Our Mission

First Star improves the lives of foster youth by partnering with child welfare agencies, universities, and school districts to ensure foster youth have the academic, life skills, and adult supports needed to successfully transition to higher education and adulthood. We pursue our mission through innovative college-preparatory programs, providing technical assistance to stakeholders, and advocating for policy change.

Revise the mission statement to include the Alumni program and add a vision and values statement.

***First Star is adjusting its ordinary course of action as a result of the COVID-19 health and economic crisis. Scholars’ adhesion to the program, the national organization and each Academy’s financial sustainability are at the forefront of our short-term and long-term strategic plans. Facing this new normal, we have made significant strides on how we are supporting our scholars, engaging with our community partners, and developing new programming through a virtual lens. We have come together as the First Star Network to confront these undeniable challenges.

1. Engaged Board of Directors
   a. Board Membership
      i. Approximately 13 total BODs (10 current)
      ii. Determine who should be transferred to a trustee position
      iii. Add additional board members that suit FS needs
         1. Nom & Gov Committee Convened Q2 2021 to support board growth and priorities areas including a focus on diversity
   b. Board Expectations
      i. Ratify Board Responsibilities document outlining financial and time commitments (committee participation, 100% BOD attendance, and staff support as needed) expected of our BOD
         1. Added Revenue and Academy Standards and Practices Committees
2. Inception of the STEAM Academy largely driven by Board Members and volunteers on their behalf

We will have achieved an engaged board when we have 13 board members, 80% of the board have met their financial commitment to the organization, and 80% have engaged FS staff to further First Star’s mission.

Progress towards goal: We currently have 12 board members. Additional engagement opportunities between FS staff and board members - Expansion sites - we have expanded to Ohio, Sacramento, with the support of board members.

2. Shore up existing academies
   a. *** Recruitment - 30 students per cohort
      i. The organization reached 75% in June 2019, 70% in June 2020* and 71% in June of 2021*
         1. *Global Pandemic - COVID 19 impacted these numbers
            a. 2020-2021 Recruitment Campaign - Monthly Resources from FS to Directors and staff
   b. *** Adding cohorts to existing academies
      i. UCLA, ASU, UM Academies added cohorts
   c. Financial sustainability
      i. Financial Sustainability Talks (FSTs) were conducted with each Academy to understand their financial standing and highlight gaps and opportunities in their funding - Annual practice
         1. ***Check-ins were conducted throughout the year with each Academy to make sure they continued to be financially stable and find solutions to funding challenges due to the pandemic
         2. National Conference presentation & resources on Financial Sustainability
   d. Engagement - building networks at each site
      i. Academies have identified stakeholders; all information located in spreadsheets
      ii. Engaged Stakeholders in regularly scheduled meetings to provide updates on the Academy, received feedback on potential areas of growth, and requested financial support, and discussed partnership opportunities
      iii. *** National Conference presentation & resources on Stakeholder Engagement
      iv. *** Academies that have hosted stakeholder meetings - Sac, ASU, LUC, UM, UU, CSUSB, KSU,
          1. Academies canceled scheduled stakeholder meetings unless online due to COVID from Spring 2020 - Spring 2021
      v. Alumni Program presents at Academy sites with a graduating class
   e. Metric reports per Academy
i. Data Dashboard, Equity Tab, Alumni Survey, *** Revolution Prep Online Learning, Academy Director Survey (Jan 2021) Program - Academic Baseline Assessments, and other forms of feedback

ii. Increased use of surveys and assessments at Academies to hear scholarly feedback. This data was utilized to make programmatic decisions based on scholars’ needs.

