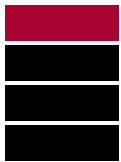


Poets & Writers' Guide to **PRESENTING
READINGS
AND
WORKSHOPS**

By Jane Ludlam

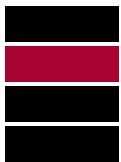




Introduction 2

The Value of Literary Programming

Know Your Audience



Finding and Negotiating with Writers. 3

Choosing a Writer

Where to Find Writers

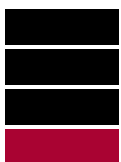
How to Negotiate a Writer's Fee



How to Present a Reading. 6

Attracting an Audience

Budget



Fundraising 12

The Readings/Workshops Program Helps Pay Writers' Fees

Introduction

We have created this as a step-by-step guide for presenting literary readings or creative writing workshops. Many organizations think about having a reading for the first time when a writer approaches them with the idea. For those who have never hosted a literary event before, the idea may be a bit daunting. Each reading will be different, depending on the writer, the community, and the organization. But every literary event has elements in common that a sponsoring organization should consider when planning. This guide was designed to show you how to present a reading or workshop, and to help you bring into reality the kind of literary event you'd like to have.

We also want to give the new sponsor encouragement, an idea of what to expect, and information about the Poets & Writers' Readings/Workshops Program, which provides funding up to \$1,000 per year per organization to supplement writers' fees for readings and workshops. This guide also explains the benefits of literary programs for the community and the sponsor; guidelines for choosing a writer and negotiating a fee; how to set the stage for a reading; making a budget; and fundraising.

The value of literary programming

A museum recently held its first poetry reading, which was the first such event for 80% of the audience. After the event, a man commented, "My wife made me come to the reading. I thought I'd be bored. It was great! When's the next one?" While it was his wife who got him there, it was the poetry and the presentation that captured his imagination. Another example of a literary event that had a powerful effect on all its participants was a creative writing workshop at a rehabilitation center in New York State; the patients were so enthusiastic about the program that visitors and family members became interested, and the workshop was expanded to include the community. Literary programs can also be beneficial for organizations of all types and sizes, including social service groups, community centers, churches, synagogues, senior centers, and schools.

Since you're reading this, you've probably already decided that you want to host a reading or workshop. But in case you're uncertain, this section seeks to encourage you to present a live literary event. Following are the ways readings and workshops benefit sponsoring organizations and the community.

Benefits of a reading or workshop:

The community is exposed to living writers.

For many people, a reading is their first encounter with a living writer.

A reading can help make literature come alive for people.

Some people who find books inaccessible appreciate the immediacy of a live performance by a writer.

Readings can expand the sponsor's audience.

Readings and workshops can attract new audiences that might not otherwise support an organization.

Readings can establish direct ties to the community.

A reading series can be a good public relations tool by helping organizations reach out to other groups in the community.

Workshops bring people together.

In libraries, churches, synagogues, and other community centers, a creative writing workshop can provide a stimulating focus for group activity.

Literary events enhance existing community programs.

Workshops can be integrated into other activities, such as book discussions and literacy programs.

Workshops can have therapeutic benefits.

In settings such as senior centers, youth programs, correctional facilities, or rehabilitation centers, a writing workshop can be a therapeutic form of self-expression.

Know your audience

It's important to know the community that you're trying to serve and match the writer with the audience. For instance, if your audience is concerned with environmental issues, a writer whose work deals with ecological themes may be perfect for your reading series.

Finding and Negotiating with Writers

Choosing a writer

It is important to weigh the benefits of presenting an emerging writer versus a well-known author.

The benefits of working with well-known writers

The advantages of literary stars are obvious: they can boost attendance and raise the prestige of an organization. While the obstacles to engaging a celebrity author loom large for most sponsors, it can be done. For example, a group of college students who had never organized a literary event had their hearts set on a reading by a nationally-known writer. In spite of the fact that her fee was considerably higher than their original budget, they rallied the community, raised the money, and brought the writer to their town.



A literary reading can help make literature come alive for people.

Literary events enhance existing community programs.



A big-name author is not a prerequisite for a successful literary event.

A reading series that is accessible to emerging writers can become the center of a vital literary scene.

The state library often keeps a list of writers, and some states have a Center for the Book, which should be able to refer you to authors.

