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a professional organization
of writers of popular fiction



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President's Voice

By Celeste Barclay



As we enter the second month of the new year, it's a time when many of us are considering those New Year's resolutions and goals. We're hopefully on track or refining them rather than abandoning them. The 2023 NINC Conference planning is in full swing, and the team has adopted a mission statement to support us as we continue to work toward our goal of making each year better than the last. Our theme for this year is **ELEVATE**, which drives us to ensure:

NINC is the premier international conference designed to elevate the career of the individual author and to benefit the publishing industry as a whole.

It is NINC's purpose and vision to be an international organization that leads our industry by creating an environment where, as professional novelists, we can engage, learn, share, and thrive. Tawdra Kandle offers more insights and updates on the conference planning in her article. It's an exciting time as we gear up for member and industry guest registration, along with securing our prestigious cadre of presenters.

The NINC Board of Directors continues to meet monthly to support that purpose and vision. One goal for our board is to update one of the key sections of our organization's bylaws. As they're currently written, they're ambiguous regarding the amount of people needed to cast their vote. This unclear wording has made previous votes difficult to determine since there was room for interpretation whether the passing margin was from all votes cast or all active members.

We have proposed a revision that will ease this confusion or uncertainty. The current wording states, "the Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote **of the membership represented in person or by proxy** at the annual business meeting or by mail vote, or by online vote." Instead, the proposed verbiage reads, "Two-thirds **of the votes cast** must approve any proposed amendment for the amendment to pass."

Laura Resnick, our Central Coordinator, offers further explanation and information about this and other proposed bylaws changes in her column this month. The vote to amend the bylaws will open on March 5, 2023, and close on April 5, 2023.

With our ever-changing industry, NINC commits to fostering a community where we advocate for our profession. Throughout this year, we will continue to offer thought-provoking and insightful articles to support our drive to ensure our membership continues to grow while remaining diverse, inclusive, and equitable. We network, collaborate, and reach out to other organizations within the authorly and publishing world to provide the most superior resources and support to all our potential, incoming, and ongoing members.

It is a tremendous honor to help guide the premiere international organization for fiction authors.

~ Celeste Barclay

Celeste Barclay, a nom de plume, lives near the Southern California coast with her husband and sons. Before becoming a full-time author, she was a social studies and English teacher. She holds degrees in International Affairs (BA), Secondary Social Science (MAT), and Political Management (MPS). She channels that knowledge into creating rich historical romances that bring the heat.

About NINC

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality, or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

About Nink

Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members; [propose an article](#) or submit a [letter to the editor](#).

NINC Member Benefits

Don't forget to sign up for the [email loop](#), [critique/brainstorming group](#), [traditionally published group](#), and the members-only [Facebook group](#) if you haven't already. The [Pro Services Directory](#), member [discount page](#), and [sample letters](#) are also great resources.

Missing a newsletter? Past issues can be found [here](#).

Accessing the NINC Website

Not sure how to log in to the NINC website? Visit the login page here: <https://ninc.com/membership-overview/login-to-ninc/>

NINC Bylaws Amendments Proposal

- The **vote** for these proposed amendments to the NINC bylaws will **open** on **March 5** and will remain open for one month.
- Check out Laura Resnick's Mad Scribbler column in this issue of *Nink* for a discussion of these proposals.
- To read the complete set of NINC's bylaws, go [here](#).

(The text this proposal would change is underlined for the sake of clarity.
Also for clarity, all proposed *new* text appears in *italics*.)

1. ARTICLE VII: Membership Committee

Current text:

Section 1: The Membership Committee shall be composed of up to three active members selected by the Board of Directors who shall serve for a period of one year. No person shall serve as a member of the Membership Committee for more than three consecutive terms.

Section 2: It shall be the duty of the Membership Committee to consider and act on the applications for membership as set forth in Article II above.

Proposed change: Remove this sentence from Section 1: No person shall serve as a member of the Membership Committee for more than three consecutive terms.

2. ARTICLE XV: Amendment

Current text:

These Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the membership represented in person or by proxy at the annual business meeting or by mail vote, or by online vote. No amendment may be voted unless the membership has had at least one month's written notice of the proposed changes before a vote is taken. Proposed amendments may be brought by the Board of Directors or by petition of 25 percent of the membership.

Proposed changes: *These bylaws may be amended by a vote by members online, by mail, or at the annual business meeting; if the vote is at the annual general business meeting, then a quorum must be present in person or by proxy. Two-thirds of the votes cast must approve any proposed amendment for the amendment to pass. No amendment may be voted on unless the membership has had at least one month's written notice of the proposed changes before a vote is taken. The announcement must also appear in Nink before the vote opens. A bylaws amendment vote shall remain open for a period of one month. Proposed amendments may be brought by the Board of Directors or by petition of 25 percent of the membership.*

Conference Report

By Tawdra Kandle

Welcome to the first conference update of 2023! This year's event will take place at the TradeWinds Island Grand Resort in St. Pete Beach, Florida, **Sept. 20–24**.

Your conference team is already at work, coming up with topics and reaching out to speakers, sponsors, and industry guests. Since this is my last year as programming chair, I'm dedicated to putting together a top-notch lineup to inform and inspire all of our attendees.

As Celeste announced in President's Voice, our theme this year is **ELEVATE**. NINC members are already the best of the best... but we can always reach higher!

