Inside **Philanthropy**

The State of American Philanthropy

Giving for Writing &

&
Literature

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ABOUT INSIDE PHILANTHROPY

Inside Philanthropy is a digital media site that covers the world of charitable giving. We report daily on foundations, major donors, and trends in philanthropy. Through our GrantFinder resource, we also profile and track thousands of funders working across key issue areas and geographic regions. Inside Philanthropy is supported by reader subscriptions and advertising. We do not receive funding from any other source. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com

ABOUT THE STATE OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

The State of American Philanthropy is a series of background papers on important topics and trends in U.S. philanthropy. The papers draw on past research and reporting by IP writers, as well as new interviews, grantmaking data, and other sources. Learn more at insidephilanthropy.com/state-of-american-philanthropy.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nonprofits, and the philanthropic dollars that support them, are critical to a vibrant literary culture. Their importance is only likely to grow as the publishing industry continues to consolidate, narrowing the number of titles and the types of books published commercially.

Yet philanthropic giving for writing and literature is minuscule compared to other artistic disciplines. Funders often erroneously assume that literature is commercially viable. Furthermore, other artistic disciplines, such as film, theater and the visual arts, have a denser network of nonprofits. Nonprofit literary organizations are generally smaller and less visible within their communities than other art nonprofits.

Funders that gloss over writing and literature, however, may be missing out. A little funding goes a long way in this discipline; unlike other forms of artistic expression, creating literature does not require expensive equipment and materials—though it *does* require the writer to have money to live on while they're writing, as well as a dedicated space to write in. In the words of Virginia Woolf, it takes "money and a room of her own." Or, in the words of one foundation leader interviewed for this report, "the return on your investment is shockingly high in writing."

This brief summarizes the state of philanthropic giving for writing and literature based on interviews with funders and nonprofit leaders, a survey of professionals working in this field, relevant research and data, and long-term reporting on the topic from Inside Philanthropy. This State of American Philanthropy brief on philanthropic support for writing and literature details:

Who's Giving

- Giving is dominated by private foundations, community foundations and individual donors. Unsurprisingly, corporate donors in this area are few.
- A handful of private foundations the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in particular are influential in this space.
- Funding for literature is anemic when compared to other areas of arts and culture. Funding does not appear to be increasing significantly over time.

Who's Getting

- Recipients of philanthropic funding are broadly classified as individual writers, nonprofit literary arts
 organizations, libraries and education organizations.
- Literary nonprofits have few grant opportunities and cannot rely on them on an ongoing basis.
- Philanthropy plays a larger role for writing and reading education organizations, which are also more likely to receive support from community foundations, corporations and governmental funders.



The Big Issues and Funding Trends

- Emergency funding for writers and nonprofit literary organizations became a priority during the COVID-19 era, but that small surge has since abated.
- Donors increasingly pursue initiatives that leverage literature to advance social and racial justice and promote civic engagement.
- Funders have historically followed a traditional model of awards for writers and project-specific grants.

 They are slowly adopting new strategies like collaborative funding and an emphasis on infrastructure.
- In the face of neo-conservative attacks on books that supposedly promulgate "critical race theory," new funding is earmarked for advocacy and fighting book bans.

Equity in the Sector

- Funders increasingly focus on equitable grantmaking, recognizing that the literary world has been predominantly white- and male-dominated.
- Funders consider multiple dimensions of diversity, funding nonprofits that promote women, LGBTQ+ and immigrant writers, as well as writers with disabilities.
- While more conversations about equity are taking place, some nonprofit leaders believe that grantmaking processes have not fundamentally changed, and that those processes exclude organizations serving disadvantaged groups.

Fundraising Now

- While a handful of funders have long been committed to writing and literature nonprofits, there continues to be a frustrating lack of funder attention to nonprofits supporting this area, despite a general cultural understanding that literature is important.
- An encouraging trend is more funding for programs and initiatives related to social justice some major funders have signaled that they see literature and writing as powerful forces for social change.
- Another promising trend that emerged in response to the COVID-19 crisis is closer collaboration among groups of funders and intermediaries. This model may become more common.

The extraordinarily limited array of funding sources for writing and literature nonprofits is, according to nearly every person interviewed for this brief, simultaneously the biggest challenge and opportunity for the field. Two other specific concerns frequently mentioned in conversions with funders: the lack of support for nonprofit publishers and for rurally-focused grantees. Looking ahead, a uniting aim among literature funders and nonprofits is simply to highlight the importance of supporting the writers and artists who produce the books and literature that are so important to our cultures and society.



Introduction

In 2019, Sarah M. Broom received the National Book Award for Nonfiction for a memoir of her family's life in New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina. In a review for the New York Times, critic Dwight Garner writes that "The Yellow House" is "a major book that I suspect will come to be considered among the essential memoirs of this vexing decade."

How did a book like "The Yellow House" come into being? As she worked on a final draft, Broom received a creative nonfiction award from the Whiting Foundation, a grant for ambitious projects. The idea for the memoir emerged after publishing pieces in the Oxford American, a nonprofit literary magazine that Broom says feels like home. Those early pieces, and later, much of the book itself, were written at arts residences across California, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York and Wyoming. And years earlier, like many aspiring writers, Broom enrolled in a writing workshop at the 92nd Street Y in New York City.

The work of a writer is largely invisible, and outside of a book's acknowledgment pages, the role that nonprofit organizations play in the careers of writers is underappreciated. Awards and fellowships give writers some financial stability and allow them to spend time on challenging projects. Editors at literary magazines and journals help writers find their voice, and literary centers and residencies provide them with a community. "There are very few writers who go on to have prominent careers who have not been nurtured along the way by smaller grants and prizes and by residencies,"

said Daniel Reid, executive director of the Whiting Foundation, in an interview for this report.

Nonprofits, and the philanthropic dollars that support them, are critical to a rich literary culture. Their importance is likely to grow as the commercial publishing industry consolidates, narrowing the number of titles and the types of books that are published commercially. In response to an Inside Philanthropy survey of those working in the sector, one fundraiser noted that "the trend is toward homogenization of popular mass-market bestsellers rather than literary work, which is struggling to survive."

Nonprofit publishers and other literary organizations counter that trend and must be supported to exist, let alone thrive. "The nonprofit status serves as a buffer against sales so that our editors have the freedom to publish books that meet the mission and that they personally feel passionate about," said Josh Ostergaard, senior development officer at the nonprofit publishing house Graywolf Press.

Yet, philanthropic giving for writing and literature is minuscule relative to other artistic disciplines. An analysis of Candid data spanning from 2019 to 2023 shows that the funders included in Candid's dataset gave \$535 million to writing and literature programs in the United States, substantially less than what they gave to the visual arts (\$3.8 billion), music (\$8.9 billion), or theater (\$6.9 billion) during the same time period.

This discrepancy in giving to different art forms is related to several factors. Most obviously,



literary works, aside from readings and spokenword events, do not require costly performance or exhibition spaces. Still, funders in the arts often gloss over literature. One respondent to the IP survey believes that "within the arts, there is very little support for literary organizations because

philanthropy assumes that literary work is supported sufficiently by the marketplace." In reality, publishing revenues have declined for decades, and exceedingly few writers can make a living solely by writing. Courtney Hodell, director of literary programs at Whiting, notes that "most of the writers that we work with have one or two or more jobs that they do in order to buy themselves the privilege of being able to sit at their desk and do their work, the work that really matters to them."

Other artistic disciplines also have a denser network of related nonprofit organizations. "It's the rare city without a theater and without a museum and without orchestras or choruses," said Ben Cameron, president emeritus of the Jerome Foundation, a Minnesota-based arts funder. "Literature is predominantly an individual pursuit, and many cities don't have that infrastructure landscape in the same way."

