source: Montgomery County, "Equity Focus Areas",
mailto:https://mcplanning.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=05d437361e7a4e19a2ba3bbced117d10
[3] Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 – 2020 American Community Survey 5- Year Estimates, Table B16004.

programs, and the learners in our community they support. In conjunction with the approval of the strategic plan, MCAEL is adopting a new mission statement:

We strengthen and build adult English language learning programs and instruction to further individual and family success at work, school and in the community.

We sought insights and recommendations across MCAEL's stakeholders to inform the strategic plan. We thank all of those who gave their time so we could do so.

B. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

I. Mission

We strengthen and build adult English language learning programs and instruction to further individual and family success at work, school and in the community.

II. Guiding Principle

We believe all English language learners should have easy access to high quality, culturally responsive English language programs that center learners' voices and honor their identities and lived experiences.

Providing access to high quality English language programs for adults is the backbone of our work as a coalition. Our programming, resources, and advocacy support the broad network of programs and flexible class options which create safe and welcoming entry points for learners. English language learning broadens learners' access to education, jobs, and essential resources, furthers their participation in the community, and fosters equity.

III. Role

We are a catalyst for learning, creating resources, forging connections, and advocating for the coalition. We build and strengthen English language instruction and programs which engage learners and support their individual goals. Our work evolves continually, responding to the needs of the coalition and the environment around us.

IV. Cornerstones

There are four cornerstones which advance MCAEL's mission and guiding principle: the coalition, the learners, the community, and equity. These cornerstones support our belief that all immigrants and other English language learners should have easy access to high quality, culturally responsive instruction that centers their voices and honors their identities and lived experiences. MCAEL's role in promoting the four cornerstones is that as the leading resource, advocate, and a program and network builder.

Coalition. For the coalition, MCAEL advances:

- Standards-based best practices professional development for program administrators and instructors
- Coalition informed programming
- Continuous learning
- Connected, collaborative network
- Variety of entry points for learners of different languages, cultures, and ability levels

Learners. For learners, MCAEL advances:
- High quality instruction
- Learner-centered program approaches
- Accessible and varied classes
- Realized goals for work, education, and family
- Opportunities to be heard

Community. For the community, MCAEL supports:
- Well-known English language programs and resources
- Fledgling programs and classes to broaden the reach of the coalition
- Connected, engaged learners
- Stronger learner participation at work, school, and in the community
- Education, data, and analysis about the state of English language learning

Equity. To foster equity, MCAEL promotes:
- Culturally responsive classes, instruction, and programs
- Accessible, high quality classes
- Honoring racial and cultural identities
- Acknowledging lived experiences
- Welcoming connections and communities

C. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

I. **Priority 1: The coalition's English language programs are equipped to provide culturally responsive, learner- centered instruction and reduce barriers to learner participation.**

Rationale
MCAEL continually refines the broad range of professional development opportunities and best practices we provide to English language program administrators and instructors, cultivating continuous learning and top -quality instruction. Research shows the benefit of high quality, learner-centered English language instruction to acquiring listening and speaking skills and the ability to read and write in English. Learners can only benefit, however, if the barriers to participation, such as access to childcare or technology, are reduced. Similarly, ready access to high quality English language classes is diminished if programs are not equipped with enough trained instructors.

Objectives

1. Strengthen programs' abilities to effectively offer and manage classes that lead to learning gains.
   Actions:
   a. Provide meetings and other opportunities for peer learning on TESOL standards
   b. Update MCAEL Toolkits
   c. Provide technical assistance
   d. Support use of in-person, virtual and alternative formats

2. Support programs to reduce barriers to learner participation.
   Actions:
   a. Continue to identify barriers and options to reduce them through the Learner Leadership Group, learner focus groups, and discussions with program administrators and instructors
   b. Share MCAEL and Census data and other resources
   c. Develop strategies to address the barriers which are identified
   d. Pilot innovative class models (flexible class options)
   e. Support services through grants (e.g., childcare, transportation) and County funded initiatives (e.g., technology)

