

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2027

## Background

The Writers' Guild of Alberta is a provincial arts service organization that provides services and resources to both professional and emerging writers in Alberta. The WGA provides value to writers by:

*Skill Building* – Offering programs and resources that help writers grow.

*Association* – Bringing together writers to share knowledge and inspiration, creating a sense of community among Alberta writers.

*Influence* – Serving as a voice for writers in Alberta; advocating for the rights of writers.

In the spring of 2022, the WGA transitioned to a new executive director and several new board members. The WGA Board met to develop a five-year roadmap to work towards strengthening our organization and our impacts.

Through online sessions, the Board and staff explored the history of the organization, trends affecting the WGA, the current state of the organization, and where we want to be in five years. We considered the question “*What is the conversation out there about the WGA?*” and reflected on what this tells us of WGA’s relationships. This work informed the strategic plan.

## Context

Recent years have been particularly difficult for writers; research and news stories emphasize how the arts sector in Canada has been one of our hardest hit industries.

From 2020 to 2022, the WGA’s in-person programming had to be shut down or redesigned. Fortunately, we had completed work prior to the pandemic to help us transition to a greater digital presence. This put us in a strong position to shift to online engagement in innovative ways. Despite distancing and public health restrictions, we garnered more diverse input, speakers, and mentoring opportunities across greater distances, drawing participants from remote areas of the province.

It is vitally important for the WGA to respond to the needs of our changing (and changed) community with relevant and innovative programs and services. As the largest writing organization in Canada, we are uniquely positioned to build a stronger community and collective voice, welcoming and embracing the diversity of writers and writing this province has to offer.

# Our Strategic Priorities for 2023-2027

1

Membership  
Engagement

2

Equity,  
Diversity, and  
Inclusion

3

Defining and  
Promoting Our  
Identity

4

Advocacy

5

Funding

6

Effective  
Governance

## Vision

A thriving writing community that is diverse, valued, and celebrated.

## Mission

We support and advocate for writers at all stages of their writing life, providing opportunities to connect and grow.

## Guiding Beliefs

- The literary arts are essential to the well-being of all individuals and communities and contribute to the economy and quality of life in Alberta.
- Networking and collaboration are beneficial to innovation and the creative process.
- A safe and welcoming environment, one that respects and invites diversity and inclusion, is essential for writers to pursue their craft.
- Knowledge and ongoing development are fundamental to creative growth.

## Core Values

Community

Advocacy

Relationship Building

Growth & Development

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

# 1: Membership Engagement

## Goal

Build and strengthen our diverse community through ongoing engagement, ensuring our programs and services respond to member needs.

## Strategies

- Update membership demographics in order to identify where significant membership change has occurred and where opportunities may exist for growth (e.g., age, membership type, location).
- Conduct a membership survey/needs assessment regularly to better understand member issues.
  - ◆ Establish the frequency and scope of assessments on a needs basis to help us recurrently evaluate relevancy and responsiveness in alignment with strategic priorities.
  - ◆ Implement a survey tool when people join or renew their membership.
  - ◆ Develop and implement key recommendations based on results.
- Investigate volunteer roles for established members, including youth-camp alumni, to serve as advocates, mentors, and ambassadors for writing.

For each initiative, identify our intent and the problems we are trying to solve, measuring impacts, engagement, outcomes, and unintended consequences.

**NOTES:** The WGA's total membership numbers have dropped about 10% over the past 15 years. Membership numbers in 2021 totalled 945, compared to a 2013 total of 1005, and a 2006 total of 1056.

The last formal membership survey was conducted in 2014 and provided important information about demographics and priorities identified by members. A needs assessment will help us better understand our current demographics as well as determine member awareness of our services, including what we offer as the WGA that others don't, what services members use and value, and what services/programs they want to see more of. The results of our needs assessment will also provide valuable insights related to diversity and inclusiveness.

## 2: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

### Goal

Invite, encourage, and embrace the value of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

### Strategies

- Establish a standing committee or project team to help us better understand equity, diversity, and inclusion, building on the recent *Equity Task Force Report* and *Indigenous Writers' Engagement Report* to determine where the WGA and its offerings match the needs of the broader community.
  - ◆ Resulting recommendations will focus on ways to remove barriers and build inclusiveness (e.g., adaptations to policies, website content, social media, programming, etc.), including the necessary resources and training.
- Reach out and build bridges with underrepresented groups.
  - ◆ Start a conversation with persons who might act as touchpoints. Invite them to participate in the needs assessment and examine ways the WGA might adapt to better meet needs.
- Share our findings and activities related to equity, diversity and inclusion through all communication channels.

**NOTES:** We have not clearly defined what diversity and inclusiveness means to the WGA or how our understanding and practices reflect Alberta's cultural landscape.

Diversity can focus on *writers* and the ways we embrace and encourage participation from writers of different ages and stages, locations, ethnicities, genders, and under-represented groups. Diversity can also focus on *writing* and whether a WGA membership provides equal value for those engaged in specific writing by genre (e.g., romance, speculative) and type (e.g., poet, playwright, children's writer). By broadening our understanding of who we currently represent and who is missing, we can better determine specific approaches to become more inclusive.