Jen Benka, the former president of the Academy of American Poets, counted 400–500 incorporated nonprofits in the United States whose central mission is supporting, employing, publishing, presenting or archiving the work of writers. In comparison, there are more than 35,000 museums, 1,200 theaters, and 1,000 nonprofit orchestras across the country.

Nonprofit literary organizations, with the possible exception of literary centers, are less visible within their communities compared to arts organizations that host public events. They tend to be smaller, and few have annual operating budgets larger than \$1 million. But these small operating budgets don't make writing organizations any less important or essential to the artists and writers who rely on their services. Philanthropic funders, unfortunately, tend to see smaller organizations as less important. "We don't blip on the radar of philanthropy," said Benka.

The Lay of the Land

Who's Giving

Giving for writing and literature is dominated by private foundations, community foundations and individual donors. Private foundations are arguably the most influential player in this space, particularly the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, and a handful of small foundations with a particular interest in this topic. Private foundations shape how other funders approach their grantmaking in this area.

Among the larger foundations, Mellon, Ford, MacArthur and, to a lesser extent, Kellogg are four that have shown sustained interest in this sub-area of arts and culture. Smaller foundations that specialize in grantmaking for writing and literature include the Lannan Foundation, Whiting Foundation, the Jerome Foundation and the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. Community foundations typically support literature to a small degree. A small number of community foundations show a particular interest in literature and writing nonprofits, including the Cleveland Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation.

A handful of major individual donors have supported literature, notably MacKenzie Scott, as we will explore later in this report. Back in 2002, Ruth Lilly, heir to the Eli Lilly and Company pharmaceutical empire, gave a \$200 million gift to the Poetry Foundation. Arts supporter Agnus Gund has funded many writing programs for those impacted by the criminal justice system through her fund at the Ford Foundation, the

15 Theater Funders to Know

Shubert Foundation

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Howard Gilman Foundation

Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

MacArthur Foundation

Ford Foundation

Ahmanson Foundation

Creative Capital

New England Foundation for the Arts

Davee Foundation

Knight Foundation

William Penn Foundation

Richard King Mellon Foundation

Reva and David Logan Foundation

Bonfils-Stanton Foundation

Arts for Justice Fund. The author James
Patterson has become a key funder for writers. A
newer literature funder is the Crankstart
Foundation, the philanthropy of venture
capitalist Michael Moritz and his spouse, the
author Harriet Heyman. And notably, the
Hawthornden Foundation has become an
important funder after receiving a substantial
boost to its endowment upon the passing of its
benefactor, Drue Heinz, the former long-time
editor of *The Paris Review*.

The Inside Philanthropy survey of philanthropy professionals shows that roughly the same number of respondents working in the writing



and literature field think that philanthropic funding levels are gaining momentum as those who think it is losing traction. "I feel like the funding horizon has been fairly constant," said Cameron of the Jerome Foundation.

Nevertheless, some funders are hopeful that interest in writing and literature within philanthropy may grow. One reason for optimism is the appointment of Elizabeth Alexander, an accomplished writer and poet, as president of Mellon in 2018. Alexander was previously director of creativity and free expression at the Ford Foundation. "The biggest thing that has happened to the nonprofit literary arts in terms of philanthropy is Elizabeth Alexander and her role first at the Ford Foundation, and now, of course, at Mellon," said Benka of the Academy of American Poets. "She is an esteemed poet and she, in her post, has brought visibility to literature."

Under Alexander, Mellon has launched major funding initiatives related to literature, such as a three-year, \$4.5 million grant to fund poet laureate positions across the United States. As National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chair Dana Gioia told NPR after the announcement, multi-year and multi-million-dollar grants to literature are extremely rare. Mellon has also made social justice central to all aspects of its work. Funders of writing and literature, and of the arts more broadly, have paid attention to Mellon's giving priorities, as it has long been considered a leader in the field.

Who's Getting

Philanthropic funding for writing and literature can be classified into three broad categories: grants, residencies and fellowships supporting individual writers; nonprofit literary arts organizations and publishers; and education organizations or libraries that offer literacy and creative writing programs. Each of these categories can be further divided by programmatic focus — fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, spoken word, and playwriting, for example.

Notably, some of the most consistent recipients of literature funding are theaters or organizations that support the dramatic arts, which intersects with literature funding if they support drama writing. The Folger Shakespeare Library, for example, consistently receives grants from arts funders. The Writers Theater, a theater company based north of Chicago that runs a literary development initiative, is also a popular grant recipient for arts funders in Chicago and the Midwest.

Some of the largest recipients of literature grants are funding intermediaries such as the Academy of American Poets, which play a key role in selecting and disbursing funds to writers and smaller local organizations. The American Library Association and PEN America are likewise grant recipients that re-grant to individual artists through their own programs.

Education-focused organizations are common recipients of writing and literature funding. Youth Speaks is a spoken poetry program that operates in several cities. 826 Valencia is a nonprofit with a national network of writing and tutoring centers. Educational organizations, particularly those that operate in multiple cities, generally have operating budgets that dwarf those of other literary nonprofits like writer centers or independent publishers.



In recent years, national and regional arts funders are more attuned to funding organizations focused on nurturing the talents of emerging writers of color. One example is The Loft, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that "advances the power of writers and readers to craft and share stories" and that prioritizes "the engagement of BIPOC/marginalized communities." Supporters of The Loft include the McNight Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, and Target Foundation.

The importance of philanthropic funding varies for different types of grantees. For writers and translators, who often work one or more jobs in addition to writing, support in the form of awards and fellowships can be critically important, particularly during the early stages of a project. Translator Jennifer Croft, for example, notes that a grant from the National Endowment

Writers Theatre
Youth Speaks
PEN American Center
826 Valencia
Sefaria
National Writing Project
Folger Shakespeare Library
City of Asylum
Young Chicago Authors
American Academy of Poets

for the Arts "made it possible for me to keep working on Olga Tokarczuk's Flights back when nobody had any interest in publishing it." Croft's English-language translation of the Polish novel won the 2018 Man Booker International Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award for translated literature.

Nonprofit literary arts organizations include literary centers, reading series, book festivals, writing-in-prison programs, writers' residencies, and literary magazines and independent presses. Within this diverse landscape of organizations, the relative importance of philanthropic support again varies. Book festivals, for instance, can obtain corporate sponsorships with relative ease because they stage widely publicized events. The latest edition of the Brooklyn Book Festival was sponsored by Amazon, Disney, Con Edison, JPMorgan Chase and several other corporations.

But for the most part, there are few grant opportunities for literary nonprofit organizations. Many cannot rely on grants on an ongoing basis. Philanthropic support can allow nonprofits to launch new initiatives or expand programs, but it's not reliable enough to serve as a significant ongoing revenue source. Instead, these nonprofits depend on support from trustees and board members, income from events, or earned revenue.

Literary magazines, for example, rely heavily on earned income from subscriptions and advertisements, annual fundraising events, or an individual benefactor. Carolyn Kuebler, the editor of the literary magazine *New England Review*, notes that many literary journals such as the *Kenyon Review* and the *Virginia Quarterly*



Review are affiliated with colleges and enjoy greater funding stability. "A large percentage of literary magazines that managed to stick around for more than a couple of years tend to hitch themselves to colleges and universities," Kuebler said.

Writers' residencies also have few grant opportunities. DW Gibson, director of the writing program at Art Omi, noted in an interview for this report that it can be difficult to get funders interested in supporting a residency program. "We are asking them to fund a process, and that takes a great leap of faith," Gibson said. Foundation support constitutes a small portion of the budget for the writers' program at Art Omi, with trustee support and income from fundraising events making up most of the rest.