Our conference mission statement was also refined for 2023: *NINC is the premier international conference designed to elevate the career of the individual author and to benefit the industry as a whole.*

Registration for member attendees and their assistants will open on Thursday, March 9, 2023, at 10 AM EST. Information and links will be available via Ninclink, on Facebook, and in the March issue of *Nink*.

Conference scholarships

Under the auspices of the Linda Kay West Memorial Fund, NINC offers **three** conference scholarships each year for members who would like to attend the conference but find the cost prohibitive.

Following a vote by last year's board to improve the procedure, here are the current guidelines:

- **Application period** for a scholarship **begins Jan. 1** each year and **closes** when conference registration opens (March 9, 2023).
- A member may use the conference scholarship only **once** in a lifetime.
- To **qualify**, you must have been a member of NINC for at least one full year.
- If more than three scholarship requests are received, three names will be drawn at random when the application period closes.
- The scholarship covers the conference registration fee and also includes a \$500 cash stipend to help the recipient cover other expenses (travel, hotel, etc.) involved in attending the conference.
- Applications are **private** and handled discreetly. To apply, simply contact NINC's Central Coordinator at admin@ninc.com.

Finally, please help me welcome our NINC 2023 Conference Team

- Conference Director: Mel Jolly
- Programming Chair/Assistant Conference Director: Tawdra Kandle
- Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
- Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
- Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
- Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
- Registrar: Lisa Hughey
- Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
- Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
- Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
- App Coordinator and Designer: Laura Hayden
- NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.



Big publishers versus the Internet Archive: a landmark case for copyright

More than two years ago, several large U.S. publishers filed a lawsuit against the Internet Archive, which operates the [Open Library](#). In a nutshell, the Open Library (some say it is not a library at all) pushes copyright-law boundaries through a controversial concept known as [controlled digital lending](#) (CDL). Controlled digital lending involves lending one digital copy at a time for each hard copy that's been scanned and digitized. No payments are made to publishers/authors for CDL.

Your average local library pays for ebook licenses and rarely, if ever, engages in CDL-based lending. So CDL is not a norm by any stretch—and publishers are fighting to ensure it does not become one. The legal battle now underway will likely affect the future of copyright law and fair use. Publishers have convincingly [argued](#) that CDL does not fall under fair use and that the Open Library is little more than a pirate site.

CDL seems unlikely to hold up in today's courts as a legitimate practice, but if readers are increasingly attracted to libraries for ebooks (despite long wait times and sporadic availability), publishers need to ask themselves why and what that means for their business model in the future. Across all media, consumers are becoming accustomed to subscription-based services where they can experiment and try new things without a commitment, abandon books without any concern for sunk costs, and of course, read as much as they like without pulling out their wallet each time.

Related, publisher David Wogahn wrote us, asking, “A topic I keep thinking about is whether larger publishers will (can?) continue to price their ebooks as high as they have been pricing them relative to print. Printing and distributing physical products is only getting more expensive—in real dollars and in costs to the environment. There seems to be evidence that some of these publishers are losing market share to lower-priced books. And I’m sure returns factor into print format profitability as well. Related, I wonder if anyone has looked at how high ebook pricing impacts author royalties. Between family and friends, six of us read one print copy of *The Thursday Murder Club*. And when it’s given away or sold as used, the reading continues without royalties to the author. It seems like authors are, in a sense, subsidizing the cost of publishers helping bookstores compete with Amazon. (As worthy an objective as that may be.)”

Apple rolls out AI-narrated audiobooks

Apple has officially launched AI-powered book narration to help authors and small publishers convert their English-language titles into audiobooks. Once an author submits a request, it must be approved by Apple’s team. Then it takes one to two months to process the book and conduct quality checks. Apple is currently accepting submissions from novelists—only literary, historical, and women’s fiction for now—before moving on to nonfiction. Audiobooks are distributed via Draft2Digital or Ingram. Authors/publishers retain audio rights and can still produce and distribute other audio versions. [Learn more.](#)

Meanwhile, Google Play Books has partnered with digital book company Bookwire on AI-created audiobooks in English, Spanish, German, French, and Brazilian Portuguese. Bookwire’s audiobook service WAY (We Audiobook You) allows Google Play Books customers to create auto-narrated audiobooks in addition to Bookwire’s standard audiobook production offering. [Learn more.](#)

Authors Guild files suit against Authors’ Place Press

Authors’ Place Press, a small, U.S.-based independent publisher, is accused of failing to pay royalties or send royalty statements. When met with demands to pay up or revert rights, the publisher threatened destruction of the authors’ works. Eleven authors are filing suit with the help of the Authors Guild. The publisher’s website now states it is no longer in operation. [Read the press release.](#)

2022 is second-best sales year on record for print

NPD BookScan reported its year-end numbers: 2022 came in 5.8% below 2021 in terms of print unit sales, and the children’s market made up half of that decline. However, 2022 still remains the second-highest year for print sales since BookScan began tracking.

Analyst Kristen McLean writes, “A good deal of the buying and reading behavior that started in the pandemic is still with us, although not every area of the business is benefiting

equally. Big questions remain about book consumers' appetites as we look ahead to 2023." Also, note that backlist comprised 70 percent of all print book sales in 2022; about three-quarters of BookScan's top 200 books of the year were published before 2022.

Digital Book World returns to New York City

Featured takeaways from the conference

Spotify's Nir Zicherman was on hand to talk about the company's nascent efforts to grow the audiobook market.