3. Promote best practices for learner-centered and culturally responsive instruction.
   Actions:
   a. Provide educational workshops and materials for instructors
   b. Conduct focus groups of learners and share data with coalition
   c. Convene peer learning and sharing opportunities
   d. Develop and offer additional online instructor courses
   e. Develop model learner satisfaction survey to provide for grant partners who do not conduct surveys

4. Support programs with instructor recruitment and retention.
   Actions:
   a. Conduct surveys to assess needs
   b. Advocate for resources
   c. Promote instruction as a job opportunity in the community and offer training and teaching opportunities
   d. Offer advice and information on career path for instructors
   e. Support fair compensation for instructors
   f. Help match instructors (including newly trained) seeking jobs with programs within the coalition
   g. Support peer sharing and networking to create sense of community among instructors

5. Ensure budget practices accommodate existing programs and evolving needs.

Actions:
  a. Regularly assess program needs through surveys
  b. Advocate for program needs and increased funding from the County
  c. Designate financial resources for new programs and initiatives

II. Priority 2: Adults in underrepresented communities have access to English language instruction and participate at rates in line with other participants in similar classes, supported by new and existing efforts by MCAEL.

Rationale

We believe all English language learners should have easy access to high quality, culturally responsive English language programs that center learners' voices and honor their identities and lived experiences. Our experience and data collection show that in Montgomery County, there are cultural communities, language groups, and geographic areas that are underrepresented in their participation in English language classes. This underrepresentation includes the absence of programs, the lack of accessible classes and classes which are responsive to the cultural identities and needs of the community as well as other barriers to participation.

MCAEL's expertise and role in the community enables us to lead this effort. MCAEL will work in partnership with other English language programs and community- based organizations by coordinating and developing classes to reach learners that currently do not have access to English instruction, build their confidence, and help them identify a pathway to continue their English study. We will support different, trusted entry points for learners, so they can access classes in environments where they feel comfortable and welcomed.

Objectives

1. Identify and connect with underrepresented communities.
   Actions:
      a. Use data and staff expertise to identify underrepresented populations
      b. Define criteria for establishing or increasing English language classes offerings either directly or through partnership
      c. Prioritize organizations and groups to partner with
      d. Contact organizations and groups identified as potential partners

2. Working with local organizations and groups, assist learners to find a pathway for English study.
   Actions:
      a. Refine Community Learning Groups model to increase the number of learners who continue on to existing classes for ongoing study
      b. Develop a system for "warm hand-offs" to assist learners to find the pathway to English learning or workforce development opportunities

3. Support an increase in the number of organizations that can provide English language programs to learners from these communities.
   Actions:
   a. Expand partnerships through Community Learning Groups and other outreach
   b. Add staff resources to support increase in outreach and learners served
   c. Increase awareness of MCAEL's expertise and resources through the means identified in Priority 3

4. Partner with businesses who approach MCAEL to source employer sponsored English language classes.
   Actions:
   a. Provide Community Learning Group classes, supported by new or existing MCAEL programs, or coordinate with other programs to deliver classes
   b. Increase awareness of the opportunities to provide employee sponsored English language classes through the means identified in Priority 3

III. Priority 3: MCAEL is the recognized resource and advocate for adult English language learning and teaching.

Rationale

MCAEL can best serve English language programs and learners, and Montgomery County when our purpose and resources are well-known and sought after. In addition, MCAEL can better achieve its goals if it has broad support throughout the community.

Increasing awareness of available programmatic, instructional and data resources by English language learning programs and instructors will broaden the coalition, improve instruction, and increase the number of learners. Research conducted for the strategic planning process identified the opportunity to increase awareness by instructors, programs, and learners about MCAEL and our resources. Through our experience, we also recognize that some programs are aware of MCAEL but do not understand that they can access our resources, both financial and instructional.

