



ROMANCE
WRITERS
of Australia

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc)

Annual Report 2018/2019

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Romance Writers of Australia: the heart of Australian romance

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc.) supports and develops writers of the world's most popular genre. RWA provides programs that target all stages of a writer's career – before, during and after publication – and promotes excellence in romantic fiction. RWA's strong community of members ensures writers can grow their careers in a nurturing and professional environment.

Our vision is a world where romance writers are well supported, highly respected and professionally successful.

Our mission is to support, promote and educate Australian romance writers.

Objectives

- Promoting excellence in romantic fiction
- Helping writers become published and maintain strong careers
- Providing continuing support and development

Values

At the March 2019 Strategy and Planning Meeting we identified four core values that define our organisation. Of course, there are many, many values that we would like to embody, but these were the four key ones that came out of our discussion, and how they need to inform our goals:

Romance focussed – Our goals need to acknowledge that our organisation exists to further authors in the romance genre, and those writing stories with romantic elements.

Career building – Our goals need to acknowledge that we strive to provide services to members that are at all stages of their romance/romantic elements author career, across our categories of aspiring, emerging and established. Career building is achieved by providing training in craft matters and by assisting our members to access opportunities within the romance and greater publishing industries.

Actively Supportive – Our goals involve all our members in active support of each other – peer to peer and also across the membership categories. This includes volunteering within the organisation, cheerleading each other and the romance genre, and supporting our members through their journey to publication and striving to reach their individual goals post-publication.

Community Minded – RWA is our tribe, our second family. We give and receive as part of that family. But RWA exists in the larger community as well, and we need to be mindful that we play our part there as well.

Goals

- Net membership growth of 10% each year
- Rolling review of all policy over 24 months
- Secure external funding; or develop new funding sources

2018/2019 Committee

Executive

President – Briony Vreedenburgh

Vice-President– Tracey Rosen

Treasurer – Bridie Smith

Secretary – Renee Geelen

Ordinary Members

Tanya Kean

Dianna Wilson

Babette Furstner

Nicolette Teixeira

Members who Resigned During the Year

Joanne Boog

Michelle deBruyn

Tracy Travis

Elizabeth Squire

Organisational Chart



Executive Summary – President's Report

After a tumultuous beginning, the new RWA committee settled into our roles and responsibilities and now we are performing as a well-oiled machine to provide our members with opportunities, support and professional development. Membership is down from last year, however the statistics suggest that we have seen the bottom of the membership drain and that we are moving forward once again.

This year saw the employment of a new Administration and Customer Service Assistant, Donna Munro, after Jillian Jones resigned the role. Donna has proven to be a pocket rocket, taking on not only an administrative role, but also the 'face of RWA' role – contacting new members and doing all she can to keep our existing members comfortable.

When Bridie Smith was brought on to committee as Treasurer, she brought with her bookkeeping and accounting skills, and we were able to bring all financial work back inside the organisation, which means we are in the processes of developing good internal systems for budgeting, forecasting, portfolio expenditures, and we have reduced the Audit expenses to nearly half of what they previous were.

In the tumult at the beginning of our term, the Group Grants scheme was accidentally overlooked. We will be resurrecting this Grants scheme in 2020.

The contest portfolio saw a drop in the numbers on some contests, and an increase in others. However overall our contests program is robust and continues to be popular and produced 7 percent of our income.

RWA welcomed back major sponsors Harlequin Australia, Draft to Digital and other sponsors Bolinda, Hachette, IngramSpark, Allen and Unwin and Kobo, as well as welcoming new sponsor Findaway Voices.

Much work is still to be done in the professional development, volunteers and marketing areas which will receive a greater committee focus this year, as well as the development of events outside our conference.

RWA would like to thank all the volunteers and RWA committee members who have helped throughout the year and look forward to a successful year to come.

Treasurer

RWA's costs during the 2018-19 financial year exceeded income resulting in a net Loss of \$9,670.80. Our net assets (equity) at 30th June 2019 were \$157,345.42. For further detail please see the Financial Statements.

