



All about writers

Strategic Plan 2017-2020

Updated December 2016



Our Strategic Plan (a summary)

Writers Victoria is all about writing.

With nearly 3,500 members, we are the largest organisation supporting Victoria's writers and literary sector.

The organisation has been a leading provider of information, resources, skills- and artform-development for our members and the broader writing community for nearly 30 years.

Writers Victoria is the only organisation that works with writers all year round, across all styles and genres, at all stages of their development, and in all parts of the state.

We have a history of supporting writers who face barriers in the development of their writing careers, such as regional writers, writers with disability and writers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

As the peak body for writers and writing in Victoria and an established cultural institution, our services and support go beyond our membership. We build capacity within the literary industry through our sector-development and partnership work. We give voice to the diverse constituency of writers that we represent. We remove barriers to increase their participation. And we advocate on their behalf.

As we prepare this new Strategic Plan, Writers Victoria is a stable, strong and growing organisation, demonstrated by our increasing turnover, membership and reach.

Our vision for the next four years will build on this success in order to:

- Move towards reducing project-funding dependence for our unique programs for regional and diverse writers.
- Prepare us for the increase in demand and workload expected due to contraction of the sector once the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Budget cuts to federal arts funding start to be felt.

Our purpose (what we're here for)

Writers Victoria supports and connects writers at all stages of their development.



Our goals (what we want to do)

Our three key goals for this period are:

Our Community

To support, connect and grow a diverse and thriving literary community in Victoria (and beyond).

Our Leadership

To increase recognition of Writers Victoria as the peak body for writers and writing in the state and as a national best-practice leader in literary development.

Our Organisation

To maintain a strong and sustainable organisation to continue to grow our impact and legacy.

Each of these goals will be addressed in relation to:

- Excellence and innovation
- Partnerships
- Diversity
- Access
- Sustainability

Strategic Priority areas

Writers Victoria has a broad and inclusive mandate to support all of the state's writers. In addition to our ongoing program, this remit includes undertaking activities in specific strategic priority areas.

From 2017 to 2020, these strategic priority areas will be:

- **Regional writers.**
- **Writers with disability.**
- **Writers from diverse cultural backgrounds (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers).**
- **Young writers.**

These four areas have been identified due to recognised need, gaps in the industry and/or our commitment to address the barriers that cause writers from under-served communities to be under-represented as participants and professionals in mainstream literary activity.

We recognise the intersectionality of these target groups and acknowledge that many writers within our community may identify as being part of more than one of the above areas. Dividing them into four groups is a deliberately simplistic way for us to itemise strategies and activities for each of them (whilst acknowledging that there will be synergies and over-laps).

We also recognise that many writers within our community will not identify as being part of any of the above areas. Writers Victoria remains committed to supporting all of the state's writers (which will be demonstrated in each year's Key Performance Indicators). But articulating these priority areas allows us to manage our workload priorities and actively seek out new opportunities to meet our strategic aims. It also allows us to better reflect the diversity of Victoria's writing community, remove barriers to participation, and help make sure all of Victoria's stories are being told.

To support this work, our other strategic priority areas for this period include:

- **Online delivery and communication.**
- **Increasing earned income** (in order to reduce our reliance on grant funding for our priority groups).

Our work in these areas will also be informed by our Diversity and Engagement Policy, which includes our Reconciliation, Multicultural, Regional, Disability and Youth action plans (updated each year).

Our strategy (how we plan to do it)

Why writing?

At Writers Victoria, we are inspired by writers and writing.

We believe that words are powerful. We believe that all writing is valid and important – from the personal to the published (and everything in between). And we know that words (and their writers) take many different forms.

Beyond the immediate benefits to Australia’s literary canon and culture, the pursuit of writing supports literacy, personal development, social inclusion and cohesion. It also has an effect on our health and wellbeing, cultural identity and expression, and contributes to flourishing and diverse publishing industry.

The practice of writing as both an artform and a livelihood is highly portable and accessible. While it mostly takes place as a solitary activity, writing creates communities of interest that cut across barriers of age, cultural background, geographic location and access.

The art of writing well is valued across all of our professional and personal communications, not just in the arts, and is a significant contributor to workplace productivity and broader economic health.

We believe that our work makes writing happen (and keeps people from giving up). We give people the tools and information they need to become better writers.

We believe in community (in person and online). We provide opportunities for writers to connect and come together.

We believe that a strong sector is a multi-faceted sector. Our work builds capacity and complements the programs of our colleagues and partners.



Our writers are telling Victoria’s stories – its history and its future, its culture and its imagination.

Strategic approach

Writers Victoria operates as a peak body and service organisation that has a direct impact on the artform of writing (across all styles and genres) by supporting the people who make it and the sector they work within.

Our purpose is to support and connect writers at all stages of their development: from new and emerging writers to the professional, published and produced. We help them to establish and grow their creative practice and their careers through craft, business and industry development. We help them succeed and support their own writing by keeping them engaged and employed within the sector.

Between 2017 and 2020, we will continue to grow our membership and extend the reach of our program, participants, audiences and impact.

We will work with professional writers and industry experts to extend our high-quality literary program of effective and relevant artform- and professional-development opportunities, providing a credible, flexible and affordable alternative to formal education.

We will deliver a comprehensive suite of services and activities with a range of topics, formats and price points in response to the needs, interests and ambitions of our members and participants.