The benefits of working with emerging writers

A big-name author is not a prerequisite for a successful literary event. In fact, even a high-profile organization can benefit from an event with an emerging writer. Emerging writers are more affordable, so an organization with a small budget can make the funds go farther. This is especially valuable for organizations that are trying to get a reading series off the ground.

By featuring emerging writers, an organization can quickly become known as accessible to up-and-coming writers. Other writers are then more likely to approach the sponsor when they want to give a reading. Eventually, a pool of writers will be available for events, the series will develop a life of its own and may become the center of a vital literary scene.

The benefits of working with local writers

Local writers draw an audience. Authors who are known to the community often increase attendance. The audience may feel an immediate link to the writer that an out-of-towner can't provide.

Where to find writers

Following is a list of resources where writers can be found:

Other reading series in the area. If there are no literary series in your town, get on the mailing list of the nearest one. For a list

of literary curators in New York State, call Poets & Writers' Readings/Workshops Program. In California, Poets & Writers has published *A Community of Words: A Directory of Literary Readings and Workshops in California* (Heyday Books, 1999). This book details over 180 literary presenters throughout the state, with specific contact information and series descriptions. For ordering information, call P&W's San Francisco office. *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*, published by Poets & Writers, lists more than 7,400 writers by state with contact information and publication credits. You can order it from Poets & Writers or through your local book store.

By keeping in touch with the literary scene, you can find out when authors will be in your area. Sometimes writers on book tours are willing to participate in local literary events. If another organization is bringing the author to your area and doesn't mind sharing the writer, you can invite the author to give a reading or workshop for your organization too.

Professors at the local college.

The English department probably has an instructor who is also a poet or novelist and who can refer you to local writers.

Arts councils and educational programs often provide lists of writers or contact information.

Check with the person in charge of literature for your state or local arts council. In addition, the state library often keeps a list of writers, and some states have a

Center for the Book, which should be able to refer you to authors.

Writers-in-the-schools programs. Some towns may have poets and fiction writers employed in the arts-in-education branch of the school district.

When you've chosen a writer, if he or she has worked with other organizations in the region, talk with the previous sponsors. It's like checking references, which you would do when hiring anyone else to perform a service. You can't foresee if the writer will please the crowd at a reading, but you can find out if they'll be able to present a reading or conduct a workshop responsibly.

Checking references is especially important when hiring a writer to lead a workshop. Rule number one for organizing a workshop is to get a writer who can teach, and the best way to make sure your writer will do a good job is through word-of-mouth. Try to find a writer who is skilled at working with your population. For example, some writers are good with children, but not with seniors. Also, be aware of the writer's level of experience—a poet who is an excellent beginner's teacher may not be right for a workshop of experienced writers.

How to negotiate a writer's fee

Establish a dialogue with the writer and don't be shy. Ask the writer how much she charges for a reading or workshop. Call and say, "We would like to invite you to read in our series. How much

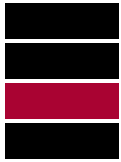
do you charge?" The writer will tell you her normal fee, which she probably has set previously. She may quote you a lower fee that she reserves for projects she believes in, such as a fledgling literary series. You can accept those terms, or you can negotiate from there, taking into consideration your budget and the number of events you wish to have during a year.

Don't be afraid to approach a well-known writer, even if your budget is limited. A thoughtful letter may get surprising results. An eminent short story writer, for instance, has a fee scale that ranges from \$50 for a grassroots organization whose work she supports, to \$3,000 for a university. Following are some rules of thumb regarding writers' fees.

- Writers' fees vary widely. The well-known author with four published novels could charge thousands of dollars, while an emerging writer may charge much less.
- The charge for a workshop might be different from a fee for a reading
- Travel can affect the amount set aside in a budget for a writer. The issue of travel expenses should be worked out with the writer in advance. If the writer's fee and travel expenses are more than your budget allows, you may be able to pool resources with other organizations in your community.



Arts councils and educational programs often provide lists of writers or contact information.



If the writer's fee and travel expenses are more than your budget allows, you may be able to pool resources with other organizations in your community.

- If you want to have a series of readings, don't exhaust your resources on a big-name author. If your goal is to develop a committed audience for literature, don't spend your entire budget on one author who charges a high fee.

Get a contract in writing.

Make sure that the author agrees to the activities you have planned. For instance, if you have contracted a writer for a reading, never assume that she is willing or has time for additional readings, audience discussions, or writing workshops unless previously agreed upon.