Objectives

1. Increase the use of MCAEL's resources and professional development opportunities.
   Actions:
   a. Use our communications platforms (including website, Google groups, email blasts) and programs to highlight MCAEL's class directory, and instructional, employment and data resources
   b. Improve search engine optimization and website navigation to help people find our resources
   c. Create standard communications to provide to programs for instructors and to disseminate at trainings, workshops, and meetings

2. Increase accessibility to information about classes and programs.
   Actions:
   a. Partner with MCPS to provide information to families and caregivers through ESOL classes
   b. Provide guidance to programs on direct outreach to learners (e.g., through faith-based and other community organizations and local community social media sites)
   c. Modify website as needed to ensure program and class information remain easy to find and use by learners and those looking on their behalf
   d. Translate Directory into other languages as needed based on data and feedback from program administrators and instructors

3. Build awareness with businesses and potential community partners and supporters.
   Actions:
   a. Develop messaging for different audiences that shows the benefits of MCAEL's role in the community
   b. Participate in meetings of business organizations (e.g., Chambers of Commerce)
   c. Identify and prioritize organizations and individuals that offer the greatest potential for new or increased partnership or funding support
   d. Identify means and messaging to increase the number of multilingual volunteers
   e. Create and execute a plan for personal outreach by MCAEL leadership or board members. ("higher touch" strategy- e.g., Kathy would meet with potential major donor or MCPS family services head to discuss outreach through ESOL classes)

4. Increase awareness of MCAEL by the community more broadly.
   Actions:
   a. Improve search engine optimization so MCAEL is found more readily by those looking for English language learning classes, resources, and data or interested in becoming instructors.
   b. Increase the number of coalition and community partners with links to the MCAEL website (e.g., Directory, other tools, resources, data)
   c. Participate in County convenings of businesses and community- based organizations to increase awareness of MCAEL, English language programs, coalition resources and workforce development opportunities

IV. **Priority 4: Our practices and programs support our internal equity goals and the equity goals of the coalition**.

Rationale
Equity is core to our mission and values and the work of the coalition. English language learning broadens immigrants' access to education, jobs, and essential resources, furthers their participation in the community, and fosters equity. Learning English has a direct correlation

with equity. Likewise, our internal policies and practices, advocacy efforts, grantmaking, and content of our programs all promote equity.

Objectives

1. Increase diversity across all measures of the people serving on the Board and participating in the Grant Panel, committees, and advisory groups.
   Actions:
   a. Develop and carry out a board recruitment plan that includes bringing community voices into the board process
   b. Create staff working group to develop recruitment protocols and plan
   c. Support new Board members through mentorship and board training
   d. Provide support to Grant Panel, advisory group, and task forces members to make it easier for them to participate (ex. stipends, childcare, translation services)

2. Incorporate equity objectives in staff recruiting, hiring, and evaluation processes and polices.
   Actions:
   a. Create a working group to review current processes and polices and identify which need to be modified or replaced and the timeline for doing so
   b. Make the changes identified by the working group (ex. modify job descriptions and requirements, use job posting sites which reach targeted applicant pool)

3. Incorporate equity objectives into resource (time, people, and money) allocation decisions.
   Action: Develop a system to review the budgeting process, staff compensation and benefits policies, and grant allocation processes

4. Broaden access to MCAEL's financial resources.
   Actions:
   a. Modify grant application and evaluation process using findings from the grant process review
   b. Increase Literacy Access Grants, including Access Small Grants

5. Provide guidance on learner access and equity to programs to support their equity goals as those goals relate to their programs and instruction.
   Actions:
   a. Develop workshops and reference materials
   b. Conduct surveys

6. Create opportunities for advocacy for learners and programs.
   Action: Use MCAEL's platform and connections (ex. take someone from learner advisory group or instructor to County Council meeting)

7. Engage vendors and external partners owned or managed by people representative of the populations served by the coalition or who employee significant numbers of immigrants.
Action: Determine criteria and protocol to evaluate new vendors and external partners

8. Ensure our equity goals continue to evolve.
Action: Re-evaluate and refine equity goals annually

D. **FUNDRAISING PRIORITY**

Priority: Increase and diversify funding to support programming flexibility and strategic plan objectives.