We will extend and deepen our cross-sector partnerships with specialist organisations to ensure our projects with writers from diverse cultural backgrounds (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers), young writers, regional writers and writers with disability are strategic, community-led and recognise cultural competencies and protocols.

We will engage with topical issues and initiatives such as the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), National Broadband Network (NBN) and other non-arts government agendas in order to ensure our work is current and responsive to economic and social change.

We will collaborate with partners, colleague organisations, government, industry and national stakeholders (within and outside of the arts sector) to develop complementary program ideas and new opportunities in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for Victoria's writers.

We will capitalise on the size and authority of our membership to lead on sector issues, advocate on behalf of writers, and increase recognition of Writers Victoria as the peak body for writers and writing in the state.

And we will work to secure the future of our programs for regional and diverse writers to support writers from under-served communities who may otherwise miss out.

We will do all this through:

Understanding our context
(external and internal) + Identifying opportunities and
setting clear targets (goals
and KPIs) + Sustaining our operations
through effective ways of
working (values and processes)

This Strategic Plan has been developed through a series of committee and staff planning days, stakeholder strategy meetings and consultation with members.

As we implement this Strategic Plan, we will undertake a process of continual review and improvement to ensure that Writers Victoria continues to progress as an effective and sustainable organisation that is fully equipped to support our diverse constituency. We will also continue to explore ways to measure and evaluate our social impact.

Values

At Writers Victoria, we value:

- **Inclusion** (we welcome all types of writers, in all locations, all year round)
- **Community** (we develop, celebrate and give voice to our members and writers, we collaborate and build the capacity of our sector)
- **Participation** (we are democratic and member-driven, we ask, we listen, we respond)
- **Innovation and excellence** (we produce quality work, we lead by example)
- **Professionalism** (we are strategic, we are resourceful, we work hard)
- **Respect** (we take care, we are community-led)

Acknowledgement of country

Writers Victoria's office is based on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation and our work takes us all over Victoria. We acknowledge the traditional owners at all of our public activities and proactively engage with Aboriginal writers, tutors, participants and audiences.

Our context (internal review)

History and reputation

Writers Victoria (formerly ‘the Victorian Writers’ Centre’) is an established and respected cultural institution with a long history of delivering programs and services designed to engage and develop writers at all stages of their development.

We were created in 1989 by a group of writers who saw the need for a professional organisation to support the Victorian writing community. Since then, Writers Victoria has had many homes within Melbourne’s literary community and has been the largest resident organisation within The Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas since it opened in 2009.

Over the past 27 years, Writers Victoria has developed a reputation as a strong advocate and resource for early-career, emerging and established writers. We now represent thousands of members, writers, sector professionals and literary organisations, to whom we provide a comprehensive program of professional services, skills- and artform- development activities in all parts of Victoria.

This significant experience, along with consistently positive feedback and ongoing expansion of our program and services, shows that Writers Victoria is a well-used and relevant resource that is meeting a high level of demand from the state’s literary community.

We are known for our long contribution to the sector’s growth and development, including:

- Being the **first, largest and longest-running association of writers** in the state.
- Playing an integral role in Melbourne’s **application for UNESCO City of Literature status** and in the **creation of The Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas**.
- Being recognised as an **inclusive and accessible organisation that supports the writers that other organisations do not** through our community-led literary programs (such as our Write-ability program for writers with disability, now being used as an example of best practice on a national and international level).

The organisation supports and works on behalf of nearly 3,500 members, as well as providing services to the broader Victorian writing community. This gives us unique insight into the needs and aspirations of Victoria’s writers and a singular authority to speak and advocate on their behalf.

We also provide employment opportunities for authors and industry professionals through delivery of our workshops and seminars, as well as through our manuscript assessment and mentoring services.

Structure, growth and sustainability

Writers Victoria is a not-for-profit incorporated association governed by a volunteer Committee of Management.

As we prepare this new Strategic Plan, Writers Victoria is a stable, strong and growing organisation, demonstrated by our increasing turnover, membership and reach.

- Reaching our largest membership of all time (of nearly 3,500 people), which means:
 - **We have the largest individual membership of all Victoria’s peak arts bodies** (as part of the Arts Industry Council); and
 - **We have the largest membership within the National Writers’ Centre Network** (as part of Australia’s largest association of writers).
- Achieving the largest regional program and membership in our 27-year history and appointing our first regionally-based staff member.

- Delivering our largest online program, including digital clinics, webinars, online Q&A sessions and launch of a new accessible website (featuring more than 850 pages of literary resources).
- Growing our significant state and national profile through our leadership on sector capacity building and advocacy, including the Pay the Writers and Free the Arts campaigns.
- Enhancing our international profile through leadership on community-led literary programs due to the success and sustained support of our Write-ability program for writers with disability and the launch of our D-Writers initiative and Directory of Chinese-Australian Writers.
- Providing nearly \$200,000 annual income to 200 writers and industry experts (not including staff).
- Maintaining best-practice governance, strong and growing finances, embedded strategic planning processes, active and stable staff team and Committee of Management.
- Continuing to provide pathways for our members and participants to become our paid tutors and commissioned writers, and for our volunteers and interns to move onto paying roles within the sector.

The organisation has a longstanding multi-year funding history with support from local, state, federal and philanthropic arts funding bodies.

