



ROMANCE
WRITERS
of Australia

Romance Writers of Australia (Inc)

Annual Report 2019/2020

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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. We are a professional, supportive writers' organisation where everyone loves romance as much as you do.

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

Amongst the many values we embody, the following are the four core values that define our organisation:

Romance focused – 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 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

Executive

President – Joanne Tracey
Vice-President– Tracey Rosen
Treasurer – Bridie Smith
Secretary – Renee Geelen

Events – Tanya Kean
Volunteers – Briony (Bree) Vreedenburgh
Members Services – Debbie Deasey
Webmistress – Kim Lambert
Marketing – Ebony Rees
Contests – Linda Joyce
Hearts Talk Editor – Sara Land

Professional Development – Kenny Raine
Sponsorship – Laura Harris

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    President[President] --- Administration[Administration]
    President --- VicePresident[Vice President]
    President --- GeneralCommittee1[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee2[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee3[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee4[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee5[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee6[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee7[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee8[General Committee]
    President --- GeneralCommittee9[General Committee]
    VicePresident --- MemberServices[Member Services]
    VicePresident --- ITWeb[IT/Web]
    VicePresident --- Volunteers[Volunteers]
    VicePresident --- Marketing[Marketing]
    VicePresident --- Events[Events]
    VicePresident --- Contests[Contests]
    VicePresident --- Bookkeeping[Bookkeeping]
    VicePresident --- ProfessionalDevelopment[Professional Development]
    MemberServices --- Groups[Groups]
    MemberServices --- CritiqueScheme[Critique Scheme]
    MemberServices --- Mentoring[Mentoring]
    Marketing --- Sponsorship[Sponsorship]
    Marketing --- PRMedia[PR/Media]
    Marketing --- SocialMedia[Social Media]
    Marketing --- HeartTalk[Heart's Talk]
    Marketing --- Newsletter[Newsletter]
    Events --- Conference[Conference]
    Events --- OtherEvents[Other Events]
    Contests --- OWLs[OWLs]
    Contests --- Webinars[Webinars]
    Contests --- F2FLearning[F2F Learning]
    Bookkeeping --- OWLs
    Bookkeeping --- Webinars
    Bookkeeping --- F2FLearning
    ProfessionalDevelopment --- OWLs
    ProfessionalDevelopment --- Webinars
    ProfessionalDevelopment --- F2FLearning
  
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Executive Summary – President's Report

President: Joanne Tracey president@romanceaustralia.com

While we have experienced some changes at the committee level, the core committee is performing cohesively and continues to provide members with opportunities, support and professional development.

This year saw a change of presidency with Joanne Tracey replacing Bree Vreedenburgh from January 2020. RWA thanks Bree for her contributions as president.

Although membership has decreased over the past year, RWA has returned a net profit for the year in excess of \$36,000. This has been assisted by the receipt of grants and a COVID-19 subsidy together with tight management of expenses – particularly in the areas of administration fees and committee expenses – during these difficult times.

Due to COVID-19 the decision was made in March to replace the physical conference in Fremantle with a virtual conference. Overall feedback has been favourable and consideration will be given to running smaller virtual events outside the physical conference in the future. The awards ceremony was also run virtually this year. The events and conference team are to be congratulated for their delivery of these events during a time when many others were cancelled.

Membership declined during 2020 – primarily in the emerging and established classes. The committee will apply a greater focus to the area of member services in the year ahead – including consideration of membership pricing, a review of both the critique and group programs, and additional analysis around the reasons for membership lapses.

Unfortunately, due to the cancellation of our physical conference and border closures, there were no group grants approved in 2020. We will be resurrecting this grants scheme in 2021 – subject to social distancing.

Contest entries across the board remained relatively constant – with increases in some and decreases in others. While overall contest income was up slightly in 2019/20 and produced just over 7% of our income, the program has been reviewed and changes will also be implemented in the area of judging for the 2021 contest season.

During the year a Diversity Sub-Committee was formed with the remit to inform the committee proper on matters of diversity that are encountered, review the language of relevant policies and documents, as well as proactively offering suggestions for how RWA can better manage the diverse nature of our organisation.

A substantial amount of work has been done in the professional development space this year. Members were surveyed and in response to their answers the OWL Program has been reviewed, restructured and rebranded. It will now be known as the RWA Academy and will provide a range of options including online self-paced courses, online short courses (previously known as OWLs), and focused one-on-one courses. This new structure will be implemented in 2021.

Other in-person professional development events planned for 2020 have been postponed indefinitely due to COVID-19.

