

A Catalyst For Opportunity

An Interview with Hrag Hamalian, President, TGR Learning Labs and National Programs, TGR Foundation

EDITORS' NOTE As the President of TGR Learning Labs and National Programs for TGR Foundation, Hrag Hamalian oversees all education programming for the nonprofit organization nationwide. He leads an experienced team of programs staff and instructors who deliver high-quality educational programming to students from under-resourced communities. Hamalian is a dynamic leader in education, with more than 20 years of experience in K-12 and higher education along with development and program expansion. Prior to joining TGR Foundation, he served as the Chief Executive Officer of Bright Star Schools. Earlier, Hamalian founded Valor Academy Middle School, a high performing 5th through 8th grade charter public school in Los Angeles. In 2013, he helped lead the strategic merger of Valor and Bright Star, the first merger between two successful charter organizations in Los Angeles. In 2011, Hamalian was the recipient of Boston College's prestigious Gold Award, honoring him as alumnus of the decade. He is a Broad Academy Fellow, Aspen Institute Fellow, an Achievement First Accelerator Fellow, a Building Excellent Schools Fellow, and a Teach for America Corps Member. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for ExED and Building Excellent Schools. He holds a double-major bachelor's degree from Boston College in biology and honors English, a master's degree in secondary education from Loyola Marymount University, and a master's in business administration from UCLA.



Hrag Hamalian

high-quality education. Over the course of the next two decades, I developed my initial charter school into a network of nine charter public schools serving more than 4,000 students in three distinct communities of Los Angeles. Our network, Bright Star Schools, built K-12 pathways with an additional six years of support to ensure students accessed higher education with minimal debt and found their pathway to careers. I also have founded, co-founded and advised several companies and organizations dedicated to improving educational

access including developing software to address diversity in higher education and leveraging technology to improve equity in college admissions and retention.

At TGR Foundation, I've been able to blend these experiences, leading initiatives that provide transformative educational opportunities. My focus has always been on building programs that are scalable, impactful, and inclusive, ensuring that students from under-resourced communities can discover and pursue their passions. Through this work, I've had the privilege of driving innovation in education while developing programs that foster long-term success for students, educators, and communities.

How do you define TGR Foundation's mission and purpose?

TGR Foundation's mission is to empower students to pursue their passions through education in order to unleash their potential. Founded by Tiger Woods and his family, the Foundation serves as a catalyst for opportunity, offering inclusive, state-of-the-art learning environments. Our Learning Labs combine innovative, hands-on education with inspiring spaces that include maker-spaces, classrooms with roll up garage doors and large performance and presentation auditoriums, all thoughtfully designed to foster creativity, collaboration, and curiosity. Many Learning Labs are co-located with world-class sports facilities giving students from under-resourced communities access to sports like golf and tennis, encouraging a holistic approach to personal and academic growth.

Our mission goes beyond education; it's about equipping students from under-resourced communities with the tools, opportunities and inspiration to achieve their dreams.

Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

As President of TGR Learning Labs and national programs, my role centers on expanding our physical presence through Learning Labs around the country while also leading and expanding the Foundation's education initiatives. I oversee our

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Tiger Woods' vision is to create safe, inspiring spaces that empower students to pursue their passions through education. TGR Learning Labs (tgrfoundation.org) provide opportunities, experiences, and mentors that help students from under-resourced communities find their passions and develop a plan for their future. Through programs focused on STEAM educational enrichment, health and well-being, and career and college readiness, students gain the knowledge, tools, and confidence needed to unleash their potential.

Will you highlight your career journey?

My career has been defined by a commitment to educational equity and innovation. At the age of 23, I founded a charter public school, Valor Academy, creating pathways to academic success for students who otherwise lacked access to



Elementary students gather with excitement outside of the TGR Learning Lab Anaheim before a week-long STEAM field trip



Rendering of the TGR Learning Lab due to open in Philadelphia in spring 2025

flagship TGR Learning Lab in Anaheim, California, and drive the development of future labs, including upcoming locations at the Cobbs Creek campus in Philadelphia (opening spring 2025) and Lulu's Place in Los Angeles (opening fall 2026). Planning for other Learning Lab locations nationally is also currently underway.

Beyond overseeing the Learning Labs, I manage our national programs, including our college access programs as well as our professional development for educators. My focus is on scaling innovative, inclusive, and impactful programs while building strong community partnerships. By integrating advanced facilities, learning methodologies and career-connected programming, in partnership with the communities we serve, I seek to ensure that we continue to meet the evolving needs of students and educators.

What was the vision for creating TGR Learning Labs, and will you discuss its education programming?