- The podcast market has grown by 2,000% over the last 7.5 years, and listenership has doubled.
- Spotify now generates promo cards for audiobooks available on its platform. You can find them at promocards.byspotify.com.
- Authors using Findaway Voices (now owned by Spotify) can market their audiobook with 100 free giveaway codes, which Spotify considers an important vehicle for growth.
- Ratings are critical at Spotify for its recommendations engine. In fact, Spotify limits the ability to rate to users who have actually listened to the content.

Other insights from the conference

- **Advertising spend is diversifying.** In 2023, for the first time since 2014, Google and Meta will have less than 50 percent of digital ad share. The companies with the biggest digital ad share in the U.S., in order of size: Google, Meta, Amazon, Microsoft, and TikTok.
- **TikTok ads perform well**, according to Ingram reps, with about 50 percent of customers converting when they arrive at their website.

Links of interest

The biggest publishers are so big that it creates bad working conditions for employees. Canadian Publisher Kenneth Whyte writes, "Having some experience in management at large companies, I think the big five publishers are now too massive—too many imprints, too many functions, too many employees—to function as anything but ruthless machines. The first priority is to return value to shareholders. In order to do that, a company must grow its profits every year. That can be done by increasing revenues or cutting expenses or both. With little revenue growth in the last two decades, managers have been hyper-focused on the expense side, demanding more and more of inexpensive junior employees." There's also some interesting advice about slush piles and getting noticed by an editor. [Read at SHuSH.](#)

A guide to AI art for authors. This is a straightforward and practical look at three major AI art generators and how authors can access and use them. [Read Jason Hamilton at Kindlepreneur.](#)

TikTok ads drive profits in six months. According to new research, 78% of small businesses that run ads on TikTok realize a return on investment in six months. [Read Colin Kirkland at MediaPost](#) (free account required).

Top 10 publishing trends in 2023: Leading voices in the indie community (including yours truly) discuss what's ahead. [Read Clayton Noblit at Written Word Media](#).

An agent's take on what's ahead for 2023. This Twitter thread touches on myriad issues; perhaps the most interesting prediction is that authors and publishers will embrace trade paperbacks because of increased costs. "Trade paperback is the new HC." [Read Carly Watters](#).

Your Amazon follows can be a big sales and marketing help. Author Monica Leonelle describes how Amazon uses the Follow function on its site and where to find out how many people are following you on Amazon. [Read Aggressively Wide](#).

Amazon's current ordering policy is likely to hurt independent authors and small publishers. A veteran book marketer and publicist discusses how Amazon may order zero copies of a new title unless there is pre-order demand. Ultimately, it means that traditional distribution may be less helpful than ever before and not a step above print-on-demand distribution. [Read Claire McKinney](#).

Should you accept returns for your POD books? Indie author Darcy Pattison offers a look at the pros and cons. [Read at Indie Kids Books](#).

Reprinted and condensed from [The Hot Sheet](#). Jane Friedman has 20 years of experience in the publishing industry, with expertise in business strategy for authors and publishers. She's the co-founder and editor of [The Hot Sheet](#), a paid newsletter for authors, and has previously worked for [Writer's Digest](#) and the [Virginia Quarterly Review](#).

Beyond the Booksellers

Alternative and ancillary ways to sell your books

By Kelly McClymer



Most indie authors focus on selling books through the major book distributors. We study ads and agonize over how to get visibility and traction on these sites. We watch our numbers go up and down with pride and alarm.

But, as we've been doing that, a few pioneer authors have been forging other paths to readership:

- Wattpad
- Patreon
- Kickstarter
- Serial apps

If you find them all tempting, no worries. You can avoid overwhelm by reminding yourself you can do one of these—or none of them. They are extra, optional ways to reach readers with books you are already writing or have already written. Choose only what fits into your life, author strategy, and comfort zone.

Making money before you publish your book

[Wattpad](#) is a community of writers who share their writing, mostly for free, in chapters as they write. It was founded in Dec. 2006 as an online community of writers and readers who shared writing without compensation. By 2016, they had teamed with publishers and media producers to help find stories that wowed readers. They now call themselves a global entertainment company and have added a publishing arm, and WEBTOON Studios for films. They advocate the platform as a way to expand the diversity in fiction that Gen Z and beyond

readers are demanding. [Data](#) indicate “four out of five Gen Z readers look to online sources for diverse stories.”

Still in beta, [Creators Program](#) (conditions apply) is Wattpad’s answer to the request by authors to be paid for the work that runs the platform. It is aimed at the writers who use the platform, not those who want to post a manuscript and do nothing more. Those in the program receive perks: opportunities for brand partnerships, mentorship, and to get paid. Another pro is getting early word of mouth on your story so that when you publish on retailers like Amazon, you already have some buzz.

Because you must be an active author in the Wattpad community in order to be considered for this program, however, it means learning another social media platform and what Wattpad readers like. Your stories must be in one of 15 specific categories.

Wattpad introduced an invitation-only [Paid Story](#) option in 2019. Since then, they have announced milestones such as 550 writers and 750 stories, a 30 million minutes reading average per month for stories in the program, and over \$1 million paid out to indie authors by April 2021 (reported to be \$2.6 million paid out to top writers in 2022).

Some other potential pros are clear: reader feedback as you release chapters, potential publishing deals with Wattpad Books, TV and film deals, and sponsored brand collaborations.