W Our strong record of leveraging funding, partnerships and diverse income streams meant every dollar of government investment received in 2015 was matched by \$2.89 alternative income (including \$2.26 earned income).

The support of Creative Victoria and the Australia Council for the Arts, as well as philanthropic funders like the Grace Marion Wilson Trust, has given Writers Victoria a strong foundation. We hope to continue to develop our relationships with these partners and use this to leverage funding from other sources.

Financial security and diversity

Three years ago, Writers Victoria emerged from a period of change that included our departure from Writing Australia (now defunct), a change in our relationship with the Australia Council from multi-year operational to single-year project funding (since reversed), the introduction of a new state funding system, launch of our new name and brand, and changeover of our Director and Chair positions.

The successful strategies implemented over this period mean that the organisation is now more stable than ever, strong, growing and ready to move into the next stage of its development.

Over the last five years, we have seen an increase in our overall revenue of 16% (across all income streams). The largest proportion of this revenue comes from earned income (58% of total revenue in 2015), of which membership fees make the largest NET contribution, followed by workshop income.

Our trend analysis shows that membership income continues to increase year on year, as does the proportion of two-year memberships (increasing our financial security and membership retention while reducing the administration required to service those members).

Our demographic analysis shows that our members are increasing in number (demonstrating current demand) and geographical distribution (with regional membership increasing by nearly 20% in 2015), whilst also reducing in age (indicating future demand).

Income from donations, while small, has risen by 94% over the last five years as we have begun to develop a donor culture amongst our membership (including the introduction of a new Personal Patrons initiative that matches philanthropists to individual writers).

We have also more than doubled our cash reserves from \$80,000 to \$167,000, which includes the creation of a General Reserve for parental leave for the first time in the organisation's history.

Salaries continue to be our largest expenditure item, increasing by 27% over the last five years in line with the growth of our team and our work to increase staff salaries towards sector standards.

Even so, our overall expenditure over the last five years has only risen by 12% (against a 16% increase in income).

Writers Victoria finds itself in a very strong position despite the changing funding and economic landscape. We have strong relationships with state and federal arts funders (including re-instatement of our multi-year funding agreement with the Australian Council from 2016-2018). And the majority of our revenue is made up of earned income, the market for which is strong and growing.

Our financial plan for the next four years will capitalise on this strong and stable position in order to:

- Move towards reducing project-funding dependence for our unique programs for regional and diverse writers.
- Prepare us for the increase in demand and workload expected due to contraction of the sector once the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Budget cuts to federal arts funding start to be felt.

Creative and cultural program

Our annual program is developed in response to the needs and ambitions of our members and participants (including writers at all stages of their development, across all styles and genres, in all parts of the state).

It includes a comprehensive range of activities including workshops, literary services, development programs, studio residencies, fellowships, commissions, opportunities and resources. The program encompasses both the craft and business sides of writing, plus broader sector and industry development.

We recognise and respond to the individual journeys of all writers – from personal writing to all steps in the book production chain, drawing on our relationships with literary organisations and publishers. We are a key employer of professional writers and industry experts (including editors, agents and publishers), who deliver a high-quality program of effective and relevant artform- and professional-development opportunities.

We have a history of supporting writers who face barriers in the development of their writing careers, such as regional writers, writers with disability, and writers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Our community cultural development work is strategic, community-led and informed by appropriate cultural competencies and protocols.

We collaborate with partners and colleague organisations (within and outside of the arts sector) to develop complementary program ideas and new opportunities in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for Victoria's writers.

We help make writing happen by giving writers community, motivation, opportunities and places to write.

We help make writing better by giving writers the tools, resources, information and training they need to develop their craft and their careers. We help make sure Victoria's stories get told.

We support the breadth, diversity and health of the state's entire literary sector through our leadership, sector development, capacity building and advocacy work.

Key strengths

- We have a legacy, reputation and experience gained over nearly 30 years.
- We are recognised as the state peak body for writers and writing in Victoria and an established cultural institution.
- We are the only organisation that works with writers all year round, across all styles and genres, at all stages of their development and in all parts of the state.
- We have significant reach, engagement and loyal support of nearly 3,500 members (giving us the largest individual membership of all of Victoria's peak arts bodies and of all the National Writers' Centre Network organisations).
- We have longstanding, established relationships with partners and funders.
- We have access to high-profile authors and sector experts and are a major employer of writers and industry professionals.
- We have an active and experienced staff team and Committee of Management.
- We are the **largest writers centre in Australia**, are based within one of the **smallest, most populated states**, and have the **biggest and busiest online and social media presence** within the National Writers' Centre Network. This population, membership and geography give us a unique opportunity to leverage and increase our earned income.

Key challenges

- Unknown impact of recent changes to Federal arts funding on our constituency, or how we will cope with expected increase in demand and workload once the impact of funding cuts start to be felt.
- Those programs that make us most unique (including those for diverse and regional writers) are those with the least amount of security.
- A small organisation with a large remit, our program and membership are growing faster than our staff team.
- Cost of delivering equitable services in regional areas and to other under-served communities who have less capacity to pay for them.
- Representing nearly 3,500 writers, Writers Victoria has a particular authority to speak and advocate on behalf of the state's writers. But our advocacy, resource and capacity building work is not resourced other than through membership fees.
- Diversifying our funding beyond government arts programs.
- Responding to changes in the digital landscape to find an effective balance between online and in-person engagement.
- Reaching participants and potential new markets from outside of our networks (who may or may not identify as 'writers'), including people working in isolation, students, bloggers, journalists and people who write as part of their jobs.
- Staff development pathways and retention in a competitive marketplace.
- A step-change in organisational resources is required in order to significantly increase organisational outputs.