Income

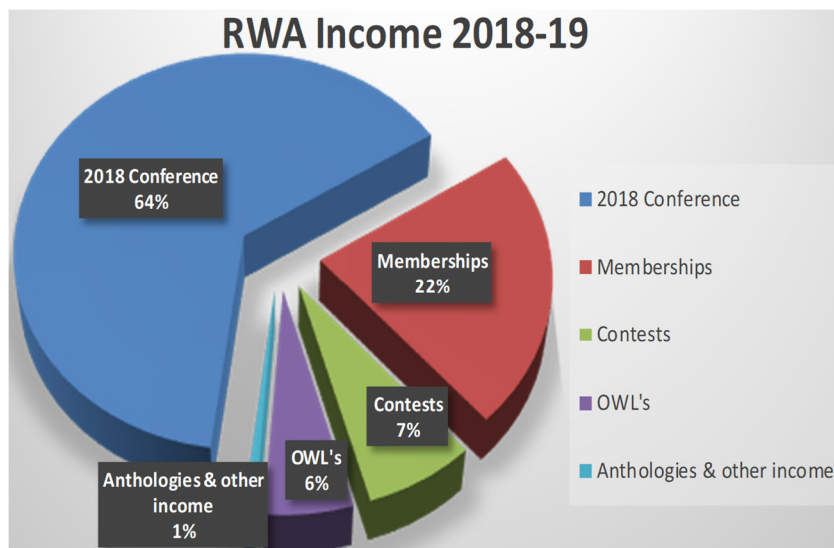
The main sources of RWA revenue in 2018-19 were Conference 64%, Memberships 22 %, Contests 7% and OWLs 6%. Anthology sales accounted for less than 1% of revenue.

Last year's conference ran at a net loss of \$8,698.77 which represents 90% of the overall loss for the year.

Cost of Sales

The Cost of sales breakdown shows 93% of costs were attributed to the 2018 Conference while it contributed 64% of income.

OWLs costs represented 5% of costs. Contest and Events expenses accounted for 1% each of our costs.

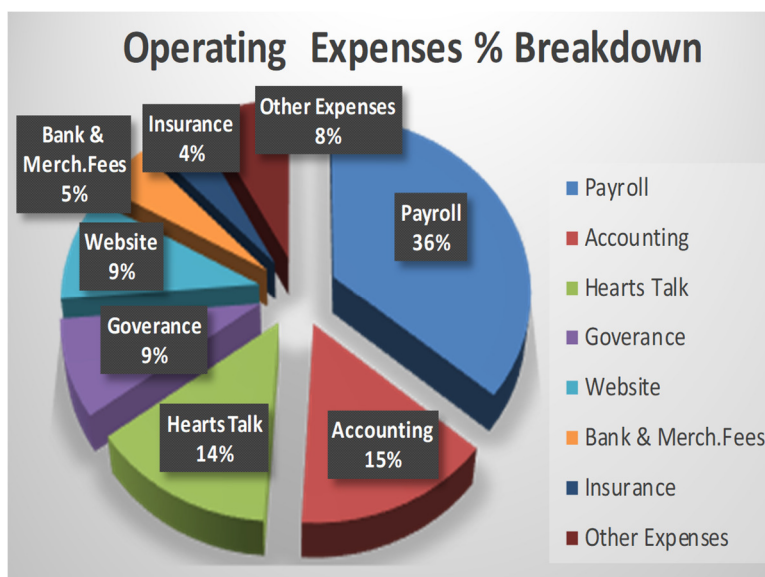


Expenses

Our main expenses were payroll – 35%, Hearts Talk Editor fees 15%, Bookkeeping and Audit – 14%.

Honorariums paid in July & August 2018 and Committee Meeting expenses (mainly travel and accommodation) were 9% of expenses.

Website support amounted to 9% while insurance was 4%, Bank & Merchant fees 5% and all other expenses totalled 8% of overheads.



Highlights 2018/19

Memberships

Membership as at 30 June 2018: 711

As you can see from the table below, membership peaked in 2015 at 940 and then has fallen since that time.

In March 2019 our membership bottomed out at 669 members. Since that time, the committee has put in specific plans to stem the flow of members out of the organisation, including contacting members whose memberships have lapsed (which has had a very pleasing result) and introducing new programs to reinvigorate interest in RWA, as well as making efforts to improve the level of positivity in the organisation. We do believe these efforts have led to the end figure of 711 members, which, in our view, represents a win.