Although stepping back from the position of President in January, Bree Vreedinburgh took on the role of Volunteers Manager. Since taking over the Volunteers portfolio, initiatives include commencement of the Volunteers Rewards Lottery, an exit survey for volunteers, Monday Motivation posts on the Volunteers Hangout and an improved Volunteer of the Month program.

The committee focus for the year ahead will be largely on the areas of marketing and member services, our thirtieth anniversary conference on the Gold Coast, as well as the development of events outside our core conference – COVID-19 permitting.

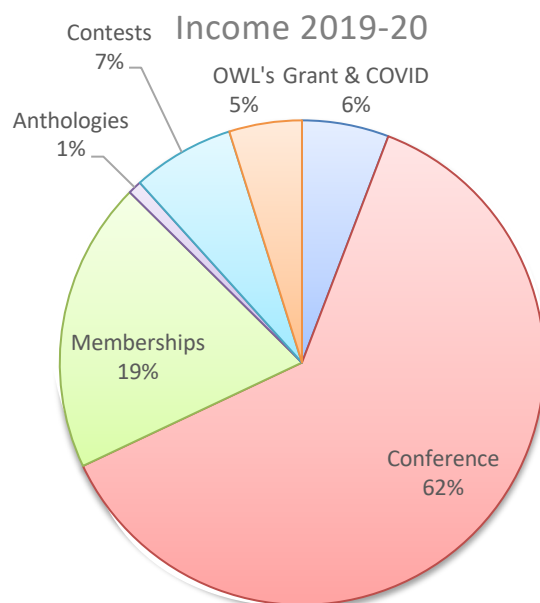
RWA would like to thank all the volunteers and RWA committee members who have helped throughout the year and look forward to the year ahead.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer: Bridie Smith treas@romanceaustralia.com

Income and Expenses

It is a privilege and pleasure to present my second annual Treasurer's Report to Romance Writers of Australia Inc.(RWA) members. 2019-20 financial year was a good one for RWA. Despite the roller coaster nature of our new everyday norms, members and teams remained constant in supporting each other and working tirelessly to benefit the organisation. It is thanks to that spirit of community and love for all things Romance that the organisation continues to adapt and thrive in meeting the existing and emerging needs of a diverse and dynamic membership.



Good governance includes operating with good financial management. I am very pleased to present our financial reports showing a very healthy profit of \$36,231. We achieved an operating profit of \$18,231, despite suffering a substantial decrease in turnover. Receipt of a Volunteers' grant of \$5,000 and Job Keeper and Cash Flow Boost payments of \$13,000 added \$18,000 to the profit.

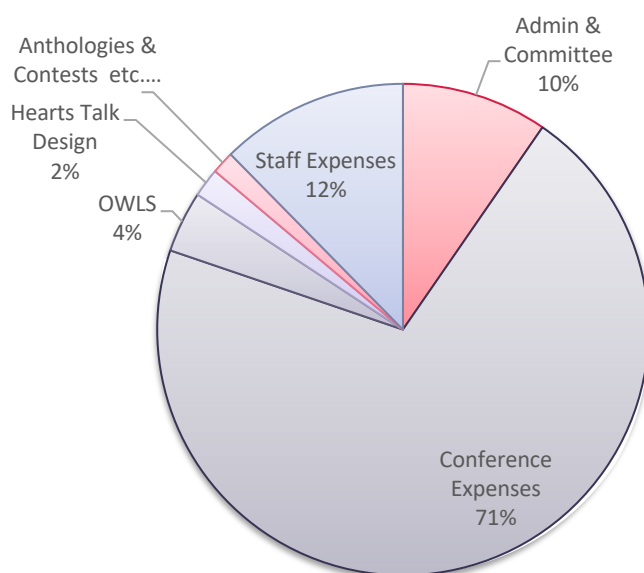
Income

The main sources of revenue were Conference 62%, Memberships 19 %, Contests 7%, and OWLs 5%. Anthology sales 1% & Grant & COVID payments 6%.

Conference Breakeven

The conference net income in 2019 was \$186,405 representing 62% of revenue while outlays were \$186, 822 equalling 71% of expenditure, essentially breakeven.

Expenditure 2019-20



Expenditure

OWLs expenses represented 4% of costs. Contest and anthology publishing expenses were less than 1% while administration and committee expenses accounted for 10% of costs. Payroll is the largest overhead at 12% of expenditure.

Thanks to every portfolio member who tirelessly volunteers their skills and utilises their networks we keep a tight rein on expenses, so members get the maximum value in return for their subscription. RWA's most valuable asset doesn't appear on the Balance Sheet. It is the membership and especially the fabulous volunteers who pour their hearts and souls into making RWA everything it is. Thank you.