[Patreon](#) is a community platform that [reports](#) more than six million active patrons and 210,000 creators. Patrons made over \$2 billion on Patreon before it reached its tenth year in operation. The platform takes the ancient “patron” model for creatives and artists into the modern age. Instead of having one wealthy patron, as they did in Elizabethan times, a writer or artist gets their support directly from the fans and supporters of their art in small monthly contributions.

The platform is free to set up but requires the writer to bring fans and supporters to the community platform and subscribe. This is done by offering different levels of patronage, often starting at \$1 a month, in exchange for something as small as a hearty thank you from the writer. For example, science fiction author [N.K. Jemisin](#) starts her tiers at \$1 per month and offers a picture of her cat Ozzy in exchange. At \$2 per month, patrons get two Ozzy pictures and occasional Patreon-only blog posts. At \$5, Jemisin shares a previously unseen early draft of a short story or novel scene. Authors can get creative without a lot of cash or time outlay. It isn’t until patrons sign up for \$50 per month that she offers a signed copy of any book that comes out during a patron’s subscription.

Choosing tiers is an art. Giving away something unique that fans will enjoy and that won’t eat into your writing time is a delicate balance. Studying successful writers and what they offer is the best way to see if this can work for you.

Pros: Earn regular income between book releases, reward your fiercest fans, have a little fun with your readers, and build your audience. If you have other creative or artistic offerings like music, painting, or filmmaking, you can showcase them here, where they have more value.

Cons: This is a platform for keeping fans happy between books, not a way to build a list. Even superstar writers like Jemison tend to bring in no more than a few thousand a month; Patreon takes a cut of the patron subscription.

[Kickstarter](#) has been around for a while, but novelists have not typically paid attention to (or been successful on) this platform until recently, unless they were offering something special like a collector's edition or graphic novel. Like Patreon, Kickstarter gives a writer the chance to make money in between books or before a book launch. However, Kickstarter works on the short launch method where you put your Kickstarter offer up for 30 days and promote it heavily to reach your self-set goal. Only if you reach (or exceed) your goal do you have to fulfill your offer.

Novelist [Brandon Sanderson's \\$41 million Kickstarter](#) is familiar to most authors. It made international news because it is outside the norm for most Kickstarters, and far outside the norm for most book Kickstarters. However, in a publishing world where a \$2,000 advance is not uncommon, indie authors can create their own similar advance while testing the audience enthusiasm for that book. And you'll know in advance what your book launch will earn before you invest in a cover and editing.

Authors Monica Leonelle and Russell Noelty have been helping authors run successful Kickstarters by running their own for [Get Your Book Selling on Kickstarter](#). Their recommendations: set your goal low, be aware of the amount of work you will need to do in 30 days to get backers for your Kickstarter, and deeply understand the Kickstarter game as it applies to your backers and fans.

Like Patreon, Kickstarter is best fueled by your current readers and supporters like family and friends.

Unlike the Wattpad community, which is built on unpaid serial writing and reading, there are also **paid serial apps** that cater to the younger reader marketplace. They read on their phones, enjoy voting for their favorite serials and episodes, and otherwise like being part of a book's active community as the book is being written and released.

The top three serial apps are Kindle Vella, Radish, and Yonder. All work in a similar manner: Authors exclusively release episodes of 500–5,000 words serially, until the book is complete. Readers use in-app currency to unlock and read episodes. Readers are able to vote up episodes/serials and follow authors. Authors are paid based on how many readers read and like an episode. Each platform has a few specific differences to be aware of:

Anyone can start a [Vella](#) (no curation or invitation necessary). Readers buy "coins" to unlock episodes, but authors are paid from a pre-determined monthly pool of money (like KDP Select authors), plus bonuses for bestsellers. Vella books and sales can be accessed from the KDP dashboard.

[Radish](#) is curated, so you need to be approved before you can publish. Anyone can apply. Generally, Radish wants a complete manuscript for your first serial (unlike Kindle Vella). They don't want to make readers unhappy with serializations that don't complete. Radish payments

are complex and based upon the contract you sign (which does allow for negotiation). Radish also recognizes that authors looking to build readership may be interested in reaching a younger audience by serializing a novel pre-release.

A newer entry into the marketplace, [Yonder](#) was created by Wattpad to compete against Radish and Vella. This is an invite-only program, separate from Paid Stories (i.e., if you have a Wattpad Paid Story, and the same book serialized on Yonder, your reader would need to pay for access separately).

Writing serials requires slightly different craft techniques than you might use in a novel (hooks at the beginning and end to make sure readers start a new episode and eagerly look to begin the next).

Post-publication ancillary markets

Wattpad: Any perma-free first book in series can be released in chapters on Wattpad to reach a younger audience of readers for the rest of the series.

Patreon: Releasing snippets of original draft work can be done to keep those who really loved the published book engaged and feeling a part of the author's community without extra work.

Kickstarter: Although best results come from new works, some authors have found a way to pay for collector editions of published work for their most devoted fans. [A Mark of Kings](#) is a great example.

Bottom line

We talk a lot about not having all our eggs in one basket. These non-retailer options are worth a look if you're ready to expand your bottom line. As always, avoid giving away exclusivity except for short periods of time that work strategically for your author career.