We believe membership will continue on an upward trajectory, and will be watching this closely over the coming years.

Total Membership: 711

Ordinary Members: 700

Honorary Members: 11

Historical Memberships

2009	723
2010	718
2011	732
2012	838
2013	897
2014	970
2015	992
2016	947
2017	904
2018	748
2019	711



Portfolio Reports

Contests

Coordinator: Tracey Rosen

Contest entries continue to fluctuate across different contests this year, with one contest seeing as much as a 61% increase in entries, with another seeing a 37% decrease in entries. A number of contests saw the same number as previous years. We have discussed different changes to the contests being run, timing and promotion as part of our organisational three-year plan. We have yet again seen a strong effort from all of our contest co-ordinators, and want to thank everyone for their efforts. There is a lot that goes on behind the scenes, as there is with everything, and the contest co-ordinators are certainly working hard from well before the contest opens to make sure everything runs smoothly. Thank you!

The Ripping Start seemed to benefit from post conference enthusiasm with a 23% increase in entries for the first contest of the year.

The Selling Submission continues to be our least popular contest, but continues to offer a worthwhile area to allow our members to work on something that few of us enjoy, but is a necessary part of the business.

The Emerald saw the massive 61% increase in entries this year, and the Emerald Pro received exactly the same number of entries as last year. We have introduced the Sapphire in the 2020 contest period to take the place of the Emerald Pro, as we found that running both of these at the same time with a similar name caused confusion for both entrants and judges, and put additional strain on our reader judges. The Sapphire will run earlier in the year and will hopefully relieve some of the pressure on reader judges by spreading out the load across a longer period.

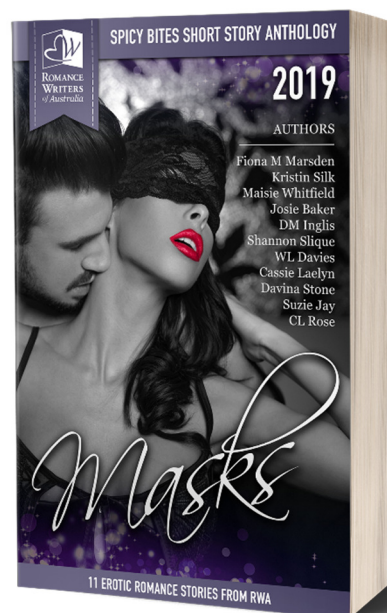
The Little Gems has seen declining entries over the past few years, and after 15 years, it was decided that this sweet anthology contest would become the Sweet Treats in the 2020 contest period. The Spicy Bites will remain as the more erotic option and we hope that the new theming will encourage a lot more entries into both of these contests. The covers for this year's anthologies were again designed by Lana Pecherczyk and complement the designs from recent years.

The First Kiss continues to be a popular contest with the same number of entries for the last two years. As the last contest for partial manuscripts before the end of the contest period, it could benefit from more promotion earlier so that we can rebuild the enthusiasm that we seem to naturally see with the earlier contests.

We saw a small decline in entries into the Valerie Parv Award this year, which could again benefit from additional promotion to encourage entrants. What a wonderful prize for entry into this contest.

Following from the survey conducted last year regarding the structure of the Romantic Book of the Year, this year was the first of a two-year trial period where the overall Ruby trophy was discontinued, and the categories were switch from length to sub-genre. The Ruby did see a significant decrease in entries this year of 37%. We will continue to look at ways to make this contest

fair and accessible to our members and increase the benefits for the winners. Additional prizes and media exposure are integral to this process.



Sponsorship

Coordinator: Laura Harris

RWA's Sponsorship Coordinator Laura Harris commenced in the role in February, taking over the in train sponsorship agreements for the Melbourne conference. Throughout the remainder of the year, Laura has maintained relationship with eight major sponsors for the conference including our Major Sponsors, Harlequin Australia and Draft2Digital//Findaway Voices. We are delighted to continue our relationship Harlequin and Draft2Digital and we welcome Findaway Voices.