Highlights 2019/20

Memberships

Membership as at 30 June 2020: 648

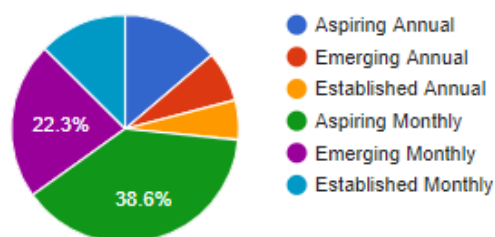
Membership has dropped since last year, but is a constantly fluctuating number month-to-month.

Total Membership: 648

Ordinary Members: 635

Honorary Members: 13

Total Transactions By Membership



Historical Membership

2009	723
2010	718
2011	732
2012	838
2013	897
2014	970
2015	992
2016	947
2017	904
2018	748
2019	711
2020	648



Portfolio Reports

Contests

Coordinator: Linda Joyce contests@romanceaustralia.com

Contest entries were not significantly different in numbers from previous years except for Selling Submission in which the numbers declined even further.

Spicy Bites and Sapphire contests have had a small increase of numbers year on year. The new Sweet Treats had the same number of entries as the retired Little Gems.

The Cover Design contest did not attract enough entries so did not proceed and will not be continued as a contest.

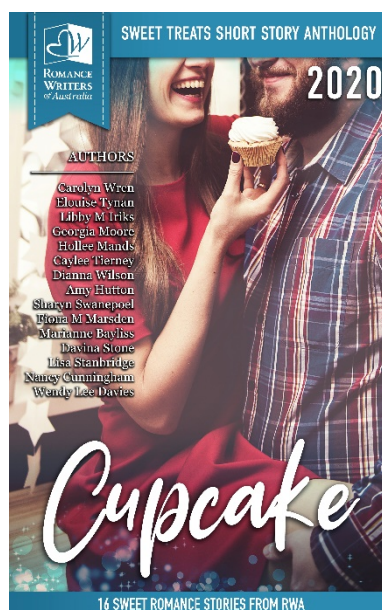
The Selling Submission will be retired and replaced with Publishing Basics. It is hoped that this contest will be attractive to both the traditionally published and self-published. It is also open to all classes of membership.

The Novella section of the RuBY which was run for the first time this year attracted 19 entries. It will continue next year.

Strategic Directions 2021

Discrepancy judging is to be trialled for the 2021 year in situations where the lowest score is more than 20% below the next closest score. The judge coordinator will organise the judges in these cases. This will put extra work on our pool of judges but is worth a try for our membership. In addition to this the scoring system has been expanded from 1-5 marks to 1-10 to give a greater spread of marks as the current digital marking system does not allow for half marks.

The score sheets and entry forms will be reviewed in line with the strategic aims of diversity within RWA.



Sponsorship

Coordinator: Laura Harris sponsorship@romanceaustralia.com

After developing a detailed, tiered sponsorship program in conjunction with advertising packages and the planned tradeshow then signing up Gold, Silver and Bronze sponsors, COVID hit! We had to swiftly pivot, developing a new method of engaging sponsors for our Virtual Conference. We would like to thank the three sponsors, Draft2Digital, Reedsy and Harlequin who supported us through our first ever Virtual Conference. With such a significant change from the original sponsorship program we had planned for the Fremantle Conference, it was fantastic to see their willingness to try something new with us.

Draft2Digital continued to be our main sponsors at conference, offering not only financial support but delivering presentations, taking appointments and giving freebies for our members. Their ongoing support has been significant, and their willingness to take a chance with a new format was greatly appreciated. Draft2Digital has expressed ongoing interest in working with us, an essential given the large numbers of members who are self-publishing.

Reedsy was new to us this year and keen to meet our members to see how they can support us in our writing journeys. Their suite of services fit well with the hybrid and indie publishing members and we hope to have them return next year.

Harlequin have demonstrated their ongoing commitment and support of our organisation and members, taking on sponsorship in the new format, including a change in how pitches were received. Having the largest romance publisher on board every year adds value to all members as they share their knowledge and experience with us, and offer access to a traditional publishing pathway.

ROMA

The *ROMA* is RWA's annual award recognising and rewarding the best reporting of romance or romance themes in the Australian media.

Each year, RWA members are invited to nominate reporting – whether print, or other media, that represent the strongest and freshest exploration of a romance-related subject.

Nominations are then assessed against criteria including quality, innovation, bias/objectivity and reach.

This year, there are three finalists:

- Caitlin Fitzsimmons for *Romance Fiction: A massive but 'largely invisible' cultural export* published by the Sydney Morning Herald on 18 January 2020.