Some nonprofit literary organizations receive government grants from the National Endowment for the Arts or state arts councils, although not all councils consider literature a part of their mission. Many of these public grants, however, are similar to philanthropic support in that they are rare, small, and that funding priorities change. Grantees have noted that government grants require a lot of paperwork, a hurdle for small organizations. Nonprofit organizations, however, see a grant from the NEA or a state arts council as an important sign of recognition that they can leverage for fundraising.

Foreign governments and foundations may fund organizations that support international writers or literature in translation. Art Omi, for example, typically hosts writers from around the world in partnership with cultural offices such as

the Dutch Foundation for Literature and the Institut Ramon Llull, a consortium backed by the Government of Catalonia and the city of Barcelona. In the case of Art Omi, these institutions cover half of the cost of hosting a writer from their country or region. Another prominent example of international funding is the Library of Korean Literature, consisting of 25 novels and short story collections published by the Dalkey Archive Press, an independent publisher from Illinois, with support from the Literature Translation Institute of Korea.

Funder Spotlight



Located in Brooklyn, New York, the Hawthornden Foundation was established in 1982 by Drue Heinz. The foundation offers multiple types of support to organizations in the literary arts including literary presses, journals, book festivals, public libraries and more. Hawthornden also awards grants to educational institutions with programs aimed at helping to develop readers. Finally, Hawthornden awards an annual £15,000 prize to British, Irish and British-based authors for works in "imaginative literature" including poetry, novels, history, biography and creative non-fiction.



Another major category in this space are organizations running literacy and creative writing programs. Many such programs benefit children, and in particular, at-risk youth. Arts education is a well-established field and, as a result, these organizations can apply to a wider range of grants, including those from foundations focused on education. And because the impact on local communities is more apparent, youth literacy and education organizations are more likely to receive support from community foundations and corporations, particularly those that have headquarters or major offices in the cities where the organization operates.

Many of these nonprofits receive significant government contracts. Government grants and operating agreements, for example, comprised over 80% of the 2022 annual operating budget for the National Writing Project, which supports writing teachers and programs at K-12 schools. Federal funders include the U.S. Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Giving & Getting Deeper Dive

Giving for writing & literature encompasses a relatively small field comprised of small presses, literary journals, organizations that support writers, and organizations that support the teaching of writing and literature. Crossovers with other fields of philanthropy include, most obviously, K-12 education philanthropy. Writing and English programs in higher education are likewise supported by arts and humanities funders.

In the realm of K-12 education and youth development, some writing nonprofits focus on teaching writing and reading to youth from specific demographies, such as LGBTQ youth, girls, youth with mental health diagnoses, or youth who have interacted with the criminal justice system. These literacy-focused nonprofits might find funding through foundations with youth development or criminal justice reform programs.

Another growing subcategory of literature nonprofits are advocacy organizations that protect freedom of speech and the rights of writers and other creators. Such nonprofits might receive funding from grantmakers outside of the arts and culture space.

PEN America receives more funding from philanthropy than any other literature organization, according to Candid data. Founded in 1992, PEN is a respected nonprofit that runs a wide range of initiatives, including advocacy efforts to combat censorship in education, youth writing programs, and festivals and events. PEN also operates as a funding intermediary, providing fellowships, awards and grants to individual writers. Supporters of PEN include Mellon Foundation, Arizona Community Foundation, Craig Newmark Foundation, and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, an intermediary that handles family fortunes and collaborative funds.

The literature category includes religious and evangelizing organizations, such as the Every Home for Christ/World Literature Crusade.



Poetry and spoken word nonprofits comprise a significant portion of literature funding. Youth Speaks, for example, is a San Francisco-based organization that runs spoken word poetry programs for at-risk youth in several U.S. cities. Supporters include the

Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and Mellon Foundation, as well as California-based donors such as the James Irvine Foundation. Another major grantee in this category is StoryCorps, a popular and rapidly expanding organization that records stories told by people of all backgrounds. Some of the stories are distributed on NPR and other outlets. Another spoken word grantee is the Storyville Center for the Spoken Word, the organization behind The Moth storytelling series.

The relative paucity of funding for small book publishers and literary magazines is notable.

Inside **Philanthropy**Survey

"[Disapproval for philanthropy is growing] and is increasingly seen as a racist tool of the rich that perpetuates inequality, and that pits mission-oriented organizations against each other in a fight over dollars that they limit.

Philanthropy does not believe problems will ever be solved by the organizationshey support and demonstrates that lack of confidence by ensuring foundations will last forever."

-Fundraiser, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Philanthropy grants for the hundreds of small arts publishers in the U.S. are hard to come by. Donors too often believe that publishers can make a sufficient profit through book and magazine sales. The reality is more nuanced, since few titles today generate significant revenue. Examples of publishers and publications that attract sustained philanthropic support include Graywolf Press, Harper's Magazine Foundation, Milkweed Editions, and The New Press.

Some publishers are niche players on a topic of interest to funders. For example, Island Press, a publisher that specializes in books about sustainability, received a grant of \$1 million from the Kresge Foundation.

On the other hand, funders recognize that the market for poetry is small, and that poets need their support. There is a longer history of institutional support for poetry than for other genres of fictional writing. "Poetry has benefited from older institutions like the Academy of American Poets, which was founded in 1934," said Benka of the Academy of American Poets. "Creative nonfiction hasn't had an institution with that much longevity." To this day, the academy remains the largest recipient of philanthropic dollars for poetry.

In 1934, fiction and creative nonfiction may not have needed institutional support. In recent years, however, after declines in book publishing revenue and mass layoffs in newspapers and magazines, where many creative nonfiction writers work, those genres are in need of philanthropic funding.



The Big Issues & Beyond

Some of the most important issues for writing and literature funders include small grants and awards to support low-income writers; combatting the book bans and education gag laws that have become a pressing reality in today's America; and supporting programs that leverage the power of literature to advance social justice and promote civic engagement. A small but important niche area in literature funding is support for translators and publishers that produce works in translation. One nonprofit in this area is the Center for the Art of Translation, which has received funding from the San Francisco Foundation and from Yonder (a reading app), among others.

In the early years of COVID-19, emergency grants for writers and educators were organized by arts funders. Some of these funds have closed, and some continue today. Artist Relief, funded by Mellon, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and more than 20 other funders, provided \$23.4 million in emergency grants in 2020 and 2021, an eye-popping number for writing funders. Poets & Writers magazine, PEN America, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts and other organizations also established emergency funds for writers. One prominent emergency fund was the Literary Arts Emergency Fund organized by Mellon, the Academy of American Poets, the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP) and the National Book Foundation. The fund closed in 2022. These collaborative funds were proof-ofconcept that arts funders can aggregate significant funding to support the writing community.

Funders have become increasingly interested in how literature and writing can advance racial and social justice. Benka of the Academy of American Poets sees storytelling as a powerful lever for social change. "When we think about how individuals begin to care about other people, which is really the root of social justice, one of the best ways we learn about others, others' experiences, others' lives, is through stories," she said.

Funders of literature are particularly active in the area of criminal justice reform. While prison writing programs have a long history—PEN America started its program in 1971—funding for reading and writing programs as an instrument to aid people within the jails and prisons system has expanded.

The Art for Justice Fund was the largest of these efforts. It was initiated by the philanthropist Agnes Gund with support from the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. Gund set aside \$100 million for the fund, and the first round of grants primarily focused on literary organizations. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that Gund credits two nonfiction books—Michelle Alexander's "The New Jim Crow" and Bryan Stevenson's "Just Mercy"—for sparking her interest in the issue of mass incarceration.