Our Bronze sponsors for this year are Kobo and IngramSpark and we thank them for their ongoing support. Additionally, we have other sponsor supporters including Bolinda, Hachette and Allen & Unwin.

The sponsorship program had been revised in light of the 2018 membership survey. Laura will be meeting with current and potential sponsors to seek feedback on the current system, and to identify what else we can do to improve our already strong relationships.

ROMA

The ROMA is Romance Writers of Australia (Inc) annual award for reportage of romance and/or romance themes in the Australian media. To be considered, an entry needs to be published in Australian media by an Australian journalist about romance publishing/industry in Australia. There is no cost for entry but entries must be from financially current members.

In 2018/19, there were nine member-submitted entries in the ROMA across online (5) and print (4) media. This was the same on the previous year. For the third consecutive year, there were no entries under the 'broadcast' category (again, this year, a podcast was captured under 'online' since it is not traditionally broadcast).

Significantly three of the four print pieces were from major Australian newspapers or magazines.

Issues around the role, relevance and response of romance in a post #MeToo world dominated the key pieces this year, with 50 Shades references continuing to linger.

There were two comparatively unique angles (around Christian romance and the evolution of Love Studies) showing that there does continue to be new things to say about romance for those journalists willing to give it thought. The challenge for RWA going forward is to find and promote those topics and themes to engage the media and inspire exploration.

Events

Coordinator: Tanya Kean

Following the March S&P meeting it was decided to create a number of smaller state-based events to be held throughout the year. The smaller events will consist of both social and professional development events. It is envisaged that six events a year in addition to the annual conference will be held. This initiative began with two member forums (Melbourne & Brisbane) and more will be rolled out in the coming twelve months. Volunteers will be recruited to act as state-based coordinators to facilitate this initiative.

Annual Conference

Sydney Conference – 2018

The Sydney conference was held at the Sofitel Wentworth 17-19th August. Bronwyn Stuart sourced speakers and guests and with the help of the executive committee and Emily Madden, a program was created and registrations opened using a new platform - Grenadine. Special guests include Moe Ferrara from Bookends Literary Agency, Kathleen Schiebling from Harlequin and internationally renowned screenwriter Ross Greyson Bell. Rachel Bailey presented one of the two Friday workshops. Publishers include Harlequin, Escape Publishing, Penguin, Hachette and Tule Publishing. Business Hub participants include Draft2Digital, IngramSpark, Kobo, iBooks and Bolinda. Attendee numbers were significantly down on previous conferences, as a result revenue was adversely affected. As of August 2018, Bronwyn Stuart stepped out of the conference manager position and Tanya Kean and Tamara Martin took over.

Melbourne Conference 2019

Tanya Kean is the conference coordinator for the Melbourne 2019 conference being held 9-11 August 2019. A dynamic five stream program (Advanced Craft, Beginner Craft, Business/Indie, Life, Research and Career streams) was compiled by Tamara Martin. The Friday workshops were Melissa Storm (marketing for advanced members) and Natasha Lester (beginner/intermediate craft members). The international agent is Marisa Corviserio from the Corviserio Agency, the international editor is Nicola Caws from Harlequin International and the international publisher is Michelle Klayman from boroughts. Rachel Bailey is doing a one day intensive members only workshop with a maximum of 20 participants. Nalini Singh is the Keynote Speaker. Sponsorship dollars are down from last year, however attendee numbers are up, with all indications that the conference will make a profit this year.

Fremantle Conference 2020

The Fremantle conference will be held from 14-16 August 2020 at the Esplanade Hotel by Rydges, Fremantle. The planning team headed by Claire Boston have sourced Lisa Cron, to deliver a full-day workshop on Friday. International agent will be Tanera Simons, from Darley Anderson and International editor is Anna Boatman, from Piatkus. Lisa's workshop will run concurrently with a day of sessions/business coaching for published authors. New York Times bestselling author Heather Graham will also be in attendance, and new for the conference in 2020 will be a trade show featuring marketing, indie services and software companies.

Gold Coast Conference 2021

The Gold Coast conference celebrates 30 years of RWA and will be held between 13 – 15 August 2021. Several venues have been viewed as possible sites for the conference but as, yet no contracts have been signed.