f. Alumni Program
   i. Alumni Program is developed and running
   ii. Significant amount of resources collected and utilized by the Alumni community on an as-needed basis
   iii. Alumni survey created and shared to collect accurate information on current students transition to Alum status in addition to our existing Alumni network
   iv. Alumni program presents to the graduating seniors and underclassmen at each Academy to encourage continued engagement
   v. ***Virtual Monthly Meetups (2020) were established to create a national presence and regular connection for Alumni
   vi. National virtual graduation represents first big Alumni event - 2022
   vii. ***Change Reaction Grant secured - emergency funding
   viii. ***Alumni involvement increase 2020-2021 (STEAM PM, Graduation hosts, Internships, Spotlight Series Interviews)

g. FS Network & engaging Academy Directors
   i. Increased frequency of Professional Learning Webinars to Monthly
   iii. Scheduled Monthly one-on-one calls with Academy Directors to provide direct supports, adjusted in Jan 2021 to 3 month ((1) 1:1, (2) Regional, (3) National))
      1. Intentional focus on building community and supporting one another during the pandemic. Leaning on the resources that the network has collectively, as well as to use the space to collaborate and build relationships in a social setting.
   iv. *** Created space for Friday Virtual Meetups - a space for Academy Directors to co-collaborate via Zoom
   v. *** Annual national conference - virtual 2020 and 2021
   vi. *** 2020 Virtual Celebration - added Director participation and acknowledged a director, FS Brilliance Award
   vii. May 2021 - FS National & SAC (Director led) Foster Care Awareness Campaign
   viii. *** 2021 Virtual Summer Academy - 5 Academies are planning/running a virtual Academy that is open to all scholars from across the network
   ix. Engage Directors during 2021 Strat planning week - one day with consultant - SWOT analysis
   x. Academy Director Led Initiatives
      1. Scholar Advisory Committee -
a. Jan 2021 - Scholar led Towan Hall event focused on racism in America and changes to the foster care system that could be made to address racism
b. May 2021 - Social Media Campaign (Big 100) on Instagram focused on the impact placement changes have on youth in foster care and raising awareness.

2. Professional Learning Webinars - for 2020-2021, a Director designed and implement all PDs
3. Data Collection - Fall 2020 - Director researched different types of surveys and data collection systems that could be used at the individual scholar level, however we have not moved forward with implementing any of the identified systems at this time.

We will achieve this goal when Academies are operating at full capacity, with active local convenors that support the Academy Director. Academies will operate with financial transparency, and metrics including alumni.

Financial Sustainability and Stakeholders - continue to be the main focus areas.

3. Strengthen National Organization & Infrastructure
   a. Financial sustainability for FSN/ fundraising
      i. ***We have successfully increased unrestricted funds to allow an additional FTE while maintaining and increasing the months of “wolves at the door” from 8 months to over a year when considering the austerity budget and expected large unrestricted grant funding.
   b. Stakeholder engagement
      i. FS is recognized in national forums with other foster youth agencies - Foster Youth In Action Org Led, Foster More, iFoster (mentorship program); TAY Americorp - Sacramento and LA; CCAI Consortium in DC for Foster Youth and Adoption; Partnering with UFC and NYCL on CA policy and education work - best practices doc and learning webinar; DCFS Director Bobby Cagle; LA County Supervisor MRT; Together We Rise Ready to Succeed, YMCA, among others
      ii. *** FY Education Conference - FS team; Academy Directors, current scholars and Alumni presented a workshop raising awareness of the evidence-based practices First Star utilizes as a part of its Academy model to maintain youth engagement and successful outcomes. Additionally, the workshop highlighted the importance of having staff (peer mentors) with shared lived experiences to provide meaningful connections and ongoing support to youth.
      iii. ***CA Collective
      iv. ***Media opportunities - Nightline, Time, NewsNation PRIME, Foster Boy Panels, CASA panel, Panels team has participated in
v. ***Alum program - iFoster, Change Reaction, Earthshot, Ready to Succeed - Summer Program Peer mentors for BGSA, Comfort Cases, in-person meet ups in Chicago, DC, FL, NJ and CA

c. Demonstrated value to university partners
   i. ***Expanding services to alumni and peer mentor engagement, which increases student retention rates and Baccalaureate attainment rates.
   ii. Stakeholder groups
   iii. ***Value demonstrated by the univ through program persistence in the face of Covid.
   iv. Universities started undergrad foster youth programs after demonstrated success serving this population through their First star Academy
   v. Matriculation data - FS scholars who attend the university UU Alex Smith Scholarship and Kent State - Scholarships for FS scholars who apply and are accepted
   vi. ***Updates on Academy Model Transition During COVID-19 - Consistent emails throughout the transition to virtual programming to University leadership to explain how First Star would continue supporting scholars during the ongoing pandemic.