This article was praised by the judges as an excellent, highly respectful news article highlighting how romance as a genre is undervalued and sometimes denigrated when, in fact, it is a thriving, diverse genre which would be celebrated.

- Tanya Nellestein for *I write romance because two things can save the world: love and books* published by the Sydney Morning Herald on 6 February 2020.

This article took the fabulous approach of 'discovering' many wonderful things about romance and was an unabashed promotion of the valuable lessons romance can teach about life including the always important issue of consent being 'deliciously and explicitly present.'

- Emma Noble and Sian Johnson for *Romance fiction got us through the GFC and World War II. Here's why it could help us during COVID-19* published by ABC News on 29 March 2020.

This article was appreciated by demonstrating that it's romance to the rescue in times of crisis. The writers acknowledge that the very thing romance is criticised for – the HEA – is actually the strength of romance, and is what people need during difficult times. This article clearly demonstrated that romance can be enjoyed by everyone and that there is something for everyone in romance.

This year, we had three strong contenders for the *ROMA* – and I'm looking forward to seeing many more in 2021.

The winner of the 2020 *ROMA* is: Caitlin Fitzsimmons with *Romance Fiction: A massive but 'largely invisible' cultural export* published by the Sydney Morning Herald on 18 January 2020.

Congratulations Caitlin.

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 events@romanceaustralia.com

At the 2019 August S&P four smaller state-based events were flagged for immediate implementation. Anne Gracie's Mildura Writing workshop (PD), Narrandera writing retreat (PD), and two Anthology Launch events (Social). In the weeks following the March S&P, COVID-19 travel and social distancing restrictions meant the cancellation or postponement of all of the regional events. The Fremantle conference was also affected and, after consultation with the committee and the conference team, a decision to hold the conference as an online event was made. The Fremantle venue contract was renegotiated and the WA conference will be held at the venue in 2022.

Conferences

Melbourne Conference 2019 - Wrap up

Tanya Kean was 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 held. The feedback from Melissa Storm's Friday workshop and her general attendance was mediocre with many comments being that she was not a great speaker and much of what she said could have been accessed online. It is my view that we do not ask Melissa Storm to be a guest at a conference for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, Natasha Lester's workshop aimed at beginner to intermediate writers was extremely well received. Rachel Bailey's one-day intensive members-only workshop was booked out in days (max 20 participants). This type of intensive workshop should be on the program every year, as many members of all writing levels appreciate the smaller group size.

The international agent, Marisa Corviserio from the Corviserio Agency, also was lukewarm in her attendance and many members that pitched to her were disappointed with her abrupt feedback and lack of interest in any pitches she received. The international editor, Nicola Caws from Harlequin International, was similarly received, with feedback suggesting she was not interested in anything that wasn't category. Michelle Klayman from Boroughs, although well-received may not have provided as many opportunities as members would have like for publication. Nalini Singh proved a popular Keynote Speaker. Merchandise was available for purchase for the first time this year and was somewhat well received.

Sponsorship dollars at 13.5K was slightly down from last year. The attendance numbers were 338. The treasurer's Profit and Loss statement will have details of whether the conference made a profit or loss.

Fremantle Conference 2020 -Wrap Up

The Fremantle conference was due to be held from 14-16 August 2020 at the Esplanade Hotel by Rydges, Fremantle. However, COVID-19 meant the conference had to be held online. Presenters were given the option of staying within their agreements and presenting in an online forum, with only a handful declining to remain with the schedule program. A software platform was sourced (Webinar Ninja) to accommodate the 40+ hours of content and the Fremantle team remained to manage the online conference. Pitching was also managed remotely with members pitching appointments being directly handled by the pitchers. Lisa Cron's full day Friday workshop was

replaced by Liz Pelletier and feedback was extremely positive. Heather Graham 'owed' us a conference from 2016 (Adelaide), however her presentation was a huge failure, lasting only 8 minutes from 60 minutes as she directed participants to her website for further information.

The online conference was held over 5 days to accommodate all the content, that due to the webinar platform could not run concurrently but instead back to back. There were some minor technical glitches in the initial stages of the management, but the Fremantle team got a handle on the 'new normal' online conference very quickly. Overall the feedback for the online conference was extremely positive with many members asking for the committee to consider having a smaller version of the online conference every year.

Due to the nature of an online conference costs were far less than a physical conference. Ticket prices were costed accordingly and replays of most of the workshops are to be made available to attendees for three months for the one ticket price. Sponsorship dollars were also greatly reduced. Libby Iriks coordinated both of the Virtual Anthology Launches and Tanya Kean put them together. Tanya Kean and Kristine Charles put together the virtual awards night presentation, screened on RWA's YouTube channel.

