LOCAL GROUP GUIDELINES
FOR MEMBERS

January 2019

SoA local groups are organised by members, for members. We’d love to see more members getting together locally to share stories, experiences and laughs, and to discuss the issues that are important to you. Attending group meetings also gives you the opportunity to raise issues you want to report back to the SoA.

If you’re interested in setting up a meeting of members in your area, these guidelines cover how the we can assist you, top tips for organising meetings and applying for financial assistance from the SoA.

Why set up a local group?

- A way to connect with your local writing community.
- An opportunity to regularly meet and talk to fellow members.
- A forum to share experiences in writing, publishing, self-publishing, and to discuss members’ professional problems and possible solutions.
- An opportunity to inform each other about issues and changes in the publishing industry and to discuss opportunities to recruit new members.
- A way you can participate in wider SoA regional activity, campaigns and projects, and other national book-related events, such as library and bookshop campaigns (‘Books are my Bag’).
- A direct line of communication with the SoA Management Committee.

‘Local groups tend to be more personal and less formal. Friendliness and support should be the watchwords.’ Janet Laurence, member of the Management Committee and South West Writers.

How we can help you get started

- We can let you know the number of members living in your area and email them to gauge initial interest in setting up a local group. Please send us the postcode areas you’d like us to cover.
- If there is enough interest, you organise the first meeting and we’ll notify members by email through our newsletters, on social media and list the event on our website.
- We’ll direct members to contact you for further information about the group and meeting. The SoA will send emails about future meetings and group updates from our central mailing list as it is kept up to date with all members in the area. You do not need to maintain your own mailing list.
- Before the meeting we can send you some SoA printed materials to remind you of the membership benefits. Please let us know and we can post them out to you.

For your first meeting, a free informal get together for members to socialise works well. Encourage members to bring their latest book or what they’re currently working on to get the conversation flowing. After your initial meeting, you can
continue to meet regularly and the SoA will help you by posting meeting details to our website and emailing members in the area.

As the local organiser, you will need to:

- find and book a suitable venue for each meeting. A café or pub with an accessible space that can be reserved works well.
- send us the meeting details so that we can inform members with plenty of lead time (six weeks ideally)
- invite, liaise with and, if appropriate, agree expenses and/or fees to external guest speakers. Please see the finance section below regarding payments.

Top tips for successful local group meetings:

- **Forward plan:** successful groups plan meetings well in advance.
- **Avoid the need to pay room hire or cancellation fees:** if meeting mid-week, cafés and pubs are usually happy to reserve an area for free.
- **Avoid expenses:** members suggest that meetings are organised so that individuals are responsible for buying their own food and drink.
- **Have a direct contact:** it is helpful if members are able to contact the organiser direct with any queries and to RSVP.
- **Avoid overkill:** meetings more frequent than once a month can be overkill. Most of our local groups meet somewhere between once a month to twice-yearly.
- **Liaise with the SoA:** make sure you send us the meeting details at least six weeks in advance.
- **Decide your format and regularity:** use your initial meeting to discuss the format and what members would like from the group and meetings. Once the operating details have been established, the group is then added to regional groups page on the SoA website.
- **Use your group’s expertise:** group members are encouraged to share their knowledge and experience by leading discussions or giving an informal talk.
- **Book external speakers well in advance:** if there are gaps in the group’s knowledge, arrange a speaker two-three months in advance to visit the group. Remember to agree fees in advance.
- **Keep in touch in between meetings:** members might find a Facebook group valuable. Let the SoA know if you would like us to set one up for your group.
Welcome new members: some groups have a ‘buddy’ system for new members. Consider sharing transport to and from meetings.

Make use of the SoA: if you need help, ask. We’re able to provide limited assistance such as printing name labels and collating networking sheets.

Make the most of other networks: link up with other local writers groups, literature festivals or writer development agencies.

Ideas for types of meetings:
- Talks: some group meetings include a talk by a ‘featured writer’. This could be someone from within the group talking about their books and style of writing, or it could be someone from outside the group sharing specialist knowledge such as book promotion or finding an agent.
- Networking or social events: you might simply want to meet to share ideas and make new friends and colleagues.
- Local author showcase: present an afternoon or evening of local authors reading their work at a café, pub, bookshop or library.