Kelly McClymer has been a proud NINC member for 20 years and an indie author looking for the mythical easy button marketing for 13. Her permafrees first in series receives new reads and upvotes every week on Wattpad. Her neglected Patreon profile reflects the reality that marketing matters. And her humorous Vella The Billionaire's Christmas Giveaway may not be finished until 2024, but she's going to enjoy writing every episode.

Publishing Pioneers

By Barbara Meyers



How pioneers become legends

Prior to 1993, [Shirley Hailstock](#) did not find acceptance for her novels, but that year she was one of the first Black authors featured in the Arabesque line of romances released by Kensington Publishing.

“At the time we were called pioneers,” Hailstock recalls. “Today, 30 years later, we’re referred to as legends.

“Prejudice is extremely hard to get around, especially in this era of the internet and social media,” she says. “Being invisible is no longer an option.”

Hailstock does not consider herself a catalyst for change.

“We (knew we) had to be better than our white sisters in order to get past the prejudice that we knew existed.”

“Making a gay character straight is a line in the sand which I will not cross.”

[Sherwood Smith](#) and writing partner [Rachel Manija Brown](#) experienced their 15 minutes of fame back in 2011 after co-writing a post-apocalyptic young adult novel. They never expected to be offered representation only on the condition that they make a gay viewpoint character straight or cut him out altogether.

“Making a gay character straight is a line in the sand which I will not cross,” Brown says.

Previous agents had also offered to take a second look if they did rewrites... including cutting the viewpoint of the gay character. They heard from other writers whose prospective agents made altering a character’s minority identity—sexual orientation, race, disability—a condition of representation.

Smith and Brown wrote and widely posted a position paper after a person who had once been associated with the agency in question took it upon herself to smear them all over the

internet, calling them liars and stating their book was terrible, even though she never saw the submission.

“Whether or not we had influence, the ice block against gay protagonists did subsequently break,” Smith says. It seemed to her that shortly after this incident, many agencies made a point to announce that they were LGBTQ+ friendly and were seeking projects with diversity. Subsequently, more diverse books began appearing. “I do think we had an impact, but there were many like us who were trying to get past this bottleneck.”

Smith’s advice to others: “Lay (your position) out as honestly as possible and stick to it. Resist the urge to attack back. We never named the agency, and never will, whatever was said about us.”

Viking eventually published the book in 2014.

Read *The Guardian* article based on their position paper [here](#).

The flip side of prejudice

[Neil Plakcy](#) learned a lesson about prejudice in 2010 when he pitched a cozy mystery with a male protagonist to his agent.

According to the agent, nobody would publish a cozy mystery with a male protagonist. Cozy readers were women and they wanted to read about women. Plakcy’s research at the time found this to be mostly true.

Since he’d written about gay protagonists previously, Plakcy’s agent encouraged him to make his hero gay, which might fit into a small niche publisher of LGBT fiction.

But Plakcy thought he’d written a good book with wide appeal, and he couldn’t make the protagonist gay just to fit a market.

Instead, Plakcy investigated KDP and put his cozy mystery into the program. Sales were surprising, and he quickly modified another older unpublished manuscript as the second in the series.

“I have since sold over 87,000 copies of this book in electronic and print format,” Plakcy says. “I just published the 14th book in the series and have a catalog of over 50 self-published titles by now.”

He discontinued working with his agent because “he either wasn’t interested in what I was writing or couldn’t sell it... he was looking at the market through the prism of mainstream publishing. I don’t think he believes he was wrong, either. It all comes down to the gatekeepers (agents, traditional publishers). If they decide the market doesn’t want what you have to sell, or that your book won’t sell enough to meet their profit projections, they’re not interested.”

“If Jane Austen, Mark Twain, and Charles Dickens could self-publish, I certainly can.”

In 2005, during her first book signing at a major writing conference, a well-known author noticed [Dara Girard](#)’s indie-published trade paperback next to the traditionally published mass

market book she was signing at the time, and asked, “Who put you in trade?” Girard replied, “I did.”

She soon learned from other authors that indie publishing was for those who either wanted to publish other authors or who couldn’t get traditional contracts and did it as a “last-ditch” effort.

Raised by an artist, Girard had been exposed to the theater environment where people produced and created their own shows, and musicians wrote and produced their own songs. Taking the lead to put her work out there wasn’t a radical idea.

Her first indie-published book was a nonfiction book for writers. By the following year, she’d indie-published her first fiction in the same genre as her traditionally published works.

“I’m not sure I would’ve had as long a career if I hadn’t indie published. I liked dictating what I could create and when. I liked the independence of being able to put out the books I wanted to see.”

Fired up

[Edie Claire](#) found a similar path to self-publishing.

“I got fired up by JA Konrath at the first conference held at TradeWinds in 2010 and having received all the rights to my trad-pubbed books back without having a plan for them, I decided to bite,” Claire says. “I wanted clean books, so I taught myself enough HTML to make my own epub and mobi files. Ten years after my publisher axed my mystery series, I wrote a new book and brought it back, and the series became a *USA Today* bestseller. I started making way, *way* more money than I ever did in trad. Those were the heady days... 2012, 2013. Then competition of all kinds ramped up with a vengeance and things changed. But in those early days, readers were so eager for ebooks that they seemed to just fly off the shelves. First time in my career I think I ever caught just the right crest of a wave!”