Rationale

MCAEL will focus on increasing and diversifying the organization's funding, concentrating our efforts initially on major donor and grant funding to build our overall budget. Additionally, we plan that our strategies to build broader awareness of MCAEL will support efforts to increase the number of individual donors. We recognize that increasing the proportion of overall revenues coming from outside funding will take time and expect County funding to remain MCAEL's primary source of funds. With limited staff resources, it is important to identify and focus on opportunities for strategic, long-term funder partnerships and most promising donor relationships. Two of the new foundation targets have an invitation only application process, which will require the Executive Director's time to find a connection to the organization and to build their awareness of MCAEL's programming and impact. Growing the impact of the Spelling Bee through sponsorship and attendance will also require the efforts of the Executive Director and the Board of Directors. Hiring a junior development professional will enable the Executive Director to focus on more high-touch, high dollar major donor and institutional fundraising.

Objectives
1. Focus development resources on major donors and grant funding.
Actions:
    a. Cultivate past participants in ELL classes and others with direct or lived ESL experiences with the financial means and networks to be donors or supporters
    b. Hire a junior development professional responsible for development operations and event logistics
    c. Focus Executive Director development efforts on major donor and institutional funder cultivation and stewardship

2. Differentiate the role of MCAEL versus the role of the direct service providers in our narratives and messaging to funders.
Actions:
    a. Develop clear messaging directed at alleviating concerns from direct service providers that MCAEL is a funding competitor

    b.   Help funders understand the critical role we provide in ensuring a strong coalition within Montgomery County

3. Forge strategic partnerships with new and existing funders in support of our strategic priority to bring programming to underrepresented communities.
Action: Pursue funding opportunities with:
   ● Meyer Foundation
   ● J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation
   ● A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation
   ● Additional potential prospects: HMSHost Foundation, Pepco, Philip L Graham Fund, John Edward Fowler Memorial Foundation, and Corina Higginson Trust

4. Use the Spelling Bee to raise MCAEL's visibility in the community, form connections, build interest in our mission, and increase revenues.
Actions:
   a. Identify networks from Board members, partners, existing donors, and other supporters to increase attendance
   b. Identify and increase the number of sponsorship opportunities and the amount of sponsorship levels

5. Increase Board participation in development activities.
Actions:
   a. Conduct Board training on development
   b. Create Board fundraising toolkit. A fundraising toolkit could include the MCAEL "elevator pitch"; sample emails and notes that Board members can send out to their networks to solicit support; sample thank you notes they can write to top donors; and social media posts to drive awareness of MCAEL and the Spelling Bee

6. Increase the number of individual, corporate and foundation, donors, and average gift size.
Action: Actions identified in objectives one through five will support this objective

E. <u>RESOURCE NEEDS</u>

MCAEL will seek additional resources to support certain objectives of the strategic plan. Specifically:
   • Funding from the County to support greater compensation for instructors and other program needs through grants
   • Funding from the County and other funders to support outreach and program expansion to underrepresented communities and data analytics
   • General operating funding to support development operations, search analytics, and technology

- Staffing:

Role	FTE[4]	Purpose	Timing
Data analytics and technology	0.5	Conduct data analysis, provide data resources for coalition and community partners, and provide tech support for MCAEL programs (e.g., Community Learning Groups)	1/31/2023
Program management and outreach	1.0	Support program expansion and outreach in underrepresented communities	TBD based on budget resources
Development	1.0	Support development operations and event logistics	TBD based on budget resources

F. OUTCOMES, PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MILESTONES

To guide execution and evaluate performance under the strategic plan, MCAEL will use intended outcomes, performance indicators and milestones developed for each of the strategic priorities. Milestones will be incorporated into a separate implementation plan. The implementation plan identifies the timeline and responsibilities for actions and tasks to be undertaken to accomplish the strategic plan objectives. Some of the performance indicators and milestones may be modified as the implementation plan is finalized.