Sponsorship revenue = \$3,900. Ticket sales 361 participants. Accordingly, to the 'conference' budget, the virtual conference made a profit of \$33,527.31. These figures need to be cross-checked against the Treasurer's P&L for verification.

Gold Coast Conference 2021 - Planning

The Gold Coast conference celebrating 30 years of RWA and will be held from THURSDAY 12 – 15 August 2021. Mantra-on-View at Surfers Paradise was chosen as the venue. We have a grant of \$5000 from Destination Gold Coast and Tanya Kean is sourcing other grant funding to help with running costs. Angela Ackerman is contracted for the Friday full-day workshop, other International guests are Kimberley Atkins editor, from Hodder and Staunton UK and Deb Werksman from Sourcebooks Casablanca, with possibly more to come depending on funding.

The program is still under development however as it is RWA's 30th anniversary year, there will be some special events highlighting 30 years of the organisation, its members, and their achievements. A commemorative magazine is also being developed. The cocktail party theme is Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. ARRA will be holding an author signing day on Saturday 14th August in partnership with RWA. Stefanie London has agreed to be the closing keynote speaker.

The call-out for workshop submission will be a little different in 2021, the reach of the EOI for submissions will be widened to include indigenous, marginalised and diverse writing groups. The program will also reflect the growing response from our members for the conference program to be more inclusive.

Fremantle Conference 2022

The 2020 conference was forced to cancel RWA's booking at the Esplanade in Fremantle WA, rather than lose our \$5000 deposit already paid to secure the 2020 conference, the committee decided to reschedule the dates to comply with the agreed (and signed) venue contract conditions. The dates for the Fremantle conference are 12th - 14th August 2022.

Member Services

Coordinator: Debbie Deasey members@romanceaustralia.com

Debbie took over the role of Member Services Coordinator in April this year. The first month was getting some training on MemberPress, answering members' queries, connecting with the coordinators in the portfolio.

Members

There are currently 648 active RWA members, with 340 aspiring members, 175 emerging members, 120 established members and 13 lifetime members.

The connect@romanceaustralia.com contact email address:

Most of the emails are answered by Debbie and others passed onto RWA admin or the relevant committee members for review.

The Member Press database

We have had a technical issue whereby the system was not automatically generating reminders to members and/or no welcome emails for new members. This issue has now been fixed (as of August).

There has been a decline in members since January 2020. The decline has been mainly the emerging and established members. An email was sent to members not renewing. The response was limited but included cost of membership due to change in financial status due to Covid-19 and some unaware their membership has expired due to no renewal email.

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

A proposal to be drafted by Debbie (as discussed in the RWA July Committee meeting) regarding membership prices and to include concessional prices for the RWA committee to consider.

Group Grants email:

No current activity.

Loops and Groups

Aspiring Author Loop

Ambassador: Dannielle Line

The feedback from members regarding this group is positive and encouraging. Participation in the loop remains high and lively. 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: Samantha Marshall

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. Samantha is working with Danielle (aspiring group) to increase participation in the group.

Established Author Loop

Ambassador: Pam Elderidge

Usage remains on the quiet side. Debbie to contact Pam to consider a survey to be sent to established members to gauge what they would like from the group.

Critique Matchmakers

Admin: Madeline McCreanor

Host: Bernadette Eden

A new Critique Matchmakers Scheme runs four times a year and is currently has on average eight people enrolled each time. Madeline and Bernadette will consider reducing numbers to six per session to keep within the time limits and ensure each person has adequate time with potential partners.

Debbie will work with Madeline and Bernadette to send out a survey to all participants in 2020 to review how many critique partners remained in contact. Ideas for future conference include a live speed dating

Group Liaison

Unfilled

Unfilled since June. Debbie Deasey is currently filling position. Rowena Candelish recently stepped down from the position.

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. Most of the groups registered with RWA are closed to new members or they are not in the areas of member need. There are multiple people on the waiting list and multiple enquiries about members wanting to connect with other writers. Most of these writers are isolated due to geographical regions or a lack of an available group.

As discussed in the RWA July Committee meeting, Debbie is developing a proposal for an online group for writers, with costing and the requirement of volunteers.

Membership strategies for 2021

- Removal of expired members from the Mailchimp Mailing List (link with webmistress to do this).
- Addition and removal of members from RWA Community Facebook Group.
- A proposal to be drafted by Debbie regarding membership prices and to include concessional prices for the RWA committee to consider.
- A survey to all participants in 2020 to review how many critique partners remained in contact.
- To develop a proposal for an online group for writers, with costing and the requirement of volunteers
- The proposed mentoring program discussed at the March 2019 S&P is yet to be explored further.