Once a sponsor and a writer have agreed on the writer's fee, the sponsor should draw up a simple contract. Sometimes just a phone call will seal the deal, but people are forgetful and some version of a written agreement is advised, no matter how informal, so that both parties understand what's expected. The sponsor should send the writer a simple letter that specifies, for example, "We will pay you \$50 to read for half an hour at the Bloomsbury Community Center on June 12."

How to Present a Reading

Attracting an audience

The whole process of attracting an audience is about getting the word out to individuals in your community. You are your own best resource because you know the people who can provide useful services. You may know the newspaper editor, the clerk at the copy shop, or volunteers who will distribute flyers.

The sponsor who wants an audience must invest something, either her own time, her supporters' time, money, or all of the above. It's important to note that some of the most compelling strategies for attracting an audience require a small budget. Following are some recommended methods for attracting an audience. It is not necessary to use all of these tactics to attract an audience. Rather, it is an inventory of suggested techniques that have proved effective in the past to sponsors of literary events.

Telephone trees.

Many Readings/Workshops Program sponsors report that personal telephone communication is the most effective way to publicize a reading or workshop. A phone tree has the added benefit of minimal cost. It works like this: the director of the event is at the top of the "phone tree." Beneath him are the members of a group of committed supporters, such as the Friends Committee of a library. Each member gives the director a list

of ten people whom the member will call and invite to the event. This method is effective because people who have been personally invited by someone they know are most likely to show up.

Mail invitations.

If your organization has a mailing list, or access to another organization's mailing list, and a budget for printing and postage, sending out invitations will increase the turnout for an event.

E-mail Notices.

Try collecting e-mail as well as mailing addresses at your events.

Make flyers.

This is an effective technique that can be done for the cost of photocopying. Place them in bookstores, cafes, coffee shops, taverns, as well as area colleges and universities.

Make posters.

It costs more to print posters, but they will give your event a higher profile than flyers.

Place ads.

This applies only to organizations that have a budget for advertising or can persuade the media to give them free ads.

Send out press releases.

A special notice to the media announcing your event is a good way to get the attention of newspapers, radio, TV stations, and calendar listings of cultural events. Follow up the press release with a phone call to make sure your announcement runs.

Audience development

Organizations that are new to literature but already have other programs will find that the audiences often overlap. For instance, a nature center can attract a crossover crowd from a wildlife lecture, or a library can draw on the members of a book group. Organizations can jump-start their literary programs by drawing on the regular audiences for other cultural, educational, or scientific events.

Following is a list of strategies to build an audience for ongoing literary programs.

Announce new literary programs at other events.

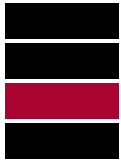
Since the audiences often overlap, those who attend a lecture or musical performance, for instance, may respond to an announcement of an upcoming reading or workshop.

Integrate programming.

Literary events can be incorporated into presentations of other artistic genres. For instance, a library in a Midwestern state had a popular discussion group in which artists talked about their painting. The library integrated a poets' group with the visual artists, and the audience participated in discussion with both poets and painters. This strategy also enables poets and painters to share ideas and create multimedia works. Live performances can also be integrated well with literature.



The whole process
of attracting an
audience is about
getting the word out
to individuals in your
community.



It's important to note that some of the most compelling strategies for attracting an audience only require a small budget.

People who have been personally invited by someone they know are most likely to show up.

Organizations can jump-start their literary programs by drawing on the regular audiences for other cultural, educational, or scientific events.

Incorporate living writers into literary programs.

A book discussion series can include the works of a local or emerging author, who can be invited in for a live event.

Target a crossover audience.

Reach people who are interested in literary events through the following venues: colleges or universities; libraries; arts councils; bookstores; cafes; community bulletin boards; local newspapers; radio stations; other arts organizations.

Broadcast the event on radio or TV shows.

This is a great way to expand the audience for literature, and it isn't exclusively the domain of sophisticated sponsors. A grass-roots reading series in the lake country in Minnesota appears weekly on prime-time TV on two cable franchises. Public access television is a great way to get media exposure.

Secure interviews for the writer on radio or TV shows.

Try to get the writer on the local radio station the evening before or the morning of the event. An interview on a talk show or an opportunity for the writer to read a bit of her work can help drum up an audience.