Tiger Woods envisioned the TGR Learning Labs as safe, inspiring spaces where students could grow, learn, and prepare for the future. The Learning Labs are designed as advanced learning environments, which foster a dynamic and engaging atmosphere. Our education programming spans:

- STEAM Field Trips for Schools: Introducing STEAM concepts and careers in topics as diverse as forensic science, biotechnology, AI, multimedia, and drones.
- After-School Programs, weekend and summer courses: Offering academic support and interventions, more than 30 after-school STEAM courses, and clubs like robotics, esports, and drones as well as Saturday workshops and week-long summer camps.
- College Access Programs: Providing workshops, intensive college-prep programs, scholarships, and resources to support students through every step of the college admissions process. Our hallmark program is the Earl Woods Scholar Program supporting students from low-income communities to matriculate into, persist and graduate from top colleges and universities.
- Career-Connected Learning Programs: Through industry partnerships we provide “learning about work,” “learning through work,” and “learning at work” opportunities that span

career panels, professional networking, industry workshops, project showcase competitions, micro internships, and site visits.

- Educator Professional Development: Equipping educators with the tools and training they need to inspire their students to excel through in person and virtual workshops, training, and resources.

Our goal is to create lifelong learners who are ready to adapt to a rapidly evolving world.

Will you provide an overview of the new TGR Learning Lab Philadelphia?

The TGR Learning Lab Philadelphia is scheduled to open in spring 2025 in partnership with the Cobbs Creek Foundation. This 30,000-square-foot facility will include nine classrooms, a makerspace, a golf simulator, multimedia room, music recording and podcast room conjoined to a driving range, short course, and world-class PGA golf course. It's designed to provide cutting-edge programming for students from elementary to high school in West Philadelphia. Even before opening, we've already made a significant impact in Philadelphia through pre-launch programming, including early elementary math and reading tutoring, STEAM workshops, after-school programs, and college and career-connected opportunities tailored to the local community. The Learning Lab will build on this success, offering inclusive programs that inspire students to unleash their potential.

Where do you see opportunities for growth and expansion for TGR Learning Labs?

We have a great desire to continue to scale our presence in major cities throughout the country and provide our innovative learning environment for youth. Each Learning Lab requires coordination with local community stakeholders, government, school districts, and local organizations as each is designed to reflect the unique needs of its community, blending state-of-the-art facilities with programs that resonate locally. We are currently assessing several new regions to determine where we will grow next. In addition, we see potential in virtual programming that can complement our in-person experiences. We already lead virtual educator workshops and college access workshops to expand our reach to students and educators nationally.

Though physical Learning Labs will always be our priority, with advanced technology like AI and virtual reality moving at rapid pace, we believe in the long term we can also deliver high-quality, interactive education to students and educators who may not have access to our physical locations.

How critical are metrics to measure the impact of TGR Learning Labs' work?

Metrics are the backbone of our innovation and growth. By collecting and analyzing data on student participation, learning outcomes, and long-term impact, we gain insights that inform every aspect of our programming. Through a partnership with the Stand Together Foundation, we are actively building very robust data practices in every aspect of our programmatic work to ensure we can continually improve experiences for students while validating our long-term impact for external audiences.

In our expansion to Philadelphia and Los Angeles, data has guided curriculum design, ensuring we're addressing local needs and achieving measurable results. Metrics also allow us to iterate on our programs, continuously improving them to meet the demands of students and the workforce. As we expand, metrics remain essential in demonstrating our impact to partners, funders and the communities we serve.

Will you discuss the strength and expertise of the TGR Learning Labs' team?

Our team is the heart of TGR Learning Labs. They bring deep expertise in education, STEAM innovation, college and career access, educator development, and community engagement, ensuring that every program is both impactful and relevant. Many members of our team are lifelong educators who understand firsthand the challenges students face and are passionate about creating solutions that inspire learning.

Our team also thrives on collaboration, not only within our organization but also with external partners in fields like technology, healthcare, and sports. This interdisciplinary approach allows us to deliver programs that are innovative, inclusive and responsive to the needs of our students and educators.

What are your priorities for TGR Learning Labs as you look to the future?

- Looking ahead, my priorities are to:
1. Scale impact: Successfully open and operationalize the Philadelphia and Los Angeles Learning Labs while exploring opportunities for future locations.
 2. Enhance and grow educational programs through innovation: We are constantly building new programmatic constructs that resonate with every category of learner and looking to integrate cutting-edge technology, concepts and resources to enrich our programs and prepare students and educators for emerging industries.
 3. Strengthen Equity: Ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to state-of-the-art facilities, world-class programs, and the support they need to succeed.

Our mission remains clear: to inspire and empower the next generation of learners, innovators and leaders. ●