Our context (external review)

Overview

It's not surprising that Writers Victoria is the largest writers' centre in the country.

We are based within one of the smallest, most populated states, which is home to one of the greatest concentrations of professional writers and publishing houses in Australia. Victoria supports a diverse range of writers, a prosperous publishing industry, a successful culture of independent bookselling, wide variety of literary organisations and a healthy culture of reading and literary engagement. Melbourne is recognised by UNESCO as an International City of Literature (the second city in the world to achieve this endorsement) and Clunes as a member of the international Booktown cohort.

Across the country, reading is still the number one way that Australians enjoy and engage with the arts. In 2012-13, Victorians made around 26.8 million visits to their local libraries borrowing over 48.4 million items. And 73% of Victorian children read for pleasure in their spare time. (Source: bit.ly/1XE3sw7)

Economic

2016 and 2017 will potentially be very difficult years for the arts in Australia as the impact of the 2014 and 2015 federal arts funding cuts start to be felt (most likely by those artists and organisations who can least afford it).

Writers Victoria finds itself in a strong and stable position during this period of uncertainty, but we have significant concerns for our constituency and for the increase in demand and workload we expect once the sector starts to contract.

It is likely that the funding cuts will have a direct impact on:

- The ability of writers to find publication and showcase opportunities for their work (due to potential loss or contraction of literary journals and publishers, and increasing competition for those opportunities that are left).
- The ability of writers and literary sector workers to earn a living (due to increasing trend for commercial organisations to ask writers to work for free, loss of income from literary journals and organisations, loss of income from changes to copyright and parallel import restrictions, organisational restructures, mergers and closures, and increasing competition for those positions that are left).
- Availability of literary services, activities and opportunities in under-served areas and communities, which are often supported by volunteer-run organisations.
- Contraction of the breadth, diversity and health of the state's entire literary sector, putting Melbourne's status as an international City of Literature at risk.
- Increase in demand and workload on those organisations that remain and the health of the people who work within them.

More pressure will be placed on state and local government funders as well as philanthropic trusts and foundations. Access to grants will become increasingly competitive.

Philanthropic funders are less likely to fund operational or ongoing initiatives, so are often not prepared to enter into long-term partnerships. And the trusts themselves are increasingly impacted by the slowing economy.

Crowd funding is becoming an increasingly popular and plausible option for supporting independent literary projects and organisations, with key provider Pozible reporting a 56% project success rate. (Source: www.pozible.com/why) However, we are now seeing a new trend for crowd-funding fatigue, and the expected increase in direct fundraising requests has the potential to reduce its impact and sustainability.

The population, membership and geography of Victoria does give us a unique opportunity to leverage and increase our earned income. But while average weekly earnings increased by 2% over the year to May 2015, it seems likely that a static or slowing economy will have an impact on our constituency's ability to pay for membership services and professional development, particularly those from under-served or vulnerable communities. (Source: bit.ly/1UdhIhS)

While Writers Victoria has had some success in developing a giving culture amongst our membership, charities like ours are facing increased competition, with nationwide donations falling to their lowest levels in 30 years in 2015. (Source: bit.ly/1XE3EeP)

While not having a direct impact on our current Write-ability business models, the introduction of the NDIS will have an impact on many of our participants, as people with disability get access to their own Individual Support Packages (ISPs) and gain control over how that funding will be used. This will provide more choice and power for participants, but it also has the potential to reduce the number of services available to them – as the move to ISP-funding risks the sustainability of previously project-funded initiatives.

Politics and policy

Australia has not had a national cultural policy since the Labor Government briefly introduced Creative Australia in 2013, which had only just begun to be implemented before the change of government.

The incoming Liberal Government cut federal arts funding in its 2014 and 2015 Budgets. The biggest impact of these cuts will be on individual writers and artists, who will have to apply for a smaller (and more competitive) pool of Australia Council funding but who are not eligible to apply to the Catalyst program that replaced it. The cuts also followed the 2014 announcement that \$6 million would be taken from the Australia Council budget to fund a new Books Industry Council. This was rescinded in 2015 and the money returned to Treasury rather than the arts.

At a federal level, the current focus on reducing the budget deficit through spending cuts also means that Government is unlikely to commit to new expenditure without corresponding reductions in other areas.

At a state level, Victoria's Labor Government incorporated the arts within a broader creative industries portfolio in 2014, which included a restructure and rebrand of its key funding agency to Creative Victoria. A Creative Industries Strategy is expected to be launched in mid 2016.

At a local level, Writers Victoria is based within the City of Melbourne, which has a comprehensive arts policy and particular interest in activation and celebration of arts in the city. Writers Victoria also works across a number of other metropolitan and regional local council areas. Our magazine, online and advocacy work stretch beyond Victoria.

Our work will also be informed by the outcome of the state election in 2018.

Social

The digital revolution is having a significant impact on writers, readers and the publishing industry.