For workshops, it's important to target the audience.

Workshops are often small and focused on specific populations. However, the techniques for getting the word out are the same as for readings.

Presenting a reading

Whether you're planning to have a casual or structured event, here are some steps to help ensure that the event comes off smoothly.

Ask the writer what she needs for her reading.

If you have some flexibility, this can take the guesswork out of your arrangements. Some writers have specific requests; they might or might not want a podium, a microphone, lights, beverages, or other items.

Agree on how long the writer is going to read.

This is probably one of the greatest sources of misunderstandings. Tell the writer beforehand how long she is scheduled to read. A worst-case scenario is a writer who assumes she has the entire evening when she's actually only scheduled for ten minutes on a bill with four other writers. Make sure the writer's expectations match your own.

Agree on a time to arrive at the venue.

Someone in authority from the sponsoring organization should be present to meet the writer.

Make sure that the stage is set.

Here are some things to consider when arranging the physical set-up of a reading.

- Set up chairs in advance if you're using them.
- Put the podium in place if the writer wants one.
- If a microphone is required, make sure it's set up for the writer. Test the microphone.

- Provide enough light for the writer to read by. If you're using special lighting, make sure it's set.

There are special considerations for programs involving two or more writers.

The reading order should be determined in advance. Once again, make sure that everyone knows how long to read.

Have someone at the door from your organization to guide people.

If there's an admission charge, make sure you can give change.

If you're selling books, there are special things to consider.

You might want to have a table to display and sell books, and a poster or announcement stating that books are on sale. You should be able to make change. If the writer likes, you can make arrangements for her to sign copies of the book. Be clear with the writer about where the books will come from. Often writers will bring their books to sell, but sometimes books must be ordered from the publisher. Many publishers can deliver books quickly, but sometimes it takes weeks, so order books well in advance.

Make sure the audience has a clear view.

Whether they're in chairs or on the floor, the audience should have an unobstructed view of the writer.

Be aware of the volume of the writer's voice and the noise level in the room.

If you're holding a reading in a bar, bookstore, or library, try to be sensitive to the performer.

Make an announcement to patrons that a reading will be occurring.

Audiences generally appreciate a printed program.

If you have the budget for a program, you can provide a brief bio for each writer, including publications. Ask the writer beforehand for a bio; many writers have one prepared. You can also acknowledge the support of funders. A program is by no means an essential ingredient of an event, but it is helpful and can be inexpensive to produce.

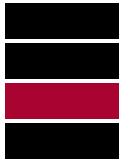
Hosting a reception or discussion

A reception following the event is strictly optional. Such a gathering can break down barriers between the audience and the writer. Always discuss it with the writer to make sure she wants one. Even if the author can't attend, you can have a reception—it can help build an audience as it creates a feeling of a cohesive literary community. It can benefit the author through book sales; if a writer has brought books to sell, people tend to buy them immediately following the reading.



Incorporate living writers into literary programs. A book discussion series can include the works of a local or emerging author, who can be invited in for a live event.

A reception following the event can break down barriers between the audience and the writer and benefit the author because it gives her a chance to sell her books.



A reception can help build an audience for future events as it creates a feeling of a cohesive literary community.

The reading or workshop you host should be a unique expression of your literary community and the writers you host.

Introducing the author

The director of the organization, the event's host, or someone who has knowledge and enthusiasm about the writer's work should welcome the audience, announce the evening, thank the event's financial supporters, if applicable, and introduce the writer by giving a brief bio. Ask the writer for a set of facts that she would like included in the introduction, or get the information from her book jacket. Sometimes the writer will ask for someone in particular to introduce her. An introduction can be as long or as short as the host and the writer like. It can be as simple as a few sentences about the writer, or it can include a brief essay on her work (though keep it short). Many introductions describe some of the salient points of the author's work to prepare the audience for what they're going to hear.

Presenting a workshop

Some writers want to review samples of the participants' writing before they teach a workshop. This is appropriate for workshops where critiques are given or the participants have been creating ongoing work. Other writers are happy to conduct more flexible workshops where the writing is done on the spot and a participant may drop in for only one workshop session. In any case, make sure the format of the workshop suits the population you're serving, and that the writer knows what to expect.