Web Services

Coordinator: Kim Lambert webmistress@romanceaustralia.com

Achievements:

- The MemberPress software which replaced MemberMouse to manage our members has steadily been optimised, and a number of problems resolved.
- An analysis of the website issues has been done, and progress made on optimising that to minimise the size of the site, increase the speed of response, and improve the security and stability of the platform.
- An analysis of the G drive structure has been done, and an initial plan for restructure discussed with the Admin Assistant.
- A helpdesk system is almost ready to go live, to allow better management of IT requests, and change management requests in general.
- A new website has been stood up, within our hosting for the 2020 Virtual Conference.
- Work has been done on improving and better documenting all of our systems.
- G suite and email ongoing management continues to take up considerable time.

Challenges:

- Website traffic has been somewhat erratic, affected by the upheavals in the world this year, and some restructure has become necessary to our Mailchimp mailing lists, due to their change in plans and our subscriber numbers increasing to the point where we had to move to a paid plan.
- Membership numbers have dropped – partly because the membership software stopped sending reminders (which has now been fixed), and partly because the general economic downturn has had an effect.
- The website remains fragile, and there will be ongoing work to archive out old components and documents, improve automated backups, and document the structure changes as we go.
- Whilst Samantha Marshall assists with some website content and page changes, there is a desperate need to recruit a volunteer as an IT assistant – ideally someone with substantial technical IT experience. Additionally, a volunteer with experience in creating technical documentation would be very much valued.
- A project which was started, with respect to update of the website halted when the volunteer assisting found that they had new and extensive study commitments.

Forward Plans:

- Ongoing website optimisation and improvement.
- Implement G drive restructure.
- Finalise implementation of the Helpdesk / Change Management system
- Continue with documentation of everything
- Regularly assess our IT toolset for potential improvements.
- Deal with ad hoc requests re email management and content updates

Online Communications

Blog Coordinator/Mailchimp Coordinator: Nancy Cunningham blog@romanceaustralia.com

RWA Blog

Blog creation has been a bit haphazard for the last 6 months. We've had several regular blog contributors drop away late last year but Michelle Somers craft blog and Maya Linnell's blogs remain. 'The three things learned' blog has done really well with interested parties wanting to participate from across the membership base. I am going to put out a new call for this and hoping to get as many subscribers as I did last year. I ran a special Christmas edition for 3 things. For those participants who weren't selected for the 3 things blog I created two alternative blogging opportunities – the 'hot summer reads' and in the lead up to Winter – 'Comfort Reads' I am also going to put a call out for a version of that for Spring.

I did offer the Ruby winners from last year opportunities for a promotional blog post but only two took it up – Penelope Janu and Maddison Michaels. I'll do the same this coming year. I'm going to be a bit more proactive in promoting the contest line ups this year.

I'd like to be able to sort out the blog going straight to social media channels rather than harassing the coordinators of those channels every time I put a blog up – but I haven't been able to get the 'blog to social' to work accurately.

Consideration is being given to calling out the need for an additional blogger.

Professional Development

Coordinator: Kenny Raine pd@romanceaustralia.com

Kenny Raine took over the Professional Development Portfolio in August 2019 and was supported by the OWL Team as detailed in the OWL section below.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2019-22

The first task of the Professional Development Coordinator was to write the 2019-22 Strategic Plan to provide guidance for the next few years. This included three goals:

- Goal 1: To provide formal professional development learning opportunities that provide value for money to members.
- Goal 2: To facilitate and support informal professional development opportunities.
- Goal 3: To provide a revenue stream for RWA, while keeping in mind learning opportunities provide value for money for members.

In support of Goal 1, the OWL Program was reviewed and resulted in a proposal for the restructuring and rebranding of OWLs to the RWA Academy to provide a range of options including online self-paced courses, online short courses (previously known as OWLs), and focused one-on-one courses. This new structure will be implemented in 2021.

In addition, a survey was sent to members regarding other professional development areas such as workshops, retreats and writing groups. After the results were received, it was decided the Events Portfolio would be responsible for any in-person events such as workshops and retreats, while the Professional Development Portfolio would focus on online learning opportunities. Writing groups are the purview of Member Services. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, development of any in-person events was postponed.

Informal professional development (Goal 2) occurs through the RWA Facebook group; Aspiring, emerging and established author groups; Hearts Talk magazine; Critique Matchmakers; and Writing Groups. The varied formal and informal professional development activities provided by RWA was highlighted in an article in Hearts Talk in April 2020.

With respect to Goal 3, paid OWL courses provide a small revenue stream to RWA and are discussed in more detail below.