Our needs assessment results (Strategy Priority 1) will provide valuable insights. Additionally, much diversity and inclusion work has already been done by Alberta's art sector, including best practices related to policies, programming, and people. The WGA can tap into these findings, along with the results of our needs assessment, to help us determine strategies going forward.

## 3: Defining and Promoting Our Identity

### Goal

Refresh our identity, better framing how the WGA is explained, and expand our promotions and communications so more Albertans know and support who we are and what we offer.

### Strategies

- Develop key messages, using the refreshed mission, guiding beliefs and values approved as part of this Strategic Plan to help explain and promote the Guild through all communications including the website, *WestWord*, and social media.
- Complete the current website review of content, design and infrastructure to ensure that we cement the WGA brand as “the place to go for writers” with consistent, relevant, and inclusive messaging.
- Increase our social media activity, including new and varied platforms, to consistently help writers in Alberta find us, feel they belong, and access helpful resources.
  - ◆ This may include one platform to capture questions and redirect to another platform where applicable.
  - ◆ This may require a dedicated communications staff role, with associated dedicated resources.
- Reach beyond our normal audience by aligning and allying with writing community groups and events in Alberta.
  - ◆ Host info booths with banner at key events.
  - ◆ Seek out events that go beyond our historic norm.
- Identify educational opportunities to promote the WGA’s offerings.
  - ◆ Alberta Teachers Association, school boards, and university and college writing programs.
  - ◆ Determine the level of contact: focused or general.

## 4: Advocacy

### Goal

Continue to be the collective voice of Alberta writers, robustly advocating on issues impacting writers and protection of their work.

### Strategies

- Serve as a watchdog on issues affecting writers and join in actions with other writers' groups to advocate our views to decision makers.
- Serve as an advocate to members by linking them with resources and organizations that can help resolve issues such as contract or copyright infringement disputes.
- Actively seek relationships and partnering opportunities with governments, funding agencies, writing organizations, and public, community, and library associations.

**NOTES:** Many of the opportunities that Alberta writers benefit from today did not exist until the WGA advocated and fought for them. The WGA took a lead role in lobbying for a literary arts foundation, which resulted in the creation of the Alberta Foundation for the Literary Arts (AFLA) in 1984. AFLA brought much needed new money into literary Alberta, including substantial grants to individual writers and more operating funds for the WGA. When the provincial government rolled AFLA and other cultural groups into the Alberta Foundation for the Arts in 1991, the WGA continued to be the official watchdog. For nearly three decades, the WGA has been declared the Public Arts Service Organization for the discipline of writing in Alberta, ensuring ongoing funding and a seat at the government table.

Since our inception in 1980, advocacy has been at the heart of who we are as an organization. Because of the work we have done and continue to do, Alberta writers' voices are heard on issues that are important to them.

## 5: Funding

### Goal

Ensure the WGA is positioned for sustainability and growth by building diversified funding streams and adequate staffing.

### Strategies

#### Endowments/Planned Giving

- Enhance and promote the endowments/planned giving program with targeted recruitment and advertising.
  - ◆ Ensure we have infrastructure in place to accept securities and assets.
- Provide options where donors can support what is most meaningful to them, (e.g., literary awards, WGA operations, ongoing programs or individual participants.)
- Build and maintain relationships with donors.
- Give consideration to reimplementing the Fund Development Committee as a standing committee.

#### Grants

- Continue to actively seek foundation and corporate grants.

#### Sponsors

- Build the sponsor pool and strengthen individual giving.
- Build and maintain relationships with sponsors, aiming to develop long-term commitments for stable funding.

#### Fundraising

- Set a fundraising goal.
- Add fundraising activities to the WGA's existing events such as the conference, AGM and Gala. Piggyback with fundraising at other groups' events.

#### Staffing

- Set budget and staffing to support the strategic priorities.
- Give consideration to contract a dedicated fund developer.

**NOTES:** Approximately 50% of our current budgeted income comes from grants, with 30% from programs and memberships and less than 10% from donors and sponsors. This funding split has been consistent over many years and despite considerable efforts by past boards to fund raise and find new corporate and individual sponsorships. Over the last 10 years, the WGA has established endowment funds with the intent that these would grow to enable us to be more self-sufficient and reduce dependence on grants.

Fundraising and sponsorship are essential to keep pace with increasing expectations for enhanced services and programs. The goals identified in this strategic plan are contingent on the ability of the Board and staff to create new and sustained funding strategies, maintain appropriate staffing level, and establish realistic budget and operational priorities.

## 6: Effective Governance

### Goal

Ensure the Board is continuously growing and holding ourselves accountable to effective governance.

### Strategies

- Review policies and update regularly; create policies as needed.
- Review and establish clear goals for the youth committee and whether to continue its overlap between policy and operations.
- Establish clear guidelines on Board activities related to fund development and fundraising.
- Provide a board orientation early in the new board term that outlines our governance model and the clear split between Board and operations.
- Encourage all board members to take on active roles in order to increase commitment and retention and reduce board turnover.
- Implement an annual calendar and annual board evaluation.
- Support an effective Board/Executive Director relationship with ongoing communication, effective oversight, and an annual ED evaluation that supports their growth and development.
- Identify skills and perspectives for board recruitment to help ensure the Board represents a diversity of people and skills.
- Involve members on committees in order to expand our capabilities, to meet our strategic goals, and as a way to develop potential board members.