After your meeting/event, we’d love to hear how it went! Please complete this short survey to feedback to us on what worked well and how the SoA can support you with future events. Please remember to complete the survey after each event.

Once your local group is up and running, join our local group organisers Facebook group to share hints and tips for successful group events with fellow organisers.

To be listed as a local group on the SoA website, the group must be:
- Accessible - only venues that are fully accessible should be used.
- Inclusive - all SoA members must be allowed to attend. Non-members may attend up to two meetings but if they wish to continue attending, membership of the SoA should be required.
- No conditions - other than being an SoA member. If you wish to set up a special interest group, please contact us for further information.

If there is already an established group of writers who meet regularly in your area, the SoA is happy to partner with them, perhaps by offering:
- an SoA speaker to attend a meeting
- collaborate on a one-off event
- a Management Committee member to be their point of contact with the SoA
- a membership offer
- to promote their local meetings on our website
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The Society for Editors and Proofreaders also have a network of ambassadors who are happy to visit local groups for a ‘meet the editor’ session. For more information, contact the SfEP.

Support from the SoA

SoA staff members are able to visit each local group once per year to give a talk and answer member queries. Example topics include:

- The business of writing
- How to make a living as a writer
- Poetry as a profession
- How to run an effective campaign
- Copyright and permissions
- Top tips for contracts and negotiations
- Know your rights: the C.R.E.A.T.O.R campaign
- From page to screen: the adaptation process
- Prizes, awards and other sources of income
- Getting started in self-publishing

Please contact us to arrange a visit at least eight weeks in advance.

Funding

It is expected that most local group meetings will be cost-neutral, either as a free gathering in a café or pub where members pay for their own food and drink. The SoA is able to offer financial support to help towards the cost of running larger, one-off events local groups would not otherwise be able to hold. Financial support is also available to help new local groups establish themselves.

Existing local groups

Alongside regular free to attend meetings, local groups may wish to organise an event which incurs costs to run, such as speaker fees to bring in external expertise and build the group’s knowledge or venue hire for a larger space to accommodate more attendees. In order to be eligible for financial support, your event must achieve at least one of our regional aims:

- Improving authors’ business skills
  Events could include a practical workshop on publicity skills, or featuring a speaker sharing expertise on self-publishing.

- Providing access to local professional networks
  For example, joint events with other local writers groups or literary festivals in your region.
• Encouraging emerging writers or those just starting out
  Events could be in partnership with your local writer development agency or
  visiting your local college to speak to creative writing students.

Events will need to take place in an accessible venue to be eligible for support. Groups can apply for up to £300 per event and may submit two applications in a twelve month period. You must apply for funds at least eight weeks in advance of your event and costs must be agreed in advance. We cannot guarantee support for all events and each application will be assessed on a case by case basis. Please submit an application form to us.

There is limited funding available per year and once the budget has been allocated, requests for financial support will be not be considered. If SoA financial support is vital to running your event, you may wish to consider holding your event once more funding becomes available in the next calendar year.

New local groups
To help new groups establish themselves, up to £600 per group is available for the first 12 months of meetings and events. Once you have run an introductory meeting and agreed how the group will be run, you will need to email us an events plan for the first six months including approximate costs. After six months, the local organiser and SoA will review the group’s progress which will inform the next six month plan. All costs need to be agreed at least eight weeks in advance of each event/meeting. Once the group has been running for 12 months, the group will be able to apply for financial support as outlined above for existing groups.

Finances
To avoid local groups having to handle their own funds, the SoA will make payments for costs such as speaker fees, venue hire and deposits. The invoices should be addressed to the SoA and sent directly to us for payment. If members pay for their own food and drink as part of meetings, ideally this should be covered on the day of the meeting by the individual members and not collected in advance.

Groups are encouraged to charge a ticket price for events to help cover running costs. There should be two prices – one for SoA members and one for non-members. Please contact us to discuss ticketing methods and handling income. Local groups should not set up their own individual bank accounts. Whilst payments can be handled by the SoA, unfortunately we do not have the resources to be involved in arranging room hire or organising speakers.
Please contact Francesca Howell at the SoA on 020 7373 6642 or by email at regionalgroups@societyofauthors.org with any queries about these guidelines, for financial support application forms or for more information on setting up a local group in your area.