



Before 2015, there has never been a survey done of members of AWP's Writers Centers & Conferences group. It is a diverse group of writing centers, conferences, festivals, retreats, residencies, and workshops, and perhaps we never conducted a survey because we feared it would be too much like comparing apples just getting started on a tree with bright, expensive oranges. We ultimately decided that the benefits of conducting a survey outweighed any hesitations that we had.

Survey Goals

In the fall of 2015, we conducted a survey of—then—145 member programs (we have since grown to 155). The goal was to find out more about the programs we serve so we can offer better services and programming. We also wanted to be able to present some key findings to our member groups that might prove useful as they seek funding, consider new strategies, and hire staff.

The survey was open from October 1 through 16, and we had a response from 45% of our member groups.

General Findings

More than 50% of those responding were conferences. Though we often talk about the trend of online programming, none of the respondents offered online courses. About 60% of programs limit class sizes to between 6–12 students.

When asked to estimate the demographic breakdown of their attendees, we learned that the majority was white (74%) and female (68%), which is pretty much on par with what we heard in AWP's 2015 Survey of Writing Programs.

The answers to a follow-up question—"How do you reach out to underrepresented demographics?"—proved interesting. Of the 44 who answered this question, 26 said they already had processes in place to bring in writers of underrepresented groups, 7 stated this was a problem for their organization and wanted to find a solution, and 6 felt this was not something they needed to pursue.

We have emailed program directors the PDF results of the full survey and the separate category relevant to their WC&C member program—whether they are primarily a conference, center, workshop, festival, retreat, or residency. It is important to note, however, that the survey data for different categories is complicated not only because we did not have good representation from all categories, but because some members run multiple types of programs: a conference *and* a center, for example. We touch on this again at the end of this document.

What follows is an overview of responses for each category. For more information about programs comparable to your own in size or region, please contact Diane Zinna at diane@awpwriter.org

Responses from Conferences (31)

Conferences had excellent representation of all genres, with playwriting, screenwriting, and children's literature all being offered by nearly 50% of groups. Songwriting and YA literature appears to have been categories we should have polled, as several wrote those genres in. Only three programs reported that they offer any work on literature in translation.

The largest number (40%) reported they were located in the rural United States. 94% reported they were not-for-profit. Most (56%) take place over 4–7 days, and 87% report that they conduct it in the same place every year. When asked what makes their program unique, almost all mentioned a special location. Speakers and location were judged as the most important to attendees. Most (25%) reported their program charges \$1,000–\$2,000 to attend. In terms of best promotional practices, almost all respondents reported word of mouth. Flyers and print advertising were judged least effective.

In terms of staffing, half of respondents said they had no one working full-time; the other half reported 1–5 full-time staff. All surveys have difficulty getting reporting on financial information, but of the 17 conferences that responded to our question about director salaries, the highest was \$60,000, the lowest was \$0, the median was \$24,500, and the mean was \$42,000.

Responses from Workshops (24)

For the purposes of this survey, we defined a “class” as a program of lectures and, perhaps, students sharing pieces of their work. We defined a “workshop” as a program where students’ full-length works are exchanged and reviewed by peers and the class leader. We saw a great deal of overlap between workshops, conferences, and centers, so among the *differences* we saw: workshops tend to have been existence longer; several have been in existence 30 years or more (21%). Many more workshops than conferences are for-profit (31%). Most were one-week programs (46%). When asked what makes their workshops unique, most mentioned community and size. More workshops than conferences named publishing as a top attendee priority, and most attendees (42%) were reported to be over age fifty.

Responses from Centers (19)

Such diversity of genres at our member centers! Programming in fiction (at 100%); poetry and creative nonfiction (at 90+); playwriting, screenwriting, and children's literature (at 60–85%); and interdisciplinary work are being offered at almost 50% of the WC&C member centers. Most (58%) are not associated with a school or university. Most (26%) have been in existence 25 years or more. Most (58%) are located in urban areas. 50% state that their programming costs \$50 or less to attend. Most assert that their students’ main goal is publishing. In contrast to workshops and conferences, the majority of students at centers would be considered beginning writers, and 81% reported that they do not share space with other programs.

Responses from Retreats (13)

Retreats were the most expensive programs, with 55% charging \$1,000–\$2,000 and 33% charging more than that; 80% of those responding do not offer discounts for students. The goals of those in attendance were reportedly enrichment and revision time. The average salary of a director is \$35,000.

Responses from Festivals (7)

The majority of festivals reporting were from the rural United States. 85% were not-for-profit. Most festivals (57%) run 2–3 days. 71% return to the same location each year. In terms of draw, most reported that there is some culturally unique element attractive to attendees, who for the most part are professionals for whom

creative writing is not their career. Women are still in the majority (72%) of attendees. All of the reporting festivals reported that they consciously work to attract underrepresented demographics. The majority (83%) have at least one full-time staff member, with an average director's salary of \$50,000.

Responses from Residencies (6)

The residencies that responded to this survey were well-established, with 50% being around 10 years or longer. 67% were located in the rural US, and 83% said they had 1–5 full-time staff members. Only one program does not pay their director a salary. Of those who do pay, the average director's salary was \$48,200. This category was the most highly funded by private donations. Half reported they shared space with other programs.

What We Learned and Can Apply to WC&C Member Services

About 30% of the survey's respondents are fairly new to WC&C, having joined in the past 1–2 years; the next largest segment (18%) has been a member for more than 10 years. Most responded that they joined WC&C for community and advertising opportunities and state that added visibility is the biggest benefit they've seen as members. Many also stated that they enjoy staying connected with other directors; about 55% responded that they read and enjoy the peer-driven *WC&C Quarterly*.

When we asked what more people wanted from their WC&C memberships, several mentioned that they would like more information about funding opportunities, more support from AWP in attaining funding, help with reaching underrepresented demographics, better collaboration between groups, and more programming geared toward non-academic writers. Our plan is to address these issues in upcoming issues of the *WC&C Quarterly* and propose a panel on funding for #AWP17.

As mentioned in the introduction, some members run multiple types of programs. For example, a respondent might be speaking for a conference *and* a center, or as an administrator of several conferences each year versus one annual event. We reviewed individual responses, and of our 60 respondents, only 30 identified their programs in one way; 29 said they had more than one type of program; and 1 selected no answer, despite the "other" write-in option. Of those who stated they had more than one type of program, 6 wrote in a type that was not a selection on the survey.

Should we have required respondents to "best describe" their program in one way? If we had, we fear the results would not have painted a picture of the many hats our WC&C member directors must wear as administrators of multiple styles of programs.

What Next?

Once you have had the chance to review this survey and the category responses relevant to your organization, we would love to hear from you. How can future surveys serve you? How could they be better structured? What questions did we not ask that seem important now? We would love to hear your feedback. Please contact us at awp@awpwriter.org, and thank you for your membership in WC&C.