

Excerpts of the 11-page Final Report for the WGA Indigenous Writers' Engagement Research — internal document, please do not share. Personal details removed for privacy.

The Project

In April 2017, the Writers Guild of Alberta (WGA) sent out a call for proposals for a person of Indigenous descent to conduct research on behalf of the WGA. The research focused on three key areas.

1. Determine the best practices for the WGA to form relationships with Indigenous writers and recommend programming based on those findings.
2. Consult organizations that prioritize programming for non-dominant cultures, with priority on Indigenous cultures.
3. Assess findings and develop a report for the WGA to build future work upon.

The goal of this research is to determine how the WGA can better serve Indigenous writers in Alberta and connect them to opportunities that will help in their success as writers. This research examines ways to directly extend the WGA's mandate of "inspiring, connecting, supporting, encouraging, and promoting writers and writing" to Indigenous writers in the province.

Research Methodology

The planned research methodology for this project focused on personal interaction with Indigenous writers. The most effective way to conduct the research meetings would be group sessions as well as one-on-one interviews. In-person discussions are always the preferred method of talking with Indigenous peoples.

The research would be extended to organizations across Canada that deliver programming for Indigenous writers.

This work was to be completed within three months – the contract was signed on June 2, 2017 to be completed by August 31, 2017.

Background Research

In addition to speaking directly with Indigenous writers in the province, background research was conducted to gauge the state of Indigenous writing and publishing across Canada and the impact this may have on future programming. Much of this work was conducted online, but the research also included attendance at the Writing Stick Conference (June 8-10, 2017), which was attended by people at all levels of writing and publishing. Research was also conducted in person at the Indigenous Editors Circle workshop (August 14-18, 2017).

Of the 33 active writing-related organizations in Canada listed on the Writers Union website, three clearly indicate programming for Indigenous writers. The National Reading Campaign has the Aboriginal Policy Initiative, but that is directed at increasing literacy and reading levels among Indigenous children in Canada, rather than at writers. PEN Canada does not have distinct programming for Indigenous writers, but it does hold literary events that focus on Indigenous authors and issues. Similarly, the Quebec Writers Foundation holds workshops on Indigenous writing but does not have long-term programming. The

clearest example of Indigenous programming and workshops for Indigenous writers is the Saskatchewan Writers Guild (SWG).

Conclusions

The background research indicates a lack of resources and programming across Canada for Indigenous writers. New initiatives such as the IEC and ILSA help to expand those resources, but there are still significant gaps.

The lack of resources plays out in various negative ways in the industry. At both the Writing Stick Conference and the Indigenous Editors Circle, participants learned about the ways that manuscripts by Indigenous writers have been mishandled because there are few advocates for Indigenous writers. In addition, Indigenous writers themselves often don't have the knowledge they need to navigate the industry.

Recommendations for Indigenous Writing Programs

The following recommendations come directly from research participants, the SWG's programming and the researcher's knowledge of the issues. For efficiency, the recommendations are directed at the WGA, but all should be done in partnership with Indigenous writers who would lead the actual work. The research indicates that items one to three should be a priority.

There are two primary types of recommendations in the following list: those that can be implemented in a timely manner with little financial cost to or significant planning for the WGA and those that will take time and effort. A combination of the two types of programming would be most effective.

Recommendations for WGA Staff Training

Several respondents applauded the WGA for including staff training in their research and see it as a positive step forward. Potential training is extensive — the recommendations listed here are a starting point that will provide WGA staff with a firm foundation in the issues they will face as they build new relationships with Indigenous writers.

Finally, a non-training recommendation: in order to build trust between Indigenous writers and the WGA, it is important to make sure there is always Indigenous representation within the organization that should be acknowledged and tapped for their experience.