The Art for Justice Fund closed in 2023. One of its final grants supported the Center for Arts & Advocacy, a national organization that will continue many of the aims of the Art for Justice Fund. Other nonprofits run reading programs for the current or formerly incarcerated



incarcerated include the Arts for Healing and Justice Network and PEN America's Writing for Justice fellowship.

In 2020, the Mellon Foundation announced that it will refocus its grantmaking to advance social justice. Mellon's literature funding is now more focused on leveraging the literary arts for social change. One grantee, for example, is Freedom Reads, which distributes libraries of curated books to prisons.

In light of the growing polarization and political divisiveness in the United States, funders have become more interested in how literature can strengthen local communities and promote civic engagement. Mellon gave \$4.5 million to the American Academy of Poets to fund fellowships for local poets laureate—the fellowships were designed to allow the poets laureate to conduct meaningful and impactful civic activities. Another funder that focuses on literature as a salve for political polarization is Acton Family Giving, one of the philanthropies of WhatsApp co-developer Brian Acton and his spouse Tegan Acton.

Equity, another major issue for funders, is discussed in the "Perspectives on Equity" section of this brief.

Funder Strategies and Trends

Giving for the literary arts has historically followed a traditional model of awards and fellowships for writers and project-specific grants for organizations. Funders are slowly adopting new strategies, however. One noteworthy recent shift has been a focus on collaborative funding. This focus was jumpstarted in 2020, largely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Founded by Reginald Dwayne Betts, Freedom Reads "uses literature as a powerful antidote to the hopelessness of incarceration." Its programs have shipped over 189,000 books to readers in prisons across the country and has opened 38 Freedom Libraries in adult and youth prisons. The Freedom Library features 500 carefully curated books and the program aims to seed 1,000 libraries across the country. Freedom Reads supporters and collaboraters include the Mellon Foundation, Justice Collaboratory, Ford Foundation, Art Justice Fund, JSTOR, Yale Prison Education Initiative, and the National Book Foundation.

At the outset of the pandemic, funders an urgency to provide swift relief to artists. Several small- and medium-sized grantmakers in the arts, including the Academy of American Poets, joined forces to create the Artist Relief fund.

They were able to launch the fund in just three weeks. Benka of the Academy of American Poets said that the experience may serve as a model for future initiatives. "Pooling of philanthropic resources toward collaborative efforts that are



led by organizations that have expertise in their fields on the ground is interesting, and we're going to need more of that," she said.

Another notable collaborative that may serve as a model for future efforts is the Literary Arts Emergency Fund, which we explored in the previous section of this report.

Another newly popular strategy is capacity-building for nonprofits. The Whiting
Foundation, for example, created an award for literary magazines in 2018 that offers three to three years of funding. Prize winners are part of a cohort that shares best practices. The initiative prompts publishers and editors to think about financial sustainability by arranging sessions with development professionals.

Foundation Spotlight whiting

The Whiting Foundation "provides targeted support for writers, scholars, and stewards of humanity's shared culture." Its Whiting Award program was established in 1985 and focuses on supporting emerging writers. Each year the program awards 10 grants to writers in fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama. Whiting also offers literary magazine prizes, creative nonfiction grants, a Public Engagement Fellowship, seed grants for scholars, and grants to support the preservation of endangered heritage around the world.

The cohort model is also common among writers' residencies, where participants often have a chance to meet with literary agents and other publishing professionals. One unique feature of the Whiting Literary Magazine Prizes is that the foundation provides an outright grant for the first year, but offers a matching grant for the two subsequent years. This structure is designed as a tool for the given publication to broaden it donor base. "Fundraising, as important as it is, often falls to the bottom of the list when people are trying to develop writers, push the work along, and get their publications out," said Hodell of Whiting.

Lately there has been more field-building among poetry organizations. One example is the Poetry Coalition, which the Mellon Foundation funded and the Academy of American Poets administers. The more than 30 organizations that comprise the coalition work together "to promote the value poets bring to our culture and the important contribution poetry makes in the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds." Membership includes nonprofits that "serve poets in the disability community and of specific racial, ethnic, or gender identities, backgrounds, or communities."

Between 2020 and 2023, the coalition ran a fellowship program that paid five fellows per year to work at Poetry Coalition organizations. The coalition deemed this a "pilot project," so additional funding opportunities are likely to emerge. "I'm hopeful because of efforts like the Poetry Coalition that the younger generation of leaders emerging is just going to have more support than their predecessors," said Benka of the American Academy of Poets.



Ben Cameron of the Jerome Foundation, however, cautioned that in general, funders have fallen behind their grantees in adapting novel strategies to support the writing and reading community. "I think literary organizations are thinking in new ways, but I'm not sure funding is happening in new ways," Cameron said. He cited the Open Book, a literary space in Minneapolis co-founded by the Loft Literary Center, Milkweed Editions, and Minnesota Center for Book Arts as an example of collaboration that funders can learn from.

Perspectives on Equity

Over the past decade, a growing number of publishers, nonprofit leaders and funders have recognized the persistent inequities in the field of literature and called for change. These inequities include lack of access to quality reading and writing education; contributory factors like poverty and institutionalized racism; lack of recognition for underrepresented voices; lack of support for community-based organizations working with disadvantaged and at-risk populations; and lack of diversity in leadership positions at nonprofits and among funders.

The high-profile successes of individual writers who aren't white men can obscure the deeply ingrained and continuing inequities in the literary world. The nonprofit VIDA: Women in Literary Arts brought attention to these trends in the area of gender equity. Starting in 2010, it tallied the number of women and men whose work was published, or whose books were reviewed, by major literary journals. Most publications predominantly published the

work of male writers. In response, many editors sought to promote the work of more female authors.

Nonprofits that focus on mentoring girls in writing include Girls Write Now, based in New York City, WriteGirl, based in Los Angeles, and Room to Read, operating in multiple countries.

Funders and nonprofits increasingly view equity through an intersectional lens, addressing racial, gender and geographical inequities all at once. One example is South Art, which seeks to advance "Southern vitality through the arts." They are growing their literature programming, including a literary arts fellowship that launched in 2023. According to reporting at Inside Philanthropy, the extension of literary programming at South Arts is connected to an unrestricted gift from MacKenzie Scott. Doris Duke Foundation and Melon Foundations are other private funders of South Arts, which also receives governmental funding.

The Jerome Foundation, which funds early career writers as well as nonprofit literary organizations, made equity, diversity and inclusion one of its three core values in 2016. As part of that change, the foundation switched from staff-adjudicated to peer panel-adjudicated grantmaking with diverse panels selecting grantees.

"The grants are now decided by a far more diverse, equitable and inclusive group of people than had historically been the case," said former foundation President Ben Cameron. Literary arts organizations supported by the foundation



include the Asian American Writers' Workshop, Cave Canem, a literary organization serving African American poets, and the Feminist Press.

The literary funding world has traditionally neglected non-white writers and communities, so these have been urgently needed changes. "You have white-founded organizations that have been predominantly white-led over many decades who weren't thinking outside of that demographic," said Benka formerly of the Academy of American Poets. "There has been exclusion over time, and also a wakening-up over time that that's not acceptable."

DW Gibson, director of the writers program at the Art Omi writer's residency, has noted a shift in funder support for underrepresented voices and the programs serving those writers. "For the last couple of years, awareness has grown that whatever financial support there is for writers is often geared to white writers, mainstream writers, writers that already fit some sort of mold of what we've been looking for historically," Gibson said. "There's a lot of energy going toward correcting that wrong and trying to find organizations that are already embedded into communities that are helping young writers and writers that haven't traditionally had that support."