Member Services

Coordinator: Dianna Wilson

Dianna took over the role of Member Services Coordinator this year. Time was spent familiarising with policies and procedures while tidying the member database and answering member's queries.

The connect@romanceaustralia.com contact email address was established and is monitored by Dianna. Many of the emails received are able to be answered by Dianna and others are passed onto the appropriate Committee member for response. The central point of contact has been received well and operates efficiently.

The member database was changed from Membermouse to Memberpress for a number of reasons including the ability to have system-generated membership renewal notices generated prior to membership expiring. As a result of the change in system and the fact that there were a few technical difficulties during this time (Dec - Feb) there were a large number of member queries that needed to be dealt with.

Renewal notices are now sent out one month prior to expiration and then again seven days prior to expiration.

The following tasks were also undertaken by Dianna during the year:

The content of the "New Member Booklet" was revised and updated

Removal of expired members from the Mailchimp Mailing List. Due to the technical issues this was let to sit for a while and approximately 175+ additional (one-off) emails were sent to expired members asking if they would like to renew their membership before those that didn't renew were removed.

A number of new member follow up emails were sent as a trial reminding new members of services available. Response was minimal but positive from those who did respond. Our RWA admin, Donna Munro, is now making follow up contact with new members.

Addition and removal of members from RWA Community Facebook Group

Member Survey - November 2018

With the input of the committee a Member Survey was drafted and sent out to all current and recently expired members (968 email recipients - 564 opened the email)

The response rate was lower than hoped with only 263 responses received. Many members offered valuable comments in addition to answering the set questions.

The results of the member survey assisted in guiding the committee in devising the 2019-2022 RWA Strategic Plan during the committee's March 2019 S&P Meeting and will continue to be a source of information for future committee decisions.

Aspiring Author Loop

Ambassador: Dannielle Line

During the year Emily Barlow took a step back from assisting with the running of the Aspiring Loop. Participation in the loop remains high and lively and always positive. The members are encouraging and supportive of each other with many discussions focused around craft. Dannielle has continued to run BIAW (Book in a week) challenges each month and find wonderful, generous and inspiring Guests for the regular and highly valuable Q&A sessions.

Emerging Author Loop

Ambassador: Karina Coldrick

Discussion within the Emerging loop ebbs and flows but members are receptive to RWA notices, member and other promotions, opportunities and answering questions/helping other members when asked.

Established Author Loop

Ambassador: Pam Eldridge

The Established Loop was moved over from Yahoo to Google Groups (the same as the Aspiring Loop). An invitation to join the new loop was sent to all current Established members at the date of the changeover. Usage remains on the quiet side.

Some members continue to have issues using Google but given budgetary and streamlining administrative concerns the platform remains our best option at this time.

Critique Partner Scheme and Independent Writers Scheme

Both the Critique Partner Scheme (CPS) and the Independent Writers Scheme (IWS) have served our members well for many years, assisting many members to improve their writing craft and to make important connections within the organisation.

The Committee listened to the feedback from the 2018 Membership Survey including the individual comments made, considered the declining participation and changes in membership needs, and during the March 2019 S&P meeting, after an intensive look at what we offer, the decision was made to retire both schemes at the end of April 2019.

Critique Matchmakers

Admin: Madeline McCreanor

Host: Bernadette Eden

A new Critique Matchmakers Scheme was developed by Dianna with the assistance and technical assistance of Bree. A full set of instructions and supporting documentation was created to ensure ease of running by volunteers.

Our first event ran with the maximum number of participants (12) on the 10th July.

Mentoring Program

The proposed mentoring program discussed at the March 2019 S&P is yet to be explored further.

Group Liaison

Rowena Candelish

Due to the limited number of groups registered with RWA we do not have much to offer members who are looking for face to face contact or specialist groups. (Further discussion and investigation is going on under another portfolio in regards to other ways RWA can provide face-to- face opportunities for our members).

During the March 2019 S&P meeting there were a number of decisions and options discussed which will help to improve this situation when initiated.

It was decided that all affiliated and associated groups (with their permission) should be listed on the RWA website for easy access for members to find.

In addition, the list is to be opened up and promoted to all members to list any writing groups they are part of.