This includes changes in the ways we communicate and how we spend our work and leisure time. 88% of the population are internet users, of which 14 million people have active social media accounts (a quarter of which access their profiles more than five times a day). (Source: bit.ly/1nYH4kX)

Technology has democratised the publishing process and removed some of the barriers to publication, with more and more writers using digital platforms to showcase and self-publish their work, and develop new audiences. Increased availability, accessibility and use of technology has the potential to increase participation and opportunities for writers to connect, engage and develop their practice and their careers. This is particularly relevant for those writers who face physical or geographical barriers to attend in-person events.

The ongoing rollout of the NBN will increase the access and speed of internet services to communities across the state. This is particularly relevant for those regional communities who are due to come online from April 2016 (Source: ab.co/22voSPy), and will have a direct impact on our online program (which currently experiences some bandwidth issues in remote areas).

We recognise that this technology, however, also has the potential to isolate some users. We will endeavour to ensure our online opportunities are offered in addition to, not as a replacement for, face-to-face engagement.

Writers Victoria's regional membership has increased by nearly 20% over the last three years. In a recent report, people living in regional communities were less likely to agree that there are plenty of opportunities to get involved in the arts. This was cited as a reason why they don't participate in the arts creatively, with 50% (compared to 29% in metropolitan areas) suggesting there are not enough opportunities for them to do so close to home. (Source: bit.ly/1R6Tflc). Writers Victoria will continue to service and grow this membership, and to garner the feedback required to enhance our program and advocacy work.

The last three years has seen the closure of a number of key TAFE-based Professional Writing and Editing (PWE) courses, including Holmesglen, Box Hill and Chisholm. With changes to PWE courses at RMIT, opportunities for writers who aren't able to access or afford degree-based courses are limited. Across the state, this means emerging and aspiring writers are being faced with fewer and more expensive formal education options and reduced pathways to higher education, publication and employment. The Writers Victoria program offers a credible and affordable alternative for this writing community.

Our work will need to respond to the state's changing population, migration patterns and increasingly diverse language groups, with more than 40% of people in Melbourne now born overseas (or who have a parent born overseas).

We will also continue to monitor the increased casualisation and declining wellbeing of our workforce, particularly relevant in the not for profit sector with its high number of contract and freelance workers who don't always have access to sustained employment or strong support networks. (Source: bit.ly/1OIRYNk)

Environmental

We recognise that our day-to-day operations impact the environment in a number of ways. We aim to minimise any adverse environmental effects wherever and whenever possible.

Our programs for regional writers and writers with disability in particular might be more resource intensive than equivalent programs that do not work with these priority groups. We endeavour to offer an inclusive and accessible service for these groups while taking every opportunity to review and introduce behavioural change related to our program and operations. This may include, for example, looking into alternative modes of travel for visiting tutors, and continuing to offer a mix of in-person and online opportunities.

We also aim ensure that our operations and development are as sustainable as possible, through the implementation of paperless accounting procedures, shared office services, waste-minimisation and recycling initiatives. Thanks to our comprehensive website and strong social media presence, we are able to will prioritise the use of non-printed forms of communication. This will be reinforced through the reduction of 'The Victorian Writer' schedule from ten to six editions per year (from 2016).

Legal

Writers Victoria has an ongoing commitment to securing legal expertise on its Committee of Management. The organisation also has a relationship with Holding Redlich, which has provided pro-bono legal advice on contracts and agreements in the past.

Over the next four years, we will work to update our agreement with National Trust Victoria to secure the future of our writing studio partnership.

Our community (who we work with)

Members

Writers Victoria has significant reach, engagement and loyal support of nearly 3,500 members (giving us the largest individual membership of all of Victoria's peak arts bodies and all of the National Writers Centre Network).



As a membership organisation, we are a democratic association of independent practitioners. These members inform our work and remain at the heart of our literary community.

The organisation is guided by a Committee of Management, the majority of which is elected from and by the membership. Our year-round program is developed in response to the needs of our members and participants through ongoing consultation and evaluation of our programs.

Our demographic analysis tells us that the quintessential Writers Victoria member is:

- Female.
- Based in metropolitan Melbourne.
- Over 45.
- An emerging writer.
- A full fee-paying member for one year.
- Interested in short stories and novels.
- Attracted to us because of 'The Victorian Writer' magazine or workshop discounts.

This profile has changed over the last ten years, and our quintessential member is now:

- Getting younger (slowly).
- Moving out of Northcote (with regional membership increasing by nearly 20% in 2015, with our largest concentrations of regional members being based in the Mornington Peninsula and Ballarat. We also have an increasing number of interstate and international members).

We offer our members a diverse range of support and services, including: our magazine, weekly enews, discounts on our program and literary services, exclusive opportunities and competitions, and more.

Our plan for the next four years is to continue to service and retain our existing membership while increasing the diversity of our membership profile.

Our significant and diverse community is much broader than our membership and also includes writers; readers; the broader literary, arts and cultural industries; funders and stakeholders; and the media (below).

Writers

We work to support and develop Victorian writers (all ages, all styles and genres, all stages of their careers, all parts of the state), to whom we offer support, development and networking opportunities. And we also connect with writers outside of Victoria through our program, website, magazine and advocacy work.

We work and respond to thousands of writers each year, who are:

- Working mostly in isolation, operating one-person writing businesses and/or fitting their creative practice around family, work and other commitments.