I. **Priority 1: The coalition's English language programs are equipped to provide culturally responsive, learner- centered instruction and reduce barriers to learner participation.**

Outcomes and performance indicators
1. [Effectively managing classes] Utilizing MCAEL offerings increases coalition partners' ability to manage programs effectively.
    a. Grantees show progress on selected continuous improvement goals (grantee reports)
    b. Program administrators' evaluations of MCAEL workshops and trainings
2. [Barriers] A greater number of learners can readily participate in coalition classes.
    a. Sharing lessons learned with the coalition about pilot programs with flexible class options supported by MCAEL
    b. Increase in number of students enrolled in grantee classes overall
    c. Number of programs providing support services (e.g., childcare, transportation)
    d. Number of learners receiving technology support through MCAEL (computers/reduced- cost internet access)

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[4] Full-time equivalent

3. [Culturally responsive classes] Learners receive culturally responsive, learner-centered instruction.
    a. Program administrators provide grant report narratives on how they and their instructors are incorporating culturally responsive and learner-centered instruction into their classes
    b. Learner satisfaction survey responses, learner focus groups and Learner Leadership Group feedback indicates progress toward best practices
    c. Number of reports on learner feedback shared with coalition
4. [Instructor recruitment and retention] Programs have the number of instructors they need to meet current learner demand and programs' goals for expansion.
    a. Grantee instructor retention rates
    b. Instructor satisfaction levels
    c. Number of instructors matched with programs through MCAEL coordination
    d. Number of participants in MCAEL events about teaching ESOL as a job opportunity
    e. Additional instructors attend MCAEL trainings and workshops
    f. Additional participation in Google group or use of new platform for peer-peer sharing, learning, and networking
    g. Grant partners increase pay for instructors
5. [Budget/funding] MCAEL can respond to evolving needs of programs and instructors and changing environment in which the organization operates.
    a. Year over year dollar increase in funding from Montgomery County
    b. Dollar amount of funds designated for new programs and initiatives
    c. Funds designated for updates to existing programs and technology
    d. Additional funds raised to support new and innovative programs, pilots, and other support for the network

Milestones
1. Define standards and practices for "culturally responsive" and learner-centered" instruction.
2. Form Learner Leadership Group.
3. Systematize the review of professional development offerings to incorporate learnings from reports, surveys, and other information from coalition partners.
4. Systematically incorporate learner feedback (from Learner Leadership Group, focus groups, etc.).
5. Provide summary report on program administrator and instructor findings from MCAEL-Compass survey.
6. Annually update MCAEL, Census and other data resources on website.
7. Create or use an existing communication platform for instructor peer learning and sharing (e.g., Google Chat or listserv).
8. Develop staff plan to support and encourage use of the peer learning and sharing platform.
9. Develop an annual impact report.
10. Develop a longitudinal data study to examine impact.

II. **Priority 2: Adults in underrepresented communities will have access to English language instruction and participate at rates in line with other participants in similar classes, supported by new and existing efforts by MCAEL.**

Outcomes and performance indicators
1. [Participation] A greater number of LEP learners from underrepresented communities participate in MCAEL coordinated classes.
    a. Number of potential partners serving underrepresented communities identified and contacted
    b. Number of new class sites in underrepresented communities in MCAEL-coordinated classes
    c. Number of new learners in underrepresented communities in MCAEL-coordinated classes

2. [Pathway for English study] A greater percentage of LEP learners from underrepresented communities participating in MCAEL-coordinated classes continue on to another learning opportunity. Indicator: Number of CLG participants who enroll in further classes within 6 months.
3. [Programs serving underrepresented communities] There are more English language classes offered in underrepresented communities.
    a. Number of classes in underrepresented communities coordinated by MCAEL
    b. Number of start-up programs serving underrepresented communities (broader network)
    c. Number of existing grant partners extending reach to MCAEL-identified underrepresented communities
4. [Employer sponsored English language classes] A greater number of County employers provide employer-sponsored English classes. Indicator: Number of employer- sponsored English language classes supported or arranged by MCAEL.

