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Starz #TakeTheLead Writers’ Intensive Returns, Reteams With NALIP, NFMLA for 2023 (Exclusive)

This year's edition will accept submissions between Nov. 13 and Dec. 4.

BY ABBEY WHITE  NOVEMBER 13, 2023 11:00AM



Starz #TakeTheLead Summit RICH POLK/GETTY IMAGES FOR STARZ

The National Association of Latino Independent Producers and NewFilmmakers Los Angeles are partnering with **Starz** for a second year of the #TakeTheLead Writers’ Intensive.

The initiative supports aspiring TV writers from underrepresented backgrounds with desires of working within the world of premium cable. The platform assists emerging talents with cultivating their skills and refining spec scripts, with the guidance of mentors, executives and more established writers.

“We are excited to continue our partnership with NALIP and NFMLA to bring this program to a new class of aspiring writers — many of which reflect the communities, stories and narratives STARZ is committed to amplifying,” said Kathryn Busby, President, Original Programming, STARZ. “With the success of last year’s launch, the program will continue to serve as a pathway for historically excluded creators to have direct access to mentoring and networking opportunities with STARZ executives and industry leaders in order to advance their careers as premium cable writers.”

The program returns just over a month after writers returned to work following a historic five-month strike, with new contract gains that create and preserve opportunities for writers seeking staff positions and career advancement.

“Entertainment has been hard hit by the unfortunate labor issues that have plagued 2023. Writers have especially suffered and had to sacrifice during this time. Unfortunately, nonprofit organizations including NALIP and NFMLA have also not been immune to the effects of these challenges,” say NALIP and NFMLA Executive Directors Diana Luna and Larry Laboe. “To see STARZ standing with writers and our organizations gives us hope. We were thrilled with last year’s stellar participants and we’re eager to support the talent that will be selected for this upcoming edition.”

As part of the program’s 2023 edition, 10 writers will be selected to embark on the first phase of the program, where they will see mentorship from seasoned industry professionals as they craft an episode treatment and pitch. Following phase one, a jury will assess submissions and choose four writers to move on to phase two of the intensive.

“It has been a pleasure to share my passion for writing with up-and-coming creatives and help them navigate the industry,” said executive producer and showrunner Gary Lennon (*Power Book IV: Force Hightown*), who served as a mentor for the 2022 cohort. “This business can be challenging, at times, and it is vital to have programs, like the Writers’ Intensive, that fosters the next generation of talent. I enjoyed serving as a mentor to this cohort as they continue their work to create their visions from script to screen.”

The program opens for submissions on Nov. 13 at 11 a.m. PT, with a submission deadline of Dec. 4 at 7:59 p.m. PT.

Starz larger **#TakeTheLead initiative** launched in 2021 with a study commissioned by the network and conducted by UCLA’s Center for Scholars & Storytellers analyzing scripted original series’ representation from January 2020 through December 2021. That produced findings on inclusion everywhere from series leads and directors to writers and showrunners and the network’s own leadership team. A monthly discussion series featuring thought leaders working at the intersection of inclusion and entertainment, culminating in the first-ever Starz #TakeTheLead Summit.

In 2022, the **Writers’ Intensive launched** in a first-time partnership between the National Association of Latino Independent Producers and NewFilmmakers Los Angeles. Earlier this year, **Starz also teamed with The Inevitable Foundation** on a partnership to expand professional and creative opportunities for writers with disabilities. The effort included professional development grants, with #TakeTheLead also providing funding support to Inevitable’s Concierge service.