OWL PROGRAM

Libby Iriks remained as the OWL Coordinator, as did Cheryl Rosario and Bernice Greenham as the OWL Moderators. New team members included Claudine Tinellis as the OWL Registrar and Annette Laarakkers as the OWL Promotion Coordinator. The RWA Administrator, Donna Munro, also provided some administrative support.

The 2019-20 program included 25 OWLs with 246 participants, with a few that didn't run due to small numbers or presenter's personal issues.

Due to a decrease in OWL revenue and numbers, the Professional Development Coordinator conducted a review of the OWL Program. OWL numbers per course were greater in the first three years (2015-2017) when it was new and prices were low (\$25-\$30). However, OWL numbers declined significantly, particularly large groups over 30, after the price increase in 2018 to \$55. In addition, there was less competition amongst the OWLs when the program first started with only 1 or 2 OWLs offered per month. When OWL courses increased to 2-3 OWLs per month, over saturation of the market may have had an impact on numbers per course. Increasing competition in the broader online market, including free resources, is also thought to be a factor in declining OWL numbers. Based on the last 2 years, a good turnout for an OWL is 15-25 people. It is rare to see anything above this number, with a few falling between 10-15 people and a few with numbers less than 10.

As a result of this analysis, prices were reviewed. If a 10-person minimum is set with a \$55 course cost, the total income is \$550. This is roughly equivalent to a half day course for a non-school public appearance as outlined by ASA at 31/5/2020, which is a rate of \$561. Consequently, this is considered to be a fair rate, with RWA taking a percentage of this to cover administrative and marketing costs.

With respect to the potential over saturation of the market, the OWL program was limited to two OWL courses per month for 2020. Topics were varied to provide a range of choices for participants. However, the average attendance per course was 12.9 in 2019-20, compared to 12.5 in 2018-19 when 2-3 courses were offered per month, which is about the same. This resulted in the initiative to rebrand and restructure the OWL Program to the RWA Academy to raise its profile and provide a range of different levels of courses to suit different needs of members.

The Professional Development Coordinator will continue to monitor the Professional Development and OWL Program to determine the impact of these initiatives, but with increasing competition in the broader market, it is doubtful that RWA's market share will significantly increase. Therefore, the main aim is to provide a small range of courses aimed at various levels of ability to help RWA members develop their writing and author business skills and provide a small profit for RWA.

Hearts Talk Portfolio

Coordinator: Sara Hartland HTeditor@romanceaustralia.com

Hearts Talk, the official journal of RWA, continues to be a valued core benefit to members. The digital-only magazine is emailed to members at the start of the month with a reminder email two weeks later. Data indicates the open rate is consistently in 60-65% each edition. The production schedule was modified for 2019/20 to drop the January edition to ease the burden on volunteers during the Christmas season and reflect lower demand for content from members in early January.

Victoria Purman handed over the editorial role in December and was replaced by Sara Hartland as editor and Tanya Nellestein in the new role of deputy editor for the first edition of 2020, in February. Consistent with current policy, these positions are now volunteer based. Lana Pecherczyk vacated the role as designer in May. That position is currently being filled by RWA administrator Donna Munro, while a volunteer with suitable InDesign graphic design program experience is sought. If this is not possible, alternative technical solutions will be explored so the role is more easily transferable in future.

Hearts Talk page count for the 2020 financial year varied from 19 (August 2019) to 37 pages (April 2020). This reflects the commitment of the production team to providing interesting news and feature content, supplemented by contributed articles, and loyal support from valued regular columnists, of whom there are too many to list here. Regular columns cover independent publishing, marketing, legal issues, historical writing craft, traditional publishing and regular columns from RWA core areas including professional development, contests and events.

Two new industry-based columns were introduced to broaden the content on offer. Otherworldly Bites is contributed by a trio of authors discussing Paranormal, Sci-fi and Fantasy romance. MV Ellis's column Marketing, Money & Motivation column began in February. A third column highlighting the role and opportunities for volunteers within RWA began in April 2020.

Production of *Hearts Talk* has continued to benefit from support by volunteer proof-readers (currently 16).

Looking to the future, Heart's Talk will continue to focus on delivering quality content in a timely fashion to members while meeting the goals of RWA's strategic plan.

Volunteers

Coordinator: Bree Vreedenburg volunteers@romanceaustralia.com

Thank you to all volunteers, contest managers, judges and more who helped RWA so much in 2019/20.

Bree Vreedenburg took on the role of Volunteer Manager at the beginning of 2020, implementing some of the initiatives that Nicolette Hugo had started during her time in the role.