Milestones
1. Define "underrepresented" and methodology for determining an "underrepresented community" (revisit year to year).

III. **Priority 3: MCAEL is the recognized resource and advocate for adult English language learning and teaching.**

Outcomes and performance indicators
1. [Program administrators and instructors use resources] More instructors and program administrators participate in MCAEL's professional development opportunities and use the organization's data and other resources.

a. Website analytics on parts of site accessed (e.g., Toolkits, Online Resources, Directory)
b. Instructor and program administrator surveys

2. [Outreach to LEP learners]. MCAEL and coalition partners are better equipped to conduct direct outreach to learners. As a result, a greater number of adult LEP learners are aware of and participate in coalition partner sponsored classes.
a. Number of programs and community partners with website links to MCAEL's website
b. Enrollments in grantee classes are maintained or increased
c. Instructor and program administrator surveys

3. [Awareness] MCAEL's role is well-known among community-based organizations and businesses, potential supporters, and the public more broadly.
a. Website analytics on number of visitors to the website
b. Number of programs and community partners with website links to MCAEL's website
c. Number of times MCAEL is cited in the media and asked to participate in convenings, conferences, and meetings of business organizations
d. Number of outreach meetings by MCAEL staff and Board

4. [Awareness] The number of donors and sponsors, and donation and sponsorship revenues increase.
a. Number of individual donors and revenues from individual donations
b. Number of sponsors and sponsorship revenues

Milestones
1. Implement search metrics that facilitate connection to MCAEL through customary browser searches for ESL classes or English language learning.
2. Populate MCAEL website with site relevant keywords, tagging to facilitate connection to MCAEL through customary browser searches for ESL classes or English language learning.
3. Meet with MCPS to investigate partnering to provide information to families and caregivers through ESOL classes.

IV. **Priority 4: Our practices and programs support our internal equity goals and the equity goals of the coalition.**

Outcomes and performance indicators
1. [Diversity] The composition of MCAEL's Board, Grant Panel, committees, and advisory groups better reflect Montgomery County's diverse population and captures community voices in decision-making.
a. Number of Board members with diverse backgrounds (including direct or familial ESOL experience or identify as people of color)

b. Number of Grant Panel, committee, and advisory group members with diverse backgrounds (including direct or familial ESOL experience or identify as people of color)
2. [Staff equity] MCAEL's internal processes and policies promote equity.
   a. Number of staff with diverse backgrounds (including direct or familial ESOL experience or identify as people of color)
   b. Staff surveys
3. [Resources] A broader group of programs benefit from MCAEL's financial resources. Indicator: Dollar amount of Access Small Grants and total Literacy Access Grants

Milestones
1. Complete board recruitment, training, and mentorship plan.
2. Complete Grant Panel, committee and advisory group recruitment and member support protocols and plans.
3. Determine criteria and protocol to evaluate new vendors and external partners.
4. Working group reviews and identifies changes to staff recruiting, hiring and evaluation process and policies.
5. Identified changes to staff recruiting, hiring and evaluation process and policies completed.
6. Develop content for workshops and reference materials for program administrators.
7. Complete modifications to grant application and evaluation process.
8. Systematically review and refine equity objectives and make any necessary changes to internal policies and processes.

V. **Fundraising priority: Increase and diversify funding to support programming flexibility and strategic plan objectives**.

Outcome and performance indicators
1. MCAEL will receive more revenues from foundations, corporate sponsors, and individual donors which can be used to support strategic priorities.
   a. Spelling Bee sponsorships and sponsorship revenues
   b. Spelling be attendance
   c. Number of new funding partners and foundation revenues
   d. Number of individual donors and individual donor revenues

Milestones
1. Hire junior development professional.
2. Secure a new foundation funder.
3. Secure new sponsors for 2024 Spelling Bee.