- Finding it harder to get commercially published but easier to get published in other ways.
- Finding it harder to reach audiences through traditional marketing and distribution methods, and having to take on more responsibility for doing so.
- Experiencing ongoing issues with vanity publishers (against whom we often act as protectors).
- Experiencing more competition for the smaller amounts of funding that are still available.
- Being faced with fewer and more expensive formal education options and reduced pathways to higher education, publication and employment.
- Finding it harder to make a living from their writing work. The average literary income of Australian writers is approximately \$10,000 per year, with more journals, newspapers and publishers asking writers to work for free and new threats to future livelihood arising from proposed changes to Parallel Import Restrictions.
- Finding it easier to access training and resources online, but still needing in-person support as well (particularly regional writers).
- Being offered the 'same-old' professional-development options (particularly in regional communities).

Writers Victoria must retain our relevance to this writing community by:

- Acting as the first stop for anyone interested in writing (regardless of whether they are members or not).
- Maintaining an open door policy (regardless of writing level or style) and being there for writers whenever they need us.
- Providing a credible and affordable alternative for writers' training and development.
- Being realistic – providing practical advice and development without over-promising.
- Responding to non-arts agendas to create new opportunities for writers.

Our strategic priority areas between 2017 and 2020 include:

- Regional writers
- Writers with disability
- Writers from diverse cultural backgrounds (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers)
- Young writers

Readers

We help make sure Victoria's stories get told by giving writers the tools, resources, information and training they need to develop their craft and their careers.

Our constituency also includes the readers and audiences who support their work, and we offer a diverse range of free and fee-paying arts activities and events to the literary-loving public at large.

Broader literary, arts and cultural industries

Writers Victoria is well connected to the broader literary, arts and cultural industries, to which we offer sector development, collaborations and connections.

We aim to develop and deepen our cross-sector partnerships, creating new initiatives and working on complementary programming in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for Victoria's writers.

Our work is benchmarked against similar organisations such as the members of the National Writers' Centre Network, the Australian Society of Authors and the Emerging Writers' Festival.

We work in partnership with a large range of literary and non-arts organisations and festivals including (in alphabetical order): Arts Access Victoria; Arts Law Centre of Australia; Australian Literary Agents' Association; Australian Poetry; Australian Society of Authors; Clunes Booktown; Editors Victoria; Emerging Writers' Festival; Express Media; Koorie Heritage Trust; Melbourne City of Literature Office; Melbourne Writers Festival; National Trust (Vic); National Writers Centre Network; regional writing groups and festivals; Small Press Network; The Wheeler Centre; Victorian Indigenous Literary Office; Victorian Premier's Literary Awards; and many more. We continue to grow our relationships with publishers, which will hold us in good stead as we continue to provide pathways for emerging writers.

We collaborate with these and other partners (within and outside of the arts sector) to develop complementary program ideas to reduce duplication and maximise our resources. This approach helps us achieve the best possible outcomes for Victoria's writers, foster the overall health of the sector, and identify gaps and opportunities for our own organisation's sustainability.

It is likely that 2016 and 2017 will be very difficult years for the arts in Australia as the impact of the 2014 and 2015 federal arts funding cuts start to be felt (most likely by those artists and organisations who can least afford it). Not only will Writers Victoria continue to build capacity within the literary industry through our sector-development and partnership work, but we will also need to respond to its expected contraction – particularly amongst the smaller and volunteer-run organisations.

Funders and stakeholders

We provide our local, state and federal government agencies, philanthropic funders and partners with mutually beneficial partnerships and opportunities for collaboration.

As a service organisation, our work contributes to the development and diversity of artform and cultural practice in Victoria. As a peak body, we demonstrate arts and cultural sector leadership and contribute to its development.

Our work is closely aligned with the current social inclusion policies, skills-development, disability, diversity, tourism and other non-arts agendas of our state and federal governments, and with the priorities of our philanthropic supporters.

Through a range of strategic partnerships, we help our funders and stakeholders achieve their aims and ambitions, particularly around diversity, participation and employment of industry professionals.

Media

Writers Victoria is a voice of authority on writers and writing and offers media organisations valuable and reliable information, opinion and analysis.

A priority within our marketing plan is to strengthen our relationship with the media through the use of broad advocacy messages in addition to promotion of our programs and services. This will ultimately increase the presence of Victorian writers in the media, promoting the important social contributions made by the Victorian writing community on a broader scale.

Existing markets

Our program and communications target a number of different markets and audience groups, including:

- Members (past and present).
- Non-member participants (workshop attendees and service users).
- Alumni (tutors, assessors, mentors, commissioned writers, etc).

- Members of writing groups and partner organisations.
- Literary organisations and festivals.
- Publishers and self-publishing services.
- Social media friends and followers.
- Website users.

Potential markets

The next four years will see us expand our program and communications to explore a range of potential new markets. Current trends and opportunities include:

- Writers working in isolation (including people who may not define themselves as ‘writers’).
- Outer metropolitan writers.
- Young writers (including international students).
- New ways of engaging with people with disability following the introduction of the NDIS.
- Business and government clients (through our new Business Writing program).
- Libraries, writing groups and local councils (through our new Local Council Writing program).
- Non-arts government departments.

Competitors

We believe that a strong sector is a multi-faceted sector. Our work builds capacity and complements the programs of our colleagues and partners.