The traveling writer

Here are some things to consider if the writer is traveling:

- Ask the writer if she'd like to be picked up at the airport or train station. If she would, make arrangements to meet her there.
- Make sure the writer has accommodations. If you're footing the bill for the writer's lodgings, tell her so. Find out if she has a preference, whether it's a bed-and-breakfast or a Holiday Inn. If the writer is going to stay at the host's home, make sure this is agreeable to her.
- When groups are co-sponsoring a writer's visit, make sure everyone agrees about the writer's schedule. If the writer is participating in various events hosted by several different organizations, it's important to coordinate activities.

Make it an event

The reading or workshop you host should be a unique expression of your literary community and the writers you host. Some groups need only a big pot of black coffee; others serve cake from antique hand-painted china. The point is to keep a reading or workshop from becoming intimidating or stiff. A reading series that develops an enjoyable character of its own will keep writers and audiences coming back.

Budget

This is a sample budget that shows categories of expenditures to consider when you're planning a reading series. Anyone who hosts a reading needs to know how much money they have to spend, even if it's only \$5. For example, if you have \$1,000 and your writer's fee is \$500, you can divvy up the remaining \$500 among the other items on the sample budget: travel, if necessary, publicity, program expenses such

as space rental, and a reception, if you choose to have one.

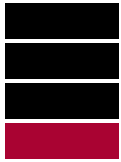
The sample budget can be used as a guide to help you avoid overlooking something that might cost money. Many of these things may not apply to you. For instance, you won't need to put aside dollars in your budget for a microphone/p.a. system if you already have one, the writer doesn't want one, or the space is so small that a mike isn't required.



A reading series that develops an enjoyable character of its own will keep writers and audiences coming back.

Sample budget

Writer(s) expenses	
fee(s)	\$ _____
travel	\$ _____
lodging	\$ _____
	TOTAL \$ _____
Administrative expenses	
telephone calls to writer ..	\$ _____
staff time	\$ _____
	TOTAL \$ _____
Publicity	
invitations	\$ _____
press releases	\$ _____
posters	\$ _____
mailing list rental	\$ _____
postage for announcements ..	\$ _____
advertising	\$ _____
documentation (photos, tape,	\$ _____
etc.)	\$ _____
	TOTAL \$ _____
Program expenses	
space rental	\$ _____
microphone and PA system ..	\$ _____
programs	\$ _____
	TOTAL \$ _____
Reception	
food	\$ _____
drinks	\$ _____
	TOTAL \$ _____



Poets, fiction writers, literary performance artists, translators and playwrights at all career levels are eligible for Poets & Writers' funding.

Fundraising

Following are some suggestions for sources of funding for literary events.

The Readings/Workshops Program helps pay writers' fees.

Poets & Writers' Readings/Workshops Program provides funding up to \$1,000 per organization per fiscal year (July-June) to supplement writers' fees for readings and workshops in New York, California, and in Chicago and Detroit. Although grants are sometimes given on an unmatched basis, sponsors are encouraged to match whenever possible with funds from the sponsor's budget, money raised at the door, or from other sources.

Sponsors are welcome to call for a consultation with one of our experienced staff members in organizing or funding a live literary event.

How does the sponsor apply?

The mechanics of the program are simple and straightforward: after a writer and sponsoring organization agree on a date for the event, the sponsor submits an application to Poets & Writers requesting matching money to supplement the writer's fee. Applications must be submitted at least eight weeks in advance of the proposed event. If the application is approved, a check made out to the writer is mailed to the sponsor.

Whom does P&W fund?

Poets, fiction writers, literary performance artists, translators and playwrights at all career levels are eligible for funding. P&W's Readings/Workshops Program does not review or judge the writer's work; rather, the decision is based on the sponsor's commitment to bringing live literature to the community.

Sponsors in the following areas are eligible to apply for P&W support for writers' fees: New York, California, Chicago and Detroit.

Only sponsors may apply. A writer who wishes to give a reading or workshop may ask a sponsor to apply for funds from Poets & Writers. Some examples of eligible sponsors are: Community centers, libraries, hospitals, churches, synagogues, cafes, theaters, bookstores, colleges, and universities. Sponsors need not have given a previous reading or workshop; nonprofit status is not required. In most cases, the events we support are open to the public; however, closed groups such as correctional facilities, shelters, or psychiatric centers are welcome to apply.