A related funding area is promoting diversity in the books that are being read, along with fighting book bans and local education policies that essentially silence non-white voices and whitewash history. The Diverse Books for All Coalition, for example, is a "national consortium of nonprofits and membership organizations working together to increase access to affordable,

high quality children's books by and about diverse races, cultures, identities, and abilities." Funders include the Kellogg Foundation and the Patterson Foundation. Another advocacy nonprofit is Unite Against Book Bans, "a national initiative to empower readers everywhere to stand together in the fight against censorship."



"You have white-founded organizations that have been predominantly white-led over many decades who weren't thinking outside of that demographic. There has been exclusion over time, and also a wakening-up over time that that's not acceptable."

—Jen Benka, author and former president and executive director, American Academy of Poets

Another nonprofit working in this space is We Need Diverse Books, which "aims to create a world where every reader can find themselves in the pages of a book." Programs adminstered by the nonprofit include mentorship programs, support for diversity in publishing, and book donation programs.

According to multiple people interviewed for this report, the racial justice protests of 2020 accelerated discussions about equity that had already been occurring within nonprofit organizations and among funders. "There are a number of institutions in the literary arts that have been experiencing very, very public calls by their community to change and make change," said Benka. She added that the members of the Poetry Coalition have been discussing how they need to change and how they can hold each other accountable in terms of equity and inclusion.

Gender and race are often central to conversations about equity in writing and literature, but funders also consider other aspects of diversity. "We now ask our applicants who are willing to self-identify in whatever dimensions they find most essential to their own identities—a request that elicits a response from most (but not all) applicants, who often lift up issues of sexual orientation or immigration or physical disability—as well as religion or political identity or geographic heritage and more," said Cameron of the Jerome Foundation.

Another equity-focused nonprofit that has received considerable funder attention in recent years is the Asian American Writers Workshop, a New York-based nonprofit that is "devoted to creating, publishing, developing and disseminating creative writing by Asian Americans, and to providing an alternative literary arts space at the intersection of migration, race, and social justice." Recent funders include the Nathan Cummings Foundation, Ford Foundation, and the Surdna Foundation.

Grantmakers fund nonprofits that promote LGBTQ+ and immigrant writers as well as writers with disabilities. Such organizations receive grants from literature funders along with funders specific to the demographic. One example is Lambda Literary, a nonprofit that has hosted an awards gala to celebrate queer authors for more than 30 years. It also publishes a literary review and runs an LGBTQ+ writers-in-schools program and an annual writer's retreat. Lambda Literary receives support from LGBTQ+ focused funders such as the Jeanne R. Cordova Living Trust and the David Bohnett Foundation, and also receives grants from the Literary Arts Emergency Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Accessibility is another area of interest for funders. The past several years have seen a slew of new grant opportunities for disabled writers. In 2021, The Inevitable Foundation launched in Los Angeles, with a mission to support disabled screenwriters and filmmakers, as well as to "use film and television to destigmatize disability and mental health globally." In 2020, Ford Foundation and the Mellon Foundation announced a new fund, the Disability Futures Fellows, which will award \$50,000 to twenty fellows annually to "honor accomplished practitioners in a wide variety of fields, including writing, theater, dance, architecture, painting, and garment making." Carolyn Kuebler, the editor of the literary magazine New England Review, said in an interview for this report that she is seeing more grants for increasing the accessibility of print publications by providing an audio component or making the content available digitally or as an ebook so that a reader can easily adjust font size.



Despite many new efforts, the core criticism remains that the literature field has problems on many equity fronts. A recent *New York Times* article detailed the fact that diversity issues keep coming up among literary organizations, and that "conflicts over race, culture and inclusion have roiled the Romance Writers of America, the National Book Critics Circle, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and other groups devoted to books and literature... In each instance, these organizations have bumped up against a moment in the country when greater accountability is being demanded, perhaps especially in an industry that is generally both fairly liberal and largely white."

Inside **Philanthropy**Survey

"No matter what the programmatic issue, the philanthropic sector must commit to funding efforts that are of and by the communities they are intended to serve. This is the only path to true equity. The sector must absolutely center every effort to combat white supremacy, anti-blackness, and anti-racism. More funding efforts must be made to support people of color and LGBTQ+ people everywhere but most specifically in the U.S. South."

Development and strategic planning consultant,
 Oakland, California



A Closer Look at Funder Types

Private Foundations

Private foundations are an important source of funding for writing and literature nonprofits. The Mellon Foundation is the largest funder operating in this space, and will likely continue to be under the leadership of the poet Elizabeth Alexander. On the topic of the importance of literature, Alexander said in 2020, "Reading is a transformative, dignity-affirming act that reveals who we are to ourselves and strengthens our shared humanity. The knowledge, critical thinking, and imagination found in books enable us to envision freedom and possibility."

Mellon refers to its literature grantmaking as "Power of the Word," and Word grants are sprinkled across several of Mellon's core funding areas: Arts and Culture, Humanities in Place, Public Knowledge, and Higher Education. Recent grantees include national organizations like the National Book Foundation, a number of universities in support of archives and writing fellowships, and small literary presses. While Mellon does not give grants to individuals, it reaches writers and scholars by partnering with organizations such as the Academy of American Poets and the American Library Association for regranting.

The MacArthur Foundation is one of the largest literary funders by the numbers because of its annual MacArthur Fellows selection, often including playwrights, poets, essayists and fiction writers. Another large foundation

supporting the literary arts is Ford Foundation, through its Creativity and Free Expression program, with a strong focus on fairness and justice. The Shubert Foundation, a theater grantmaker, supports playwrights and writers of drama.

The Brooklyn-based Hawthornden Foundation, though little known, has become one of the most important literary arts funders in the world. Established by long-time *The Paris Review* editor Drue Heinz in 1982, its endowment increased significantly after Heinz's death in 2018. The foundation supports "contemporary writers and the literary arts" in the US and globally. Grantmaking expanded significantly beginning in 2023, with grants going to dozens of literary organizations.

The Crankstart Foundation is another new lit funder on the scene. It's the funding vehicle for venture capitalist and former journalist Michael Moritz and his spouse, the artist Harriet Heyman. Literature and writing is a funding area for the foundation, with recent grants going to 826 Valencia and YouthSpeaks. Notably, Crankstart is sponsoring The Booker Prize from 2019 through 2024, and may extend its sponsorship for four additional years.

The Lannan Foundation, based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is another literary arts funder. Unlike Mellon, Lannan works closely with writers and smaller nonprofits in addition to regranting through intermediaries like PEN America. The foundation supports writers directly through annual awards and fellowships. Since it initiated its literary program in 1987, Lannan has given grants to more than 150 nonprofits. Lannan also



runs its own programs, including a writers' residency in Marfa, Texas, and a series of public events with authors in Santa Fe.

Some foundations are strong supporters of writing and literature in specific geographies.

This includes the McKnight Foundation, which gives to Twin Cities organizations, the Jerome Foundation, which makes grants to artists and organizations based in Minnesota and New York City, the Lilly Endowment in Indiana, and the Annenberg Foundation in Los Angeles. Family foundations also tend to concentrate their giving within a region. The Zell Family Foundation, founded by Sam Zell, the chairman of the private

Funder Spotlight



The Jerome Foundation supports earlycareer artists in all five boroughs in New York City and the state of Minnesota. It defines early-career generative artists who are still developing their voices, have yet to be recognized or celebrated by the public at large, and are vocational. Age is not a determining factor. Jerome currently offers grants for film, video and digital artist development, the Jerome Hill Artist Fellowships, and residencies at the Camargo Foundation. For arts organizations, it offers two-year grants to organizations with programs and services benefitting early-career artists working within any arts discipline.

investment firm Equity Group Investments, gives to Michigan- and Chicago-based institutions including Young Chicago Authors, a creative writing program for teens and young adults.