Our main ‘competitors’ for audiences, participants and revenue could be perceived as colleague organisations that play a similar role within the sector. This includes fellow not-for-profit organisations such as: Australian Society of Authors, Emerging Writers’ Festival, Melbourne Writers Festival, Express Media, Australian Poetry, The Wheeler Centre and 100 Story Building, as well as tertiary education providers like RMIT and Melbourne University.

Organisations like The Wheeler Centre program high-profile authors primarily for the benefit of the city’s readers, not writers. While Melbourne Writers Festival and Emerging Writers’ Festival run professional development programs for writers, these are only for short periods.

The work of Writers Victoria is sufficiently distinct from that of these organisations to render partnering a beneficial prospect for both colleague organisations and Writers Victoria. Writers Victoria distinguishes itself as the only organisation that works with writers all year round, across all genres, at all stages of their careers and across all parts of the state. We are one of the only organisations to offer a community-led literary program for writers with disability in Australia.

Other competitors include commercial organisations such as The Australian Writers Centre, Faber Academy, The Good Copy and the School of Life, as well as an increasing number of publishers and publications who offer professional development opportunities such as workshops and mentoring. There are also a number of commercial providers who offer business writing services to corporate and government clients. Our competitor analysis shows that Writers Victoria continues to deliver similarly high-quality programs that are more competitively priced. We also maintain relationships with our participants that last significantly longer than a single financial transaction can allow.

Until recently, some of our competitors had a market edge in the delivery of online courses, but the growth of our digital program over the last three years means that Writers Victoria is increasingly recognised as a significant provider of online services.

Our place in the sector

Writers Victoria plays a unique and critical role within Victoria's creative and cultural industries.

As a membership organisation, we are a democratic association of independent practitioners. As a service organisation, we act as the first stop for writers, a central resource and portal through which writers can develop their practice or engage with the broader sector. And as a peak body, we lead and support the sector through our capacity building and advocacy work.

In supporting writers and makers of books, we are telling Victoria's stories – its history and its future, its culture and its imagination – contributing to the creative and cultural profile of the state, and continuing to promote reading and writing as the primary way that Australians engage with the arts.

In removing barriers to participation, we help find those writers who are working in isolation and share the sorts of stories that otherwise go untold.

In supporting the development of professional as well as creative writing skills, we are equipping Victoria's workforce (across all industries) and helping writers earn an income from their work, including acting as a key employer of authors and industry experts ourselves.

Victoria's large and diverse literary sector includes a range of other organisations that offer similar services, but none that offer all of them or in quite the same way.



Writers Victoria is the only organisation that works with writers all year round, across all styles and genres, at all stages of their development, and in all parts of the state.

Writers Victoria is an inclusive and accessible organisation that supports the writers other organisations do not (such as our Write-ability program for writers with disability, D-Writers program for writers from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as our Indigenous and Young Writer Intensives).

In building capacity within the broader sector, we help open the door to more inclusive practice and more diverse audiences (beyond our own organisation).

As the first, largest and longest-running association of writers in the state, Writers Victoria also has a unique authority to speak and advocate on their behalf.

Our stewardship and sustainability (the way we work)

Management (governance and oversight)

Writers Victoria is a not-for-profit incorporated association governed by a volunteer Committee of Management.

The organisation renewed its governing Rules in 2015 to bring them in line with updated legislation. We have a comprehensive governance framework and policy manual that is reviewed and updated on a yearly basis.

The Committee meets bi-monthly to oversee the business and affairs of Writers Victoria and ensure proper management of the organisation. Subcommittee and working group meetings take place in between scheduled Committee meetings.

Performance against this plan will be implemented and monitored through:

- Annual business planning and budgeting process (August to October each year).
- Incorporation of targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) into staff appraisals (January and February each year).
- Reports against progress at bi-monthly Committee of Management meetings (ongoing).

Financial

The Committee of Management has overall responsibility for the financial management of Writers Victoria and has established a Finance Subcommittee. The organisation follows procedures as outlined in its comprehensive Accounting Policy and Procedures Manual.

To ensure that the organisation operates within a responsible, sustainable financial framework, an annual budget is prepared and accepted prior to the commencement each financial year. It is the policy of the Committee of Management that a deficit operating Budget cannot be approved.

A recut of the budget is undertaken halfway through the financial year to reflect projected changes in revenue and expenditure. Progress against the budget is reported to the Finance Subcommittee on a monthly basis and to the Committee of Management at its bi-monthly meetings.

The financial statements for Writers Victoria are audited once a year by independent Certified Accountants who are qualified to perform audits in accordance with Australian Accounting Standards. Writers Victoria has a stable Committee of Management and a strong relationship with its auditor, providing stability of financial monitoring and corporate memory of financial performance.

Writers Victoria currently has a solid balance sheet, secure cash position, strong equity and a reserves base of over \$167,000. The organisation is committed to:

- Maintaining these reserves at recommended best-practice level of at least the equivalent of three months' operating costs.
- Incrementally increasing our cash reserves (over and above this amount) through achieving small but consistent surpluses to reinvest in future capital projects (such as website redevelopment).
- Growing our net revenue year on year (with targets set annually by the Committee of Management) and re-investing the majority of our revenue into our operations, program and member services.

Key business risks (from Risk Management plan)

As a small organisation with a large remit and constituency, Writers Victoria is very aware of the risks associated with the delivery of our diverse program with limited resources.