d. PR and marketing
   i. PR/Social Media has increased significantly, both on a national level and with each individual Academy and added a YouTube channel as a media metric since the Virtual Graduation. National and local news outlets have recognized our org and individual Academies. Monthly newsletters have increased our exposure and reach.
      1. ***Academy Metrics: Seven Academies have started social media handles since 2018
   ii. Shaq in the Hat! Walked with our UCLA students on the red carpet at the PAFF in January 2020 and contributed to the Nightline feature
   iii. ***National STEAM Academy: through BOD involvement and in partnership with Fishbat, a national targeted ad campaign was created over social media, marketing and PR materials were created to increase participation and enrollment, and new content has been created
   iv. ***Website Interaction Increased as well as a redesign to our National STEAM Academy pages
v. ***First Star Ambassador and Spokesperson Engagement increased - Alexandra Daddario, Devin Alexander, Shay Mitchell, Dreion, Jeff Probst hosted our National Celebration

vi. Scholar Advisory Committee- 2021 May’s Foster Care Awareness Campaign and Alumni Spotlight Series

vii. UCLA social media interns brought on to offer new ideas on how we could engage with our Academies and design new templates for use throughout the year

viii. ***Year-End Giving Fundraisers in 2020 on Facebook and Instagram incorporated the entire team and raised….$$$ dollars

e. Staff Retention and development
   i. We retained all employees and modified First Star’s leadership structure: Lyndsey Collins as CEO and Robin Winston as COO. We hired Janice Oyama as the new Director of Academy Engagement, West.
   ii. ***Hired Director of the National STEAM Academy - Dr. Kilan Bishop and five PT peer mentors
   iii. ***Alumni interns
   iv. Hiring a Director of Development, summer 2021

Organizational health will be determined by retaining current employees and academy partners (at 90%), increasing unrestricted funds raised by 30%, and having a higher public profile.

4. Strategic Expansion will be pursued with sensible entrepreneurship
   a. Current priorities include ODU, Mizzou, JCSU, Colorado (2), Sacramento and West Virginia
      i. Expanded to Sac, Kent State and WV (still working on developing the virtual Academy with WV, MOA is signed)
      ii. ***WV is established
      iii. ODU and Mizzou - MOA signed
      iv. Colorado (2) have been set aside as an expansion pursuit and are awaiting a more suitable opportunity/partnership
   b. Engagement - building networks at each site
      i. Through the creation and utilization of the Expansion Management Tool; expansion networks and connections have grown and are actively established to ensure continued development and sustainability
      ii. Multiple expansion sites share our PR & highlight FS within their community networks
         1. 2021 - ODU included FS in their May FC awareness campaign
   c. ***Financial sustainability

2018 Strategic Plan
Development partners were identified and adding to the expansion/stakeholder network to ensure consistent support with identifying funding.

Regular communications with development partner established to discuss and support the financial opportunities and sustainability of the expansion site.

d. Additional sites - To be considered, an additional site must have an entry point commensurate with university leadership or one-year financial sustainability to engage FS staff resources.

i. Kent State is one additional expansion site that is now an operating Academy.

ii. ***WV and STEAM Academy established.

iii. NY and Johnson C. Smith under consideration.

We will achieve this goal by having two new Academies by the summer of 2019 and at least two in the pipeline for winter 2019.

Pipeline Academies include Mizzou, Old Dominion Univ and the FS STEAM Academy.