Poets & Writers' Readings/Workshops Program is open to applications from many different types of sponsors at all levels of experience and funding. Sponsors who have any questions about whether they're eligible should call or write.

For applications and complete guidelines for the New York and Midwest Readings/ Workshops Program, call or write us at the addresses found on page 15.

Information and guidelines can also be found on our web site, www.pw.org. Technical assistance articles from the program's newsletters are archived on the Web site as well.

Use P&W funds as a “seed grant.”

Funding from Poets & Writers can be used to help convince other sources of funding that your reading or workshop deserves their support. A sponsor might say to a potential financial supporter, “Poets & Writers believes in what we’re doing, so they’re helping us pay our writer’s fee. Will you make a contribution too?”

Charging admission to a reading doesn’t disqualify you from receiving Poet’s & Writers’ support to help pay the writer’s fee.

“**Friends**” organizations or other bodies of core supporters should be approached for donations.

State and local arts councils may be able to provide funds

Local businesses might contribute some money or make an in-kind donation. For instance, a local restaurant might donate the food for a reception in exchange for a mention in the program.

Pool resources with other organizations in your community. Build an ad-hoc coalition with the local library, schools, social service organizations, or arts groups.

This kind of collaboration can bring a writer to the community for a couple of days for a range of events.

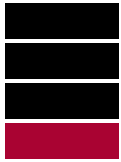
In conclusion, we hope this guide helps sponsors bring literature alive in their communities. If you have any questions, please feel free to call the Poets & Writers Readings/Workshops Program.

Good luck with your literary program.



Readings/Workshops Program provides funding up to \$1,000 per organization to supplement writers’ fees for readings and workshops.

Funding from Poets & Writers can be used to help convince other sources of funding that your reading or workshop deserves their support.



Any community-based organization interested in presenting literary events is eligible for Poets & Writers' funding for writers' fees.

About Poets & Writers, Inc.

Poets & Writers, Inc. is a national, nonprofit, literary service organization. Since 1970 Poets & Writers has been the central source of practical information for the literary community in the United States.

Poets & Writers Magazine delivers to its readers profiles of noted authors and publishing professionals, practical how-to articles, a comprehensive listing of grants and awards for writers, and special sections on subjects ranging from small presses to writers' conferences.

Literary Horizons offers how-to-publish seminars, panel discussions, a lecture series, and online seminars. The program also provides a publishing information packet free of charge and compiles the biennial *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*, which lists contact information and publication credits for more than 7,400 published U.S. authors.

Poets & Writers Online makes Poets & Writers' resources available on the Internet. Included are a searchable database consisting of more than 3,500 listings from *A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*, news from the writing world, information on contests, and excerpts from *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Another popular feature is The Speakeasy, which provides a forum for the exchange of information, news, and ideas and serves as a central meeting place and community center for writers.

The **Readings/Workshops Program** supports public literary events through matching grants to community organizations. The program helps to bring literary events to libraries, bookstores, senior centers, prisons, and other venues and helps to increase the public's awareness of literature as a living art. Poets & Writers also provides technical assistance to event organizers. The program distributes more than \$160,000 annually to some 1,000 writers from 35 states, reaching 120,000 people at readings and workshops.

The **Writers Exchange** was established in 1984 to introduce emerging writers to literary communities outside their home states and provide them with a network for professional advancement. Each year writers from a different state are invited to

apply. To date, more than 45 writers from 19 states have traveled to New York to give readings and meet with publishers, editors, and well-known authors. As a result of this experience, many have had books published, received fellowships, and secured teaching positions.

Writers on Site offers multidisciplinary residencies for writers working in partnership with visual arts organizations in California. Drawing inspiration from the collections of participating museums and galleries, the program allows writers to explore the intersection of literature and visual art through readings, workshops, and panel discussions.

As a co-founder of **The Literary Network**, Poets & Writers continues to champion the cause of freedom of expression and advocates on behalf of writers for public funding of literature and the arts.

The Readings/Workshops Program (New York State, Chicago and Detroit)

Poets & Writers, Inc.
72 Spring Street, Suite 301
New York, NY 10012
(212) 226-3586

The Readings/Workshops Program (California)

Poets & Writers, Inc.
580 Washington Street, Suite 308
San Francisco, CA 94111
(415) 986-9577

On the Internet

www.pw.org



Poets & Writers offers a full range of services for writers throughout the U.S.