

The Writers' Guild of Alberta (WGA) has embarked on a series of consultations about how we can help writers in the digital age. We recently completed a workshop July 20 – 22 with representatives from various regions in Alberta to explore the issues, the needs of writers in different locations in Alberta, and potential initiatives to benefit writers, so we can develop a collective strategy for the literary arts sector. The next step is to hold meetings in the different regions to review what was discussed at the workshop and get perspectives from as many Alberta writers as possible.

This project was made possible with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts' Digital Strategy Fund. Due to the Canada Council's grant timeline, we must complete these regional meetings by August 17 in order to adequately prepare for the next phase.

Initial feedback from our membership identified three major areas of concern for writers in the digital age:

1. **Copyright:** The federal government has announced that it will be changing Canadian Copyright law and have asked for input from artists. We plan on submitting a formal brief explaining the needs of writers. We are primarily we are concerned with proper attribution and remuneration for our writers.
2. **Social Media / Marketing:** Social media has become essential for writers to promote their work, but it takes time away from writing. We are exploring initiatives that will allow social media to be used to serve writers and writing, and not the other way around.
3. **Internet Access:** With members distributed throughout the province, many of us do not have access to reliable broadband. Reliable internet access is needed for writers to be connected to opportunities, networks, and readers. We are working to find near term solutions to fill the gap between our current challenges and the government's stated goal of having ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.

Our workshop July 20 – 22 brought eleven regional representatives together. The workshop was facilitated by digital experts Patrick Finn and Owen Brierley, who guided us with questions to determine the roles that copyright, social media, and internet

access play in writers' work, what challenges and benefits exist for writers in these three areas, and what possible solutions might the WGA implement to address the challenges.

The regional representatives will host meetings with members in their respective areas within the next month, explaining the proposals we developed during the workshop and getting notes for improvements from regional meeting attendees. These meetings are not restricted to WGA members. We welcome all writers to attend a regional meeting and provide their feedback. It is important that we hear from a wide variety of writers on these issues.

Following the regional meetings, each representative will submit a report on feedback received at the regional meeting to the WGA. These reports will be used by the WGA to finalize plans for initiatives we can take to benefit writers.

Our plan is to put the WGA in a leadership role in the national conversation about writing and publishing, and we hope to share our approach with other organizations across the country. We appreciate the support of various communities in Alberta to facilitate the regional meetings.