The Volunteer Rewards Lottery commenced in February 2020, with a random six of our amazing volunteers selecting rewards from amongst the offerings.

The budget for this initiative was \$600 (or an average prize value of \$100 per month), and expenditure to 31 July 2020 was \$623.60. The difference is attributable to the poor value of the Australian dollar against the USD, making two of our prizes more expensive than expected.

The Exit Survey for Volunteers has been implemented and received favorably. This process provides portfolio managers with current, useable feedback from those Volunteers who are standing down.

The improved Volunteer of the Month program was implemented in April, with VOTM recipients being taken from amongst some of our 'quiet' volunteers - our proofreaders for Hearts Talk. They received accolades in both Hearts Talk and a video presentation on Facebook.

Monday Motivation posts on the Volunteers Hangout on Facebook were implemented just to give a nice, positive message on Monday mornings to our volunteers. They have been well received. The Facebook Hangout has been used by our volunteers for communication purposes, which is good to see.

The Volunteers Portfolio was increased to two people, with the new Volunteers Administrator, Sue Price, coming on board from mid-July 2020, with the purpose of taking over the administrative side of Volunteers so that the Volunteer Manager can concentrate on bringing our Volunteers portfolio up to Australian Standards.

Matters to be addressed within the next 12 months are proactive health and safety initiatives, and ongoing contact with all volunteers. Initiatives to be implemented are an annual survey of volunteers, and a 2-yearly check of position descriptions that includes both the volunteer in the position and their portfolio manager.

Statistics

The strategic target is 1 volunteer for every 9 members (1:9). We currently have 69 volunteers, which gives us a ratio of 1:9.46.

An additional 3 volunteers are required to achieve the strategic goal.

The overall budget for 2019/20 was \$2400. Expenditure was \$740.32 because the initiatives that had been budgeted did not commence with the start of the financial year.

RWA would like to thank the following volunteers for their contributions over the past year:

Committee

Joanne Tracey, Tracey Rosen, Bridie Smith, Renee Geelen, Tanya Kean, Kim Lambert, Ebony McKenna, Bree Vreedenburg, Linda Joyce, Sara Hartland.

Sponsorship

Laura Harris

Contest Team Members

Erica Hayes, Cat Whelan, Pauline Johnson, Marnie St Clair, Jo McAlister, Linda Joyce, Kristine Charles, Tracey Rosen, Sarma Burdeau, Michelle Diener, Jayne Kingsley, Toni Carroll, Stella Quinn, Sara Hartland, Paquita Fadden, Fiona Marsden, Karina Coldrick, and all our contest judges.

Events Team Members

Melbourne Conference 2019

Tanya Kean, Nardia Sheriff, Kristine Charles, Pauline Johnson, Rachael Howlett, Savannah Blaize, Joanne Dalton, Di Inglis, Wendy Davies, Donna Munro, Tamara Martin, Laura Simpson

Virtual Conference 2020

Tanya Kean, Claire Boston, Michelle Diener, Shona Husk, Lana Pecherczyk, Daniel de Lorne, Donna Munro, Kristine Charles, Ebony McKenna, Laura Simpson.

OWL Team Members

Libby Iriks, Bernice Greenham, Cheryl Rosario, Annette Laarakkers, Claudine Tinellis

Member Services Team Members and Loop Coordinators

Debbie Deasey, Dannielle Line, Pam Elderidge, Madeline McCreanor, Bernadette Eden, Samantha Marshall, Cassandra Pennington Joanne Boog, Delwyn Jenkins

Professional Development Team Members

Elise K Ackers, Jillian Jones, Kenny Raine, Libby Iriks, Bernice Greenham, Cheryl Rosario, Annette Laarakkers, Claudine Tinellis

Social Media Volunteers

Kim Lambert, Nancy Cunningham, Sharyn Swanepoel, Suzie Jay, Cassandra O'Leary, Nas Dean, Jodi Gibson

Web Team Volunteers

Kim Lambert, Samantha Marshall, Anna Tito, Jessica Hamby

Hearts Talk Team Volunteers

Sara Hartland, Tanya Nellestein, Donna Munro.

Proofreaders

Pam Collings, Barbara Hannay, Vonnie Hughes, Penelope Janu, Moraig Kisler, Jodie Morphett, Serena Sandrin, Patsy Poppenbeek, Janette Whitehead, Catherine McKinnon, Nicola McEniery, Carolyn King, Shelagh Merlin, Lisa Stewart, Jodie Gibson, Debbie Deasey, Esther Clark, Anna Hackett, Michelle Diener, Claire Boston, Clare Connelly, Carolyn Wren, Laura Boon, MV Ellis, Jo Speirs.