

Guidelines on Writers' Fees

Payment to writers is a key component of sound and successful literary presenting. However, deciding on a payment policy for your organization can be complicated by the fact that there are no set amounts or formalized contract structures for writers' fees, which vary widely.

Whatever your organization's scale or situation, it is recommended that some form of payment is made to participating writers. Payment professionalizes your event and organization, increases your funding prospects, and serves as an important show of solidarity with the writers who create the literature that your organization exists to foster.

If you are accepting funding from a grantmaker or public agency, you will be expected to pay artists' fees and promotional costs and ensure that your event is accessible to the public. A good curator should provide artistically excellent programming which includes artists who represent the diversity of the community, especially when public funds are used.

When determining and negotiating a fee, we suggest you consider the following:

- **The context:** How large an audience do you expect for your event? Are you just beginning a program, or do you have many years experience in presenting a celebrated series? Do you or any staff or board members have relationships with your chosen author? Will there be travel involved? Will you expect the writer to share in the promotional efforts?
- **The content:** A full workshop, an evening's reading, or a six author panel discussion will require different fee agreements. How much time and effort will your event require of the author? If you are paying an anchor reader for 10 minutes to open a reading, the fee might be an honorarium of \$50 or so, whereas if you are paying someone for an entire reading or workshop you can expect an author's fee to be at least \$125 or greater, as NYSCA recommends.
- **The custom:** Emerging writers are customarily more affordable, valuing exposure and the opportunity to build their reputation which your event might offer. Established and prominent authors will command higher fees. Sometimes writers work through agents and their fees are non-negotiable. Sometimes writers will accept a lower fee than is customary for them because of their wish to participate or lend support to a particular event or organization. Well-known writers may use sliding payment scales - taking content and context into consideration from their own end - and accept a reduced fee from a smaller, grassroots reading series than they would expect from a large university or speaker's series. Keep in mind, however, that writers are professionals. Even though they may be willing to negotiate their

fees, they can and should expect to be paid as other artists and professionals and should not be exploited.

- Speaking with other organizations that have already featured the author or have held comparable events is an excellent way to gauge customary fee ranges in advance of proposing or negotiating payment.
- Many writers will have set fees, so your response to those fees should employ flexibility and creativity. Work to build partnerships with other organizations who share a similar mission or interest. Consider pooling your resources to expand your budget and promotional capabilities. Try to engage other organizations to share travel or actually contribute to the fee. For example, a seniors' home, youth program or school might be interested in having the writer make a presentation in addition to his or her reading for the literary presenter. This is considered an outreach activity and greatly enhances the writer's visit to the community.
- Just as consideration of fees should be part of the first stage of planning your event, negotiating those fees should be done at the very outset. Be direct; discuss the fee clearly and candidly. Share with your potential author your expectations for the event, along with your budget level. Fees are often agreed casually through a friendly phone call, but contracts are always advisable since they will help to ensure that your expectations meet those of the writer and will prevent any confusion or disagreement. Once you have agreed to a fee, send a simple letter to the writer outlining all the activities planned and specifying the payment that you will make in exchange.