Writers Victoria has a risk management policy that aims to minimise the risk any particular operation poses to the organisation, staff, volunteers, clients or general public. 'Risk' is defined as the probability that an occasion will arise that presents a danger and includes external, physical, financial, reputational and legal hazards.

Risks are identified and managed on an ongoing basis, as well as being addressed as part of the annual strategic planning process.

Writers Victoria will put procedures in place that will ensure (as far as possible) that these risks are minimised and their consequences averted.

Policies are held for office, public liability, volunteers and directors' insurance. This extends to all Writers Victoria events held in Melbourne and regionally, as well as at Glenfern and the Old Melbourne Gaol.

Insurance associated with the Writers Victoria offices are the responsibility of the Wheeler Centre and the State Library of Victoria. Writers Victoria is active in reporting any physical building risks to the owner and maintaining a safe work environment for its staff, members and visitors.

Our program (2017 to 2020)

Writers Victoria delivers a diverse annual program and suite of literary services that is developed in response to the needs of our members and participants (including writers at all stages of their development, working across all styles and genres, and in all parts of the state).

It includes a comprehensive range of activities that includes:

- **Manuscript Assessment** services for writers who are seeking an objective, professional appraisal of their work. This includes leading on the development of the first best practice guidelines for Australian manuscript assessors.
- **Mentorship** opportunities for early career and emerging writers to learn from an industry professional on a one-to-one basis.
- **Regional professional development programs**, bringing author tours, presentations and customised professional development events to regional audiences. Our focus over the next four years aim to reduce our reliance on precarious grant funding year on year.
- **Targeted projects** with a range of partners and strategic priority groups, such as our Write-ability program for writers with disability (in partnership with Arts Access Victoria), The Salon Goes Regional (in partnership with Regional Arts Victoria), Indigenous Writing Intensive (in partnership with the Koorie Heritage Trust) and Young Writer Intensive (in partnership with Express Media) and more.
- **'The Victorian Writer' magazine, fully-accessible website and enews** featuring articles and resources on all aspects of writing and publishing, up-to-date news and information on events and opportunities.
- **Fellowships** for emerging and established writers through the provision of free studio space, writing retreats, mentoring, major writing projects or international exchanges.
- **Writers studios** offering secluded, dedicated and private writing spaces at subsidised rates (in partnership with the National Trust Victoria).
- **Space to write and research in our reference library**, where we maintain a great range of literary journals, writing-related reference books, books by members and books for sale.
- **Free literary community events.**
- **Membership services and support** for nearly 3,500 members.
- **Information, advice and guidance** from our experienced team.
- **Sector development** through the development of resources, capacity building through our program and partnership initiatives, as well as representation and advocacy on behalf of Victoria's writing community.

Artistic rationale

Our artistic and program decisions are informed by the diversity of our membership. Of the 96.5% of our members that are writers, 43% are in the early stages of their careers, 37% are emerging, and 16.5% are established writers.

The program includes presentation of literary events and delivery of artform- and professional-development opportunities on a range of topics and formats. We create high-quality programs delivered by professional authors and industry experts that are accessible at a range of price points.

It includes a comprehensive range of activities including workshops, literary services, development programs, studio residencies, fellowships, commissions, opportunities and resources.

We have the population, membership and geography to support diverse programming, which allows us to cater for writers with more niche interests (such as our recent games-writing, branching narratives and LGBTI-focused workshops).

The program encompasses both the craft and business sides of writing, providing a credible and affordable alternative to formal education. It includes taster courses for those just starting out and comprehensive manuscript development opportunities for more established writers.

We continue to enhance partnering opportunities and cross-promotional opportunities to increase the reach of our work, our member and audience base, and our stakeholder relationships. For example, our partnerships with regional writers' groups and festivals has led to more effective use of resources and guaranteed that topics and authors are appropriate and relevant for the needs of each community.

Writers Victoria began asking its members about their (dial-up) internet access and interest in online workshops in 2001. Thirteen years later, we were finally in a position to offer our first online workshops in 2014 as part of a digital program that continues to grow every year.

The development of digital platforms for 'The Victorian Writer', as well as new correspondence and online courses, are other initiatives that we will use to promote access to our program and professional development opportunities for writers and communities across Victoria (and beyond).

Writers Victoria is committed to supporting our members and those people writing in isolation throughout the state. We value the contribution of Victoria's regional and diverse writers and recognise the difficulties they face in accessing opportunities for professional development, inspiration and engagement. This will continue to be a key focus of our artistic and program decision-making over the next four years. Our commitment to access and inclusion means that our program will continue to:

- Support the writers that others do not.
- Take place in accessible venues in a range of locations (in the inner city, outer Melbourne and regional communities).
- Include online opportunities (in addition to, not as a replacement for, face-to-face engagement).
- Include opportunities at a range of price points (to reduce financial barriers to access).
- Respond to participants' access requirements upon request.

Evaluating our work

Writers Victoria takes an integrated approach to measuring and evaluating our work. Our evaluation framework allows us to review all activities and services within our program for their effectiveness, artistic vibrancy, cultural engagement and the outcomes they have for writers. This includes:

- Internal review of our projects and services.
- Attendance and participation figures (including income targets).
- Membership renewal and growth.
- Annual member, non-member and lapsed member consultation.
- Feedback from participants.
- Stakeholder forums and events.
- Online engagement.
- External opinion and critique.