A handful of smaller private foundations are largely focused on the literary arts. The Whiting Foundation has supported emerging writers since 1985. More recently, the foundation sought to identify and fill gaps in funding for the literary arts by surveying writers and other professionals. It established a creative nonfiction grant for ambitious projects such as deeply researched biographies and histories and an annual award for literary magazines. The Jerome Foundation has supported early career artists, including writers, and, more recently, art nonprofits.

Another reliable funder of the literary arts is the Sidney E. Frank Foundation, founded in 2004 by Grey Goose vodka creator Sidney Frank. The arts is one of the foundation's four giving areas, and a sister foundation, the Adrian Brinkerhoff Poetry Foundation, focuses on grantmaking for poetry and is administered by Sidney Frank's daughter, Cathy Halstead. (Click here for Inside Philanthropy's exclusive reporting on the foundation.) Recent grantees include the Academy of American Poets and In-Na-Po, an organization that supports Indigenous poetry.

A few smaller foundations specifically support playwrights, including the Bobbie Bailey
Foundation and the Paul M. Angell Family
Foundation. A newer foundation, the Robert B.
Silvers foundation, supports "writers working in the fields of long-form literary and arts criticism,



the intellectual essay, political analysis, and social reportage," as Inside Philanthropy has reported. The foundation was created after the death of Silvers, a founding editor of The New York Review of Books. Private foundations focused on education such as the Spencer Foundation and the Wallace Foundation have supported literacy and writing education programs, but those grants tend to be a small share of their overall grantmaking portfolio.

Corporate Giving

Corporate funders are occasional supporters of arts education, particularly literacy and creative writing education programs for children and youth. The goal behind this funding is typically to strengthen the communities where their employees live, and therefore, corporations often limit their support to programs in cities where they are headquartered or have large offices. For example, Disney and Sony Pictures have supported the Los Angeles chapter of the 826 youth writing and publishing centers, whereas Wells Fargo and Yelp have given to the San Francisco chapter.

Amazon and Target have been the most prominent corporate supporters of nonprofit literary organizations. Since 2009, Amazon Literary Partnerships has given \$16 million to literary centers, workshops, residencies and independent publishers. Over the past few years, it has funded annual grants for poets and small publications administered by the Academy of American Poets and the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP). Like other funders, Amazon has increasingly paid attention to equity and diversity. Beginning in 2021, its grantmaking targets "organizations that

champion diverse, marginalized, and underrepresented authors and storytellers."

Much of Target's giving in this area benefits the thriving, independent literary scene in Minneapolis, where the corporation is headquartered. Historically, Target primarily supported local organizations such as the Minnesota Center for Book Art, The Loft Literary Center and the nonprofit presses Graywolf and Milkweed. Beginning in 2019, however, Target announced that its grantmaking would prioritize the creation of economic opportunity through "entrepreneurship, workforce development, housing and asset building." Target has since ceased to view literary programs as a funding bucket, though it still occasionally makes grants to literary groups.

Corporate Funder Spotlight



The Amazon Literary Partnership (ALP) supports organizations that "champion diverse, marginalized and underrepresented authors and storytellers." ALP offers grants to national and local organizations, nonprofit writing centers, after-school programs, residencies, literary magazines and more. Grantees include WriteGirl, an L.A.-based organization working with underserved girls and promoting creativity and self-expression; and the Hurston/Wright Foundation which honors and champions Black writers.



Corporations sponsor literary events and book prizes, particularly in their home communities. Commercial book publishers, bookstores, and online reading platforms are likely to sponsor major national book programs or awards. For example, sponsors of the National Book Awards (a project of the National Book Foundation) or the PEN America Literary Gala include Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, Barnes & Noble, and Google Play Books. Entertainment companies like HBO and Netflix, and digital companies like Meta and Twitter, have also supported such events at varying levels.

Community Foundations

Education and the arts are priority giving areas for community foundations, and literacy and creative writing programs for youth sometimes receive grants as part of a foundation's education giving. Community foundations also tend to give to nonprofits that provide a range of services, including arts programming, to at-risk youth.

While there are dozens or even hundreds of community organizations that occasionally make grants to literary arts and education organizations, a handful are known to regularly give in this space. These include The Cleveland Foundation, the Arizona Community Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, The Chicago Community Trust, and the Oregon Community Foundation.

Additionally, across the U.S. there are six regional arts organizations, including Arts Midwest and Mid Atlantic Arts, that make grants to artists and nonprofits in their U.S. region.

These organizations were established in the 1970s by state agencies and The National

Endowment for the Arts, and today are funded by a mix of public and private dollars. Given the general lack of available funding for the literary arts, these organizations are an important part of the funding landscape for writers.

By the numbers, The Silicon Valley Community Foundation tends to be the largest literary arts giver among the community foundations—not because of a particular prioritization of literary arts, but because SVCF is the largest community foundation in the U.S. The foundation also funds nonprofits operating outside of Northern California, with much of its literary funding supporting freedom of speech initiatives. Recent SVCS grantees include The Story Project, a nonprofit for at-risk youth that "furthers the voices of those in marginalized communities," as well as Youth Speaks, a spoken-word poetry program that engages at-risk youth. Youth Speaks has also received support from other community foundations, including the East Bay Community Foundation, the Jewish Community Federation, and the San Francisco Foundation.

The Cleveland Foundation provides significant support to writing and literacy programs for youth. Funded programs include a literacy tutoring initiative run by Greater Cleveland Volunteers and the development of a new building for Twelve Literary Arts, a nonprofit that provides youth programs. Cleveland Foundation has also sponsored the Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards (AWBAs), the only juried American book prize focusing on works that address racism and diversity.

Community foundations also support literary arts organizations and publishers. For example,



Graywolf Press, the Minneapolis-based independent publisher, lists the Minneapolis Foundation, as well as three distinct family funds within the foundation, as annual supporters. Community support for the literary arts seems to correlate to the strength of the local literary scene; funders in cities that have well-established literary nonprofits such as Portland, Minneapolis, Chicago and New York are more likely to donate to the literary arts.

Grantee Spotlight

826LA

826LA offers a number of different programs to students ages 6-18, incuding tutoring, field trips, workshops, and in-school programming. Its Writers' Rooms are on-campus spaces to help build and encourage students' writing and literacy skills. 826LA currently has Writers' Rooms at Manual Arts Senior High School in South Central Los Angeles and opened its second room in 2019 at Roosevelt High School in Boyle Heights. It has plans in the works to open a third Writers' Room in L.A.

Major Donors

Multi-million-dollar individual gifts are rarer for literature than for the visual or performing arts. One notable exception was the \$200 million gift from Ruth Lilly, whose family founded the Eli Lilly and Company, to the Poetry Foundation back in 2002. Another exception was a gift from

Susan and John Jackson in 2006—Mr. Jackson is the former CEO of the pharmaceutical company Celgene—to endow a poetry prize administered by Poets & Writers. Two years later, the Jacksons pledged \$5 million to establish a writing program at Hollins University in Virginia.