The last of that series had been published in 2002, and the last words of the heroine were “I’m pregnant.” Claire felt sorry for her readers. “I thought I’d get back to it within a few years, but that didn’t happen. It took 10 years (and the ebook revolution) before I picked the series back up in 2012. I then went on to write seven more mysteries, and the series now stands at 12.” She decided to let the break elapse in real time, which worked out well, she says, “Because a sleuth with elementary-aged twins has a lot more leeway to run around solving mysteries than a parent of babies/toddlers.”

Claire had been out of traditional publishing for six years when she began independently publishing. “I was still writing during that time and floated a few projects with agents but couldn’t sell a novel.” She later self-published all the novels and bits of novels she’d started during that dry spell.

Joining forces

[Jennifer Stevenson](#) is a founding member of [Book View Café](#), the world's first, i.e., oldest, largest, most prestigious author-owned book-publishing collective.

In 2008, after being abandoned mid-career by New York traditional publishers, the BVC authors began to self-publish fiction and gave it away in the beginning. Stevenson recalls the word on the street was all about John Scalzi, Cory Doctorow, and JA Konrath selling ebooks. The authors agreed that the way to draw attention to their fiction that was still in publishers' hands was to give some away. When it became more common to sell ebooks, they began selling, and within two years it was no longer a publicity site, but rather strictly a publisher and bookseller. BVC now sells too many titles a year to qualify as a small press.

The most important thing they learned was that a group of authors could do what one author could not. Members share jobs according to their skills and inclination.

"Community is huge for us," Stevenson says. "Without community, we couldn't do all these things. We have created some very successful theme anthologies to support our company. We signed with numerous distribution channels to libraries. We bought 2,000 ISBNs, and we're still selling them to ourselves at \$4 each."

Stevenson isn't aware of any other publishing entities similar to BVC but says starting one would be like any business.

"It requires a coherent vision and a business plan. Add some tough, energetic, pragmatic, prolific authors, and stir."

[Barbara Meyers](#) writes a mix of contemporary romance and women's fiction as well as the comedic fantasy series, *Grinding Reality*.

Authoring Authenticity

Best ways to research diverse characters

By Vanessa Riley



Although often attributed to Winston Churchill, the origin of the phrase “history is written by the victors” is unknown. Nonetheless, the sentiment is true and something to consider when writing about diversity, past and present. It is a fundamental tenant of the mindset one should have when diving into the scholarly record. I wish to take you into my philosophy of how I approach history, people, and research. I hope you’ll glean a way to enhance your writing methodology to bring more diverse characters and settings to the page.

While I don’t prescribe that DNA should dictate the story an author crafts, I believe in putting in the work and being sensitive to culture and race to deliver the best storytelling. For me, I don’t wish to do harm. Unfortunately, that’s what shortcutting the process does. Guessing or assuming every experience is the same as yours instead of doing research will allow biases to win.

For *Sister Mother Warrior*, the story of two very different women, a healer and a warrior, whose efforts led to Haitian independence, I translated French narratives written 10 years post-war. Then I procured books by Haitian poets, read the nonfiction histories of leading Caribbean and African historians, and spent hours on YouTube’s geography videos to get the story right. On launch day, a woman came to me in tears. She said we always learn about the men, never the women. She moved me, made my eyes wet. She was Haitian-born and educated in Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince. This lady was thankful for the respectful narrative I’d written about people of her blood.

Research to prevent bias

Everyone, including myself, comes to the table with biases. We are told things in childhood that frame our world. As we grow from infancy to adulthood, we experience more moments—trauma, joy, fears. Each shape and reshape our perceptions. Researchers, archaeologists, teachers, professors, and anyone we utilize for fact-finding may bring their own cultural notions to the research. If one doesn't use a critical mindset when analyzing these sources, those biases combined with our own will invade the texts we write, ruining or corrupting the reader's experience.

I've written 20-plus books showcasing the diversity of the Georgian and Regency world, focusing on Caribbean migration to all levels of society. Even though I'm of West Indie descent with a father from Trinidad and Tobago, I've welcomed sensitivity readers of Haitian, Jamaican, and British heritage to review my pre-publication work. I want to ensure I'm honoring cultures that aren't natively mine. I need to ensure every word I draft adds to the world narrative and does no harm.

How do we do no harm?

You're ahead of the game if you recognize that you have biases and that fact-finders may have them. The keys to doing this analysis are three simple steps to improve your approach to crafting a diverse story:

1. Examine your world.
2. Examine your bookshelf.
3. Examine your resources.

Your world

Your world is a reflection of you. The friends you have, the places you frequent, and the television and news you consume are all you. There's nothing wrong with the desire to write beyond the confines of your life. Yet this effort requires possessing the vulnerability to learn and the bravery to do the work.

Am I telling you to become *woke*? Maybe. Awaking to the joy of lived experiences beyond your own is essential. Committing to the humanity of all individuals in a narrative is the attitude you must inhabit.

Your bookshelf

Look at your bookshelves. When I look at mine, I see a world of wonderment. A picture of my books was included in a July 2022 [article](#) in *The Washington Post* which shows all my favorite genres and authors. This wall allows me to dive into a diverse, delightful place. Scouring it, I can reach for *Project 1619*, tomes by Caribbean sisters, and the classics—William Shakespeare,

Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, etc. These novels span hundreds of years and many locations. If I look at my research bookcases, I can grab 200-year-old books, books in various dialects, period cookbooks, and poets through the ages. My bookshelf reflects what I am, what I'm trying to research, and my hunger to truly engage the topics I'm writing. I've written books about people who don't look like me, live like me, or have nuclear families like mine because I've read thousands of books by people who don't look like me, about places I can't experience or, in some cases, it would be safer for me not to visit.

