



## *Youth-Led Volunteer Initiative for Expanding Global Access to UNESCO World Heritage Sites*

**Submitted by:** Bellwether Forum (United States)

**For:** International Volunteer Year 2026 (IVY 2026)

**Type:** Youth-Led Volunteer Initiative (Non-funding request)

### **1. Summary**

Our youth-led volunteer initiative aims to expand global access to UNESCO World Heritage Sites by mobilizing young volunteers to research, document, and digitally interpret cultural heritage locations. We plan to align directly with the goals of IVY 2026 by using technology as a tool for **education, cultural preservation, and global accessibility**.

Our volunteers will focus on collaborating with local historians and cultural heritage sights to create **immersive digital tours**, beginning with our home location, the Alamo and the Missions in San Antonio, Texas. These tours will be integrated into existing public platforms to ensure free, global access.

We request recognition and inclusion in the IVY 2026 global program.

### **2. Who We Are**

Bellwether Forum is a non-profit organization that is a youth-led network of student leaders across the United States committed to expanding cultural understanding through technology and volunteerism. Since 2024, Bellwether has hosted more than a dozen virtual and hybrid events connecting hundreds of students with global leaders, including former heads of state, UN officials, and policy experts.

Our mission is to empower young people to use technology in service of education, cultural preservation, and global citizenship.

### 3. Project Overview

**Title:** Youth Digital Heritage Initiative (YDHI)

**Pilot Site:** The Alamo, UNESCO World Heritage Site

**Launch:** Q2 2026

**Volunteer Focus:** Research, documentation, community engagement, youth-led storytelling, digital interpretation

Our aim for the Alamo pilot is to create a **standardized digital template and place for sharing** of cultural sites, enabling volunteers worldwide to replicate the model for other UNESCO locations.

### 4. Volunteer Roles and Contributions

#### **Youth Volunteers Will:**

- Conduct historical research and compile accessible educational materials
- Assist in filming and documenting on-site content
- Develop AI educational modules to answer questions on cultural artifacts
- Create youth-friendly scripts and narration
- Support translation features
- Promote the project through community outreach and school networks
- Develop needed partners and sponsors to accomplish all objectives

#### **Local Community Volunteers Will:**

- Serve as cultural guides and storytellers
- Provide historical context and lived experience
- Help ensure cultural accuracy and sensitivity

#### **Digital Volunteers (Global):**

- Assist with editing, subtitling, and accessibility
- Contribute to research and fact-checking
- Help replicate the model for additional UNESCO sites
- Promote the unified site as a place of sharing

## **5. Why This Matters**

Cultural heritage sites act as “snapshots” of a culture. A person can learn so much about a culture’s past and present by going to one of these sights. However, most of these sights require a lot of time and money to visit, and even when people arrive, they are not guaranteed favorable conditions, such as weather or even a knowledgeable and engaging guide. Millions of people will never have the opportunity to visit these sites in person. Our initiative wants to give these people the same opportunities to learn and we believe this directly aligns with the UN Volunteer initiative, IVY2026.

## **6. Project Components**

### **A. Service and Outreach**

- Develop credibility with communities that lack access to culture and travel
- Plan local, in-person events to spread awareness in communities that need access
- Provide access to our project

### **B. Immersive Digital Tour**

- 360° walkthrough of the site
- Narration by a local historian
- Timeline of the site’s evolution

### **C. AI-Supported Learning Layer**

- Optional Q&A feature for personalized learning
- Youth-curated educational prompts
- Multilingual options

### **D. Centralized Site for Online Access**

- Partner with a site with world-wide credibility that will not dilute the value of the work

### **E. Standardized Template for Global Replication**

- A consistent structure for future UNESCO sites
- Volunteer-driven content creation
- Localized storytelling for each region

## 7. Project Timeline (Volunteer-Centered)

### 1. Design Phase

This phase's main objective was to establish a roadmap, which included onboarding organizations as partners and designating phases and teams.

In recognition of UN Volunteer Day on December 5, 2025, our student leaders hosted a "Help for the Holidays" event for disadvantaged families in our community. We collaborated with local organizations and businesses to provide these families free access to holiday sites and experiences in the area. While the experiences provided were "in person access," the discussions prompted the idea about people's desires to see sites beyond local communities.



Talking with these families, our students continue to develop ideas. They then expanded these discussions with community organizations, like museums, educational institutions, and group representatives. They considered what type of sites should be the focus and what type of access should be provided.

Based on this community outreach initiative, they developed this plan.

### 2. Sponsor and Stakeholder phase

This phase includes getting support from sponsors. We have already secured Luby's Restaurants and the Pearl Fincher Museum Museum of Fine Arts as sponsors. The main goal of this phase is to get both the government and private sectors backing this project. For the government sector, our current goals are to reach out to the Texas Land Commissioner and the Mayor of San Antonio, who have oversight of the Alamo. For the private sector, our current goal is to engage with Google Arts and Culture as they already showed interest in helping the UN on cultural sites. We've held a stakeholders dinner scheduled next week for interested sponsors/stakeholders such as former Mongolian President Tsakhia Elbegdorj, former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Sichan Siv, and UN official, Kushal Ramyad.



### 3. The Marketing Phase

This phase will focus on making our proposal a “sellable” idea (how will we get people to support it). This should include contacting our sponsors for input. Upon making our idea “sellable” with a specific purpose we will pitch it to the Alamo. A lot of this phase is up to the marketing team to decide. The marketing team will be holding a fun competition between groups of teens to come up with marketing ideas such as videos, jingles, and designs to utilize on social media and/or other platforms.



### 4. Global replication phase

If the project works successfully with the Alamo and with Google, we can work on replicating it on a global scale. This would include using local tour guides to make tour videos for different UNESCO sights. As with the last phase, this phase is largely up to the global replication team to decide its trajectory. Over the summer, we will have students traveling through and recording UNESCO sites in England, China, South Korea, Mongolia, and Guatemala, as well as students focused on national expansion throughout the United States.