In recent years, there are a few major new literary arts donors. The clearest example is MacKenzie Scott, the former spouse of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who has been giving away her vast fortune with alacrity since 2019. Herself a novelist, Scott is one of the few major philanthropists in the U.S. to prioritize reading and writing. Literary grants can be found within most of Scott's giving cycles, but she focused on this in 2021 in particular, when she gave to The Authors League Fund (\$5 million), PEN America (amount undisclosed), Advancing Black Arts in Pittsburgh (\$2 million), the East Bay Fund for Artists (amount undisclosed), Room to Read (\$25 million), Urban Word NYC, and South Arts, among others. In an arts sector that rarely sees large grants, these were seismic gifts.

A few best-selling novelists are active philanthropists, as reporter Liz Longley recently wrote about at Inside Philanthropy. The prolific romance novelist Nora Roberts gives primarily through the Nora Roberts Foundation. Roberts regularly gives to both local and national literacy programs, including the adult literacy leader ProLiteracy, literary councils, and groups that provide free books. The foundation also backs libraries and library support organizations.

Best-selling novelist James Patterson is another reliable supporter of reading and writing organizations. For many years he has supported independent bookstores, local libraries, and



funded grants, prizes, and scholarships for writing and literature students and teachers, along with supporting literacy nonprofits. In 2022, Patterson gifted \$2 million to PEN America to support the nonprofit's capacity to "speak louder in defense of free expression against evolving threats in the United States, online, and around the world." To date, Patterson has donated a total of \$100 million to literary causes.

Best-selling authors often benefited from the nonprofit literary infrastructure early in their careers, attending classes, publishing their work in nonprofit journals and presses, and attending residencies before attaining commercial success. This is likely why successful authors are attuned to the needs of literary nonprofits, including supporting writers who face roadblocks to success. Among his many philanthropic endeavors, the author Stephen King established the Haven Foundation in 2006, which makes grants to writers and other artists in need, particularly those suffering from chronic illness, medical emergencies, or catastrophic events.

As explored in previous sections of this report, additional big donors include WhatsApp codeveloper Brian Acton and his spouse Tegan (who give to literary organizations via Acton Giving), and venture capitalist Michael Moritz and his spouse, the artist Harriet Heyman (who give via Crankstart).

Individual donors sometimes establish or serve as the benefactors of smaller nonprofit literary presses. "There is a model for literary magazines and book publishers where you have an angel who is your publisher and who doesn't mind losing money year after year because they really

love getting the work out there," said Daniel Reid, executive director of the Whiting Foundation.

Tin House, an esteemed literary magazine in Portland, Oregon, was widely successful before shutting down in 2018. It was started with the backing of Win McCormack, the co-founder of Mother Jones and the Liberty Hill Foundation. Similarly, Linda Breneman and her thenhusband Jeremy Jaech, a software entrepreneur, co-founded the Hugo House, a literary center in Seattle, in 1997. The Breneman Jaech Foundation supported the Hugo House through its first years and also funded other literary arts organizations in Washington state, including Hedgebrook, a residency for women writers.

Major Donor Spotlight



According to the Imagination Library website, its free book gifting program has delivered books across the United States to 1 in 7 children under the age of five. Launched in 1995 to benefit children living in Sevier County, Tennessee, the Imagination Library has since pursued national and globla replications effforts. It's global expansion programs have launched in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and the Republic of Ireland.

In 1995, Patricia Highsmith, author of "The Talented Mr. Ripley," left her entire estate and any future royalties to Yaddo, an artist retreat she had attended nearly 50 years earlier.

Cameron of the Jerome Foundation has suggested that American writers could establish a national endowment for literature by following Highsmith's example and bequeathing future royalties for one of their books to future generations of writers.

High net-worth individuals increasingly rely on commercial donor-advised funds such as Fidelity Charitable and Schwab Charitable to support the arts, including literature. These funds allow donors to enjoy immediate tax benefits for a donation the fund can disburse over multiple years. Donor-advised funds have grown quickly. In the survey of Inside Philanthropy readers and other philanthropy professionals, more than half of the respondents who work in the field of writing and literature indicated that such funds have become more prominent.

Available information from the nonprofit data aggregator Candid suggests that donations to literary organizations from these donor-advised funds are relatively small compared to other areas of arts giving, which mirrors general giving patterns within the arts.

High-profile celebrities and other public figures have played a role in the literacy space. In 1995, singer Dolly Parton, inspired by her father, who never learned to read, launched a program to give free books to preschool children. Laura Bush, who co-founded the National Book Festival as first lady, has funded school libraries through her foundation.

Intermediaries and Associations

A number of literature membership organizations serve as affinity groups, intermediaries, or associations, bringing together funders and organizations devoted to this area of philanthropy. Many of the private foundations operating in the space, as an example, are members of Grantmakers in the Arts. Since funders across artistic disciplines often face similar challenges, such convening tables can be a useful resource for philanthropy professionals.

Funders also meet with each other and with current and potential grantees at major book festivals and meetings such as the annual Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference and Bookfair. (The Association of Writers, like many literary associations, administers a few prizes that pay out \$1,000 or \$2,000 to writers or publishers. The line between "grant" and "prize" is blurred in this field, but fundraisers should generally not think of AWP as a grantmaker.) Other associations or trade groups that sometimes bring together writers with funders include the Authors Guild, the American Society of Journalists and Authors, Association of American Literary Agents, Association of American Publishers, and the Independent Book Publishers Association.

Many large funders rely on intermediaries to select grantees and regrant funds to individual writers and nonprofit literary organizations. As previously mentioned, the Academy of American Poets and the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP) separately administer annual grants. The Academy and CLMP, along with the National Book



Foundation, also jointly administered the Literary Arts Emergency Fund. Another important intermediary is PEN America.

The American Library Association (ALA) brings together funders with various stakeholders in the literary community, particularly surrounding the issues of book bans and freedom of speech. The ALA recently collaborated with another association, the Association of Rural & Small Libraries, to administer the Libraries Transforming Communities grant program for rural libraries.

Grantee Spotlight



Youth Speaks describes its mission as creating spaces "that challenge young people to develop and amplify their voices as creators of social change." Its programs include Brave New Voices, a network of national arts organizations and an international poetry festival featuring young writers; the Emerging Arts Fellowship, a two-year professional development program in the Bay Area; and the Bigger Picture, a partnership with UCSFs Center for Vulnerable Populations focusing on young people and Type 2 Diabetes.

The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) and the CLMP play a role in creating opportunities for networking, education and capacity-building for the field. The AWP is a

membership organization of nearly 50,000 writers and hundreds of creative writing programs and writer conferences. In addition to hosting its annual conference, it advocates on behalf of writers and offers professional development opportunities. The CLMP brings together hundreds of independent presses and literary journals from across the United States. It offers workshops, one-on-one consultations, grant databases and other services to publishers.

Another organization, LitNet, is a coalition of literary organizations that seeks to "promote the importance of the literary arts in American culture, build the capacity of the literary field, and broaden funding for the literary arts." Other nonprofit associations focus on specific areas. They include the Alliance of Artist Communities and Res Artis, two networks of art residencies, the Poetry Coalition, and the Writers in Schools Alliance, a group of literary arts education programs.

A growing association is the Diverse Books for All Coalition, which includes 40 member organizations and counting. The coalition works "to increase access to affordable, high quality children's books by and about diverse races, cultures, identities, and abilities."

Regional coalitions include LitTAP, which is supported by the New York State Council on the Arts. It is a group of 40 literary arts organizations statewide. In addition to organizing annual convenings and offering mentoring and other resources to members, the organization provides annual advancement regrants of \$2,500 to \$10,000. More recently, approximately 30 New York City literary organizations including the Author's Guild, Harlem Writers, the Nuyorican



Poets Cafe and PEN America formed the NYC Literary Action Coalition to raise the visibility of the sector.

Funding intermediaries are uniquely important in the writing and literature funding space because so many grantees are individual writers or small organizations.