If you're thinking of writing a narrative about a culture or situation that's not your lived experience or that of your ancestors, please honor these people by being curious. See how these people write or talk about themselves (oral histories). A few research books on a subject, for the most part, is not sufficient. Typically, you will miss the sensitivities that make your words feel like theirs. If you haven't done the work or feel it's unnecessary, I'd ask you to review your motives for telling this story.

Examine your resources

There's nothing wrong with starting with Google. Getting your feet wet, you should be looking for clues not only to who these people are but also:

1. How they lived.
2. How they made money.
3. Their socioeconomic status and hierarchy.
4. What they valued.

Wikipedia pages are a great second stop. These abstracts can give you a quick analysis and highlights. Even so, only trust what you find if you confirm it in at least two to three additional sources. I've found Wikis with wrong birth dates, death dates, children's names, spouses' names, and chronology of events.

At the bottom of the page, the reference section is pure gold. Often one will discover bibliographies of firsthand accounts. These are documents to order from a library. Sometimes JSTAR citations are there, which are articles from leading academics on the topic. Authors who have done research in this area may also be listed. Pay attention to any charts. Family trees, lines of succession, and more will yield names of interest. I often spend weeks researching each one, getting the source, and deciding whether it is helpful or skewed.

I'm a big fan of getting my hands on old books. Novels, biographies, or histories written in the time frame I'm researching are essential. Getting ahold of Thomas Clarkson's letters to King Henry Christophe and his wife, and Queen Louise's to Mrs. Clarkson, added new depth to the relationship and politics of the time from the relevance of a leading British abolitionist and the Haitian monarchy. *Queen of Exiles*, which follows Queen Louise's journey from Caribbean royalty to aristocracy in Europe, is enhanced and nuanced because of these letters.

Period books will source words and phrases used by the people at the time and will highlight beliefs and values directly from people living this experience. However, a caution: The victors who wrote many of these books in the 1700s and 1800s have made marginalized people dolls. They typically are not concerned with giving agency or value to individuals who do not look like them.

While researching *Island Queen*, a historical fiction about a Montserratian woman who buys her freedom from enslavement, builds business across the West Indies, and even has an affair with a future king of England, I found documentation from the legislative body of Montserrat. The council, when discussing increasing the fees for manumissions—the monies paid to free an enslaved person—from 40 pounds to 100 pounds, the landowners, the massas, objected. These men said the increase would hamper their enslaved women, whom they must reward for their *love, loyalty, and service*.

In this context, these Irish and British white males wish to reward their female African or Caribbean enslaved for their love (rape) and loyalty (chattel property) and service (forced servitude). This author crafted the account to imply a touching sentiment, but this is coercion. The victors are trying to manipulate laws to continue to abuse the conquered and then cheaply right the situation in their wills. If you encounter something like this that threatens your sense of humanity, I give you license to throw any hundred-year-old plus books (you own) across the room regardless of the spine's condition. This is a Vanessa Riley guilt-free pass. You'll feel good afterward. I know I have.

Art of the time, what people painted, created on baskets, and carved into wood and walls, speaks to what was valued. The [Aktá Lakota Museum & Cultural Center](#) is one of the best places to see Native art. It has over 14,000 square feet of displays, clothing, canvases, and more. Medicine Man Gallery possesses one of the largest collections of American Indian art, both antiques and contemporary forms, in the United States. [The Museum of Indian Arts and Culture](#), housed in New Mexico, offers virtual tours. Onsite tours provide the opportunity to see artifacts from digs. It will help you better understand ways of life and hierarchical structures within communities.

Partnership with Native Americans is another resource to begin your search into tribal history. Like Wiki, it has important names and legislation that have affected tribes across the U.S. For indigenous populations around the globe like the First Nations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of Australia, begin with [Australians Together](#). Look for organizations like [The Jamii Asilia Centre](#) (JAC), a Swahili name for Indigenous Peoples Centre. JAC works on preserving the oral histories of the people of Kenya. Still, other organizations focus on the Tainos of the Caribbean and other indigenous populations of South America and beyond.

Museums that feature well-researched resources into African American History:

- Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
- The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) — [Online Exhibit: African]

- Archives of African American Music & Culture (Bloomington, Indiana)
- The Museum of African American Art in Los Angeles
- Dance Theater of Harlem
- Negro Leagues Baseball Museum
- Frederick Douglass National Historic Site
- Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field

Many of these museums have virtual components. Some offer questions and answers via their contact forms. Once you've done your basic research, utilize the Ask a Librarian feature. This can help you get in contact with genealogy departments and provide access to maps, including international ones from the 1700s and earlier.

As with the museum, use the Ask a Librarian feature after you've Googled and done enough research to ask specific questions. This will honor the librarian's time.

For social anthropological research about cultures, I've begun to incorporate YouTube and TikTok. Both platforms showcase full or partial documentaries. Today's gig historians and tour guides visit sites, record videos of hikes of ruins, trek into harbors, and show the views from the top of the Citadel and other wonders of the world while also including the locals' view of what they value. Protests and sentiments of all types of all demographics are being uploaded daily.