5. Policy/Advocacy

a. Building relationships with key political individuals that will in due time support First Star and our efforts (Directors of CPS Departments, County Supervisors-Children's Deputies, School districts, Institutional funders, FosterMore, Fostering Media Connections, etc.) to get our students to represent Foster youth on a local and eventually, national stage.

b. First Star will build on its existing presence and take a forceful policy and advocacy position where appropriate by partnering with CAI, Children’s Rights and Foster America to assert policy in various ways in the best interests of foster youth nationally.

i. ***Imagined as the Fix Foster Care initiative, this work has since adjusted to include collaborations with John Burton Advocates for Youth, United Friend of the Children, and National Youth Law Center. Two completed projects - Best practices for FY Seniors in CA document, Combating Summer Melt Webinar.

ii. CA Gov. Newsom and team in addition to CA legislators (working through the budget process for the Sac State funding allocation); Building relationships with DCFs leadership - Los Angeles and Sacramento; Foster More; Funding by LA County Board of Supervisors; CA DSS leadership; Foster Youth Education Fund - LC is a board member; State leadership, Meeting Elected Representatives during the national conference (Feb 2019).

iii. ***CA Collective

1. $30 million FY allocation.
iv.  ***Eradication of For Profit Foster Care Group and successful petition

We will have achieved this goal by engaging at least 4 - 6 high profile/political operatives (ie Directors of CPS Departments, County Supervisors- Children's Deputies, School districts, Institutional funders) that support foster care policy and initiatives. First Star will present the First Star Academy model, and its outcomes at two conferences and First Star will partner with additional foster youth agencies to promote advocacy.

**Measurements of Success**

Achieved measures of success are highlighted in green!!!

1. Engaged Board of Directors
   a. We added three board members by January 2020 who address the organization’s diversity and fundraising needs.
   b. Ratify a board of directors agreement of responsibility by the end of Q1 2019, which includes both financial and committee responsibilities.

2. Robust Current Academies
   a. Ensure all academy cohorts are operating at capacity by July 2019. Current student numbers to measure against: ASU - 16, SB - 16, UM - 28, UCLA is at 27, Rutgers and Rowan 45, ISU is 22, Loyola is 14 seniors, UCF - 10, UCONN - 46, Utah - 20, CUNY - 25
   b. Add an additional cohort at least four current academies; likely expansion targets include UCLA, ASU, CUNY, Rutgers/Rowan, Loyola, and Utah. **UM**
   c. Engage in Financial Sustainability Talks with each academy resulting in transparent budgeting and fundraising action plans by Q2 2019

**Financial Sustainability Talks (FSTs)**

d. Ensure all academy directors are connected with local CPS, and additional agencies in their communities (for example, CASA, City Year, Local School Districts, Departments of Education, & State Funding) **70/30**

e. Data collection through the First Star Dashboard to measure our ongoing efficacy

f. First Star will develop an Alumni program that will track the outcomes of scholars that have exited our program, and create paths for graduating scholars’ continued engagement with First Star as they move through post-secondary education.

3. Strengthen National Organization & Infrastructure
   a. Increase unrestricted funds raised by 30% (from ~$400K annually in 2018 to $520K annually 2019)
b. Increase traditional and social media engagement by pursuing a national news outlet for a First Star national story and individual academy stories in their communities. Increase Facebook likes and Instagram followers by 25 (current numbers are 2200/342 respectively) 2700/1,113 Youtube 11>65 Alumni IG page added, Fox11 News stories and several local stories, ABC story, Ambassadors supporting our work

c. Create a New First Star video with national content - First Star Effect, Revised First Star Family video, will have grad video soon

d. Invest in a competitive benefits package and professional development opportunities for employees - Suggestions from the team - Retirement plan with matching opportunities from the organization; 403b or 401K; family medical; vision and dental; life insurance; short term and long term disability; gym membership; parking passes; public trans; company phones; tech and tech upgrades;

4. Strategic Expansion will be pursued with sensible entrepreneurship

a. We will achieve this goal by having two new Academies by the summer of 2019 and at least two in the pipeline for winter 2019

Sac. State, Kent State

STEAM Academy

5. Policy/Advocacy

a. Engaging at least 4 - 6 high profile/political operatives that support foster care policy and initiatives. First Star will present the First Star Academy model and its outcomes at two conferences in 2019. San Diego conference in January 2020, LC & JG presented at Sac State Conference 2019, Peter’s presentations and the CA webinar 2020, Robin presented to CASA at ASU, 2019 & 2020

b. First Star will build on its existing presence and take a forceful policy and advocacy position where appropriate by partnering with CAI, Children’s Right’s and Foster America to assert policy in various ways in the best interests of foster youth nationally. Adapted into CA Initiative