Due to the lack of a dedicated IT/webmistress volunteers we have been unable to implement this change to date.

Services Directory

It was decided at the March 2019 S&P to add a page to the RWA website where members can:

List writing services they offer - editing, cover design, mentoring etc.

Recommend (outside RWA members) writing services to members

Due to the lack of a dedicated IT/webmistress volunteers we have been unable to implement this change to date.

Volunteers

Coordinator: Nicolette Teixeira (Hugo)

Volunteers has been without a Manager for a good portion of this year, so the programs that were already in place have lapsed somewhat. However, the role of Volunteers Manager has been taken on recently by Nicolette Teixeira (Hugo) and much work is being done behind the scenes to get our Volunteer program into line with the National Standards for Volunteer Management.

We have also engaged a second Volunteers team member who will assist Nicolette in her duties.

Next year will see much more action in this area, including implementation of a volunteer recognition program.

We are pleased to report an increase in the number of volunteers since March, and with the Strategy and Planning meeting that will occur directly after the Conference, we expect to put in place measures to ensure the ongoing viability of our Volunteers program.

Web Services/Social Media

Coordinator: Bree Vreedenburgh

Bree has been managing the Web/IT part of the organisation along with a team of two content managers, a blogs co-ordinator, Facebook moderator and Instagram moderator.

We upgraded to a virtual server earlier in the year, which improved our site loading times. We also overhauled the website setup with a view to making it more intuitive for members and the public to find the information they were looking for.

IT requirements change constantly, and with more and more of our services going online, and to provide the services our members demand, we are very close to being have to pay for services we have always previously used for free, such as MailChimp, or for low cost, such as JotForms.

These costs are not insignificant, and when those changes are required, detailed analysis will be made of the options prior to decisions being made.

As our membership matures, our need for more diversified communications options expands as well – and we have been responsive to our members needs, opening Facebook groups and e-mail loops as they have been requested. The whole communications network is being monitored to ensure we provide information to all of our members on the platforms they require. This takes more and more resources and volunteer time, and another two or three IT/web volunteers would be appreciated to spread this load a little more.

We will be looking at a streamlined on-line contests solution next year, however the first of the contests will still run under the old systems.

Facebook

The RWA Official Facebook page is our primary social media channel at this stage. It is our platform for sharing blog posts to our social followers, and also where we provide members with other opportunities to highlight themselves to a wider community and potential readers.

Facebook statistics

As at 10 August, our Facebook Public Page has 3881 followers, however our posts are only reaching an average of about 500 of those followers, even when they have been boosted. This year, we will be working more on gaining traction for our posts on Facebook.

Twitter

As at 10 August, our Twitter account has 2850 followers. There have been issues with the blog posts not posting correctly to the Twitter account, that will be addressed.

Instagram

We created a new RWAAUS Instagram account this year, which has already gained 704 followers.

The RWA Pinterest and YouTube have been static in the past year.

Looking ahead

With the engagement of a Marketing Manager, we will be able to streamline content creation and distribution, and ensuring these channels each perform as well as possible.

Professional Development

Coordinator:

Elizabeth Squire took on the Professional Development Portfolio in August 2018 however had to give up the role midway through her term due to work commitments. The role was vacant for several months, but we are pleased to announce that Kenny Raine has taken on the job. Libby Iriks is the Coordinator of the RWA OWL Program 2019.

OWL PROGRAM

This year has seen all of our OWLs volunteers step away and their roles filled with new volunteers.

We had a program of 30 OWLs (3 per month), with only a few that haven't run due to small numbers or presenter's personal issues.

Numbers for OWLs have tapered off, and we will be reviewing the feedback from the OWLs to see if we can identify any trends as to why this may be.

RWA Treasurer and Bookkeeper are responsible for payments to presenters and receipt of registration payments.

Other Professional Development

Not having a PD Manager has made it difficult to further our plans for alternative education streams to the OWLs such as on-demand webinars, live webinars, longer term courses and the like, however now that we have a PD Manager, we should be able to report back shortly on action that will be taken in this arena this year.

Focus for 2019/20

An update to our Strategic Plan will be provided after the Strategy and Planning meeting which will outline our specific areas of focus for 2019/20 and beyond.