Making grants to individuals requires a level of oversight, fiscal responsibility and reporting that many foundations are not equipped to handle. Furthermore, smaller organizations "might not have the budget size that would allow them in the door of a large foundation," said Benka of the Academy of American Poets, which serves as a funding intermediary. "Large foundations don't give that many grants, and the grants they give are large, and they don't want to tip organizations over," she adds.

Inside **Philanthropy**Survey

"Within the arts, there is very little support for literary organizations because philanthropy assumes that literary work is supported sufficiently by the marketplace. But it definitely isn't, and the trend is toward homogenization of popular mass market bestsellers rather than literary work, which is struggling to survive."

-Fundraiser, San Francisco, California



An Analysis of Opportunities & Challenges

One core challenge came up repeatedly in conversations with funders and grantees in this space: the philanthropic sector's general lack of interest in funding writing and literature. Nearly every person interviewed for this brief argued that the biggest challenge, and opportunity, in philanthropic giving for writing and literature is the sheer lack of it.

"As a lover of literature, I find it very perplexing why this is a difficult story to tell potential grantmakers," said Hodell at the Whiting Foundation. "It's certainly clear to someone who goes to the ballet or to the opera that this is a costly spectacle. Maybe it's that the work of a writer is largely invisible."

While the work of writers and the literary nonprofits that support them is less visible, the societal payoffs of investing in literature are profound. "The return to your investment is shockingly high in writing, whether you're investing in individual writers or indie presses," added Daniel Reid, executive director at Whiting.

This high return is partly because writers and literary nonprofits have relatively low costs. "I love talking about the impact that our organizations are able to have," said Benka of the Academy of American Poets. "Our organizations are agile and wide-reaching. We can do a lot with little." Meanwhile the benefits of literature are unconstrained, as it's an easily scalable medium that's highly impactful in the way that it touches readers. "Literature, stories, poetry help people

understand some of the complicated but very important critical issues that we're facing as people and as a globe," Benka added.

Many arts funders that focus on visual arts or theater might simply be unaware of the struggles of today's literary publishers and writers. The rapid consolidation of the book publishing industry has reduced the number of for-profit publishers and narrowed the number and type of books released. Nonprofit presses have filled the void, promoting emerging authors and ambitious works that commercial publishers deem too risky. Literary magazines also play an important role in developing and showcasing new voices. Unfortunately, there are few grant opportunities for independent presses and even fewer for literary magazines.

"Many independent journals and presses have a significant national and international reach, elevating the importance of equity in publishing and playing an important role in our country's diverse literary legacy, but they may be less visible in their local communities and thus receive less funding locally," said Amy Stolls, literary arts director at the National Endowment for the Arts, in an interview for this report.

Greater support for the infrastructure that serves writers, including independent presses, literary magazines, and literary centers and workshops, is an opportunity for funders.

Another opportunity in the field is for major funders to speak out about the importance of funding literature. The influence of the Mellon



be catalytic. Both have clFoundation's Elizabeth Alexander and the philanthropist MacKenzie Scott in this regard could early and vocally articulated the benefits of literature funding. While this is a promising development, the general lack of support for literary organizations is a trenchant problem that will require decisive effort to solve.

Individuals supporting the arts are generally based in cities and almost exclusively fund organizations in urban areas. Jeremy Adams, development director at Art Omi, located in New York state's Hudson Valley, notes that his organization is shut out of numerous grants because many funders do not fund in rural areas. According to Cameron of the Jerome Foundation, the lack of funding for literature in rural areas is an opportunity for donors, particularly those interested in addressing divisiveness in the United States. "In light of what we've seen in politics in virtually every state, the deep divisions politically between urban centers and rural centers is a source of concern for some funders," Cameron said.

As noted elsewhere in this report, one promising trend in the field is closer collaboration among funders and intermediaries. The trend was kickstarted as a result of COVID-era emergency funds, and new pooled funds continue to emerge. As an example, PEN America ramped up its emergency grantmaking during COVID with support from new donors. The PEN America's U.S. Writers Aid Initiative continues to expand, with new funds and ongoing interest from funders, including MacKenzie Scott. This collaborative funding infrastructures allows PEN to act nimbly to new crises. In 2023, during the

Writers Guild of America screenwriter's strike, PEN opened a new emergency fund for screenwriters.

A major opportunity in the literary funding space is recognizing the power of literary nonprofits to help combat the recent crises surrounding book bans, educational censorship, and disinformation in the public sphere. Literary organizations like PEN America and the American Library Association (ALA) have acted fast on these issues. PEN America maintains a detailed banned books database, and has partnered with Penguin Random House to sue a school district in Florida for violating free speech and equal protection under the law by removing and restricting access to books. The ALA, in coordination with the nonprofit Unite Against Book Bans, has launched an advocacy campaign and is creating new research on book bans.

Initiative Spotlight



PEN America launched its PEN Across
America Initiative in 2018 in response
to "mounting threats to a free press,
breakdowns in civil discourse and the
marginalization to important voices."
Its Press Freedom Incentive Fund
supported iniatives in 20 cities during
its pilot year. The fund has an open
application process and supports a
number of projects including town halls,
film screenings, awards for local
journalism, and civic dialogues.

Literary organizations can be a powerful tool in the fight against book bans, censorship, and educational gag laws, yet major grantmaking from top education funders has not materialized.

Another opportunity for writing and literature funders is to recognize the many literary organizations around the country serving specific communities that harness writing and the literary arts to achieve larger goals related to equity, youth development, and anti-poverty efforts. The Loft Literary Center in Minneapolist, as an example, views its reading, writing and spoken word programs not only as important for the sake of the art itself, but as a means to use the power of writing to built a more just world. The Loft defines itself as an "antiracist organization" that "develops programs, services, and events for writers, readers, and storytellers because racism dehumanizes people, and stories and verse reconnect us to our shared humanity." While The Loft has been around since 1974, only in recent years has it attracted significant attention from major funders.

Organizations that develop career opportunities for BIPOC writers have also been more successful at fundraising in recent years. Cave Canem is a nonprofit founded in 1996 to "remedy the underrepresentation and isolation of African-American poets in the literary landscape." Today it runs a number of fellowships, workshops, and prizes, with support from a growing base of funders.

Creative Capital is a nonprofit grantmaker that supports artists in a variety of disciplines, including literature. Established in 1999, it was

an earlier practitioner of incorporating DEI practices in its grantmaking. Today, the Creative Capital website states that "more than 75 percent of Creative Capital Awardees in recent years identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, or artists of color, LGBTQIA+, women, and artists with disabilities." Notably, since Creative Capital is a general arts grantmaker rather than a grantmaker only for writers, its award amounts for writers are unusually high: Individuals receive between \$15,000 and \$50,000 in funding. Creative Capital is supported by funders that aren't regularly attuned to literary arts funding, including Bloomberg, the Andy Warhol Foundation, and Skoll Foundation. Looking ahead, engaging the interest of arts and culture funders who support other art forms is a major opportunity for literary nonprofits.

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Suzanne Nossel, Chief Executive Officer, PEN America

Josh Ostergaard, Senior Development Officer, Graywolf Press

Amy Stolls, Director of Literary Arts, National Endowment for the Arts

Daniel Reid, Executive Director, Whiting Foundation

Jafreen Uddin, Executive Director, Asian American Writers' Workshop

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Feedback?

The State of American Philanthropy is an ongoing project. Each SAP brief will be updated periodically to integrate new information, additional data and evolving perspectives. If you have comments or information you'd like to share with us, please email us at managingeditor@insidephilanthropy.org.