When doing these types of cultural investigations, I try to answer the following:

1. Who has the power?
2. Who doesn't have the power?
3. What is gained by swapping positions of the powerful and the powerless?
4. What is lost by switching positions of the powerful and the powerless?
5. What is the goal for happiness for each person in the power play?
6. What needs to change for each people to have meaningful agency?

They seem like elementary questions, but they'll move a writer beyond the surface discovery with paper-thin, one-dimensional characterizations to a more authentic, meaningful, albeit diverse work.

If this sounds too much, if you're asking where the fiction part of the novel writing process is, then I suggest writing fantasy. If you make up people and culture, no one can be disappointed when your novel diverges from lived experiences or cultural practices that someone holds dear. I want to win hearts and minds, transporting readers to the most authentic places. It's one of the most rewarding feelings I've ever had when grateful readers offer thanks for showcasing their culture or people in your novels.

Vanessa Riley is the award-winning author of *Island Queen*, *A Good Morning America Buzz Pick*, and the forthcoming *Queen of Exiles*. Riley's historical novels showcase the hidden histories of Black women and women of color, emphasizing strong sisterhoods and dazzling multicultural communities. Her works encompass historical fiction, historical romance, and historical mystery and have been reviewed by *The Washington Post*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *NPR*, *Publisher Weekly*, and *the New York Times*.

Saying Yes to Quitting

Knowing when to step away from the keyboard

By Trish Milburn



To authors, the refrain to just keep at it, to work hard in order to achieve success, is a common one. Any issue of *Nink* or the lineup of workshops at the NINC conference is filled with a wealth of information about how to become more successful. What you typically don't see is content about making the choice to quit.

This article is different.

Why quit?

Stepping away from writing is sometimes a choice we make, but other times it's a choice that circumstances make for us. Reasons range from health constraints to losing the joy in writing to simply being ready to retire in favor of free time for other pursuits.

Planned retirement

Perhaps the least stressful and heartbreaking reason for quitting an author career is planned retirement. Even so, that retirement may come about not only because of age and wanting to follow other pursuits but also a change in attitude toward the publishing industry. The shine has worn off.

"While I love having written for several of the Big Five, I'm tired and a bit weary and jaded," says [Lenora Worth](#). "I have always worked hard as a writer, but over the last 15 years, I had publishers and indie writers reaching out to me to write for them. That was great, but it really kept me busy. Too busy. The last few years, I've had rejections on books I really want to write and then some heavy edits that would have changed my voice if I'd agreed to do them. That really stopped me cold and made me think about how much longer I could keep up this pace. So I have decided I will 'semi-retire' over the next few years. I'm a senior citizen now, so

I'd like to slow down and enjoy my old age without always worrying about a deadline looming."

For [Linda Barrett](#), retiring from writing so far hasn't completely stuck.

"The longest I've lasted in 'retirement' is about 18 months. I keep trying to retire because I'm always asking, isn't there more to life than this?"

Barrett says the time and deep dive that writing books requires has led her to a compromise, writing short pieces—her newsletter, a play that was produced in her retirement community, and a new series of blogs.

"At this point, I'm not sure I'd commit to a big project again."

While many authors noted that financial concerns should be examined when considering retiring, Barrett also says you should ask yourself about what your goals are for retirement.

"I've found that you really need to plan ahead for transitioning into this 'third act,'" she says. "I've seen people in this retirement community have a hard time leaving their 'regular' jobs and careers."

Unplanned retirement

For some authors, quitting writing wasn't something they planned. Instead, life circumstances forced an unplanned retirement.

After 27 books in 24 years, chronic migraine disease brought [Edie Claire](#)'s writing to a halt.

"Chronic migraine is more than just a bunch of bad headaches," Claire says. "It comes with a substantial amount of brain fog and difficulty with concentration and focus, even between headaches. I could sit down and write something, yes. But when I read over it the next day, I knew it wasn't any good. There was no wit, no sparkle. Just words."

Claire was able to resume writing for about a year when a new drug helped dramatically. Then it stopped working, and she quit again.

"I can't stand the thought of starting another book, getting worse again, and then spending the rest of my life staring at an unfinished manuscript. So instead, I'm trying to reinvent myself, finding another creative endeavor."

For Julie Beard, quitting came about because of a combination of health concerns and changes in the market. Her last book was published with Silhouette in 2005. She opted out of the third book in that contract because she was undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

"I quit just as the traditional market was shrinking," Beard says. "Now it's a whole new world of digital publishing, which is less enticing. I really enjoyed seeing my books in stores."

Market changes and toxic atmosphere

For Anonymous Author A, the shift in how books and authors are perceived now has weighed on her emotionally.

"The shift isn't only in how we work changed, but how authors and even books are viewed by the book world," she says. "This second part has created a huge shift in how authors are

viewed and treated online. Blatant statements from different sectors stating that authors don't deserve to be paid for their work, or that authors are selfish because people in different countries should be given their books for free, while ignoring the part that authors are also humans who need to eat, shelter, and pay for healthcare is such an elitist view, while pounding away that authors are elitist for wanting what everyone wants—to be able to make a living that creates security for themselves and their dependents."

The author says that when she does occasionally write, it's merely for her own pleasure. She's firm that she's not writing for readers at this point.

"I am not worried that yet again they will be the worst reviews because they thought the next book would be from the series they wanted, or the hero they're hot for, or the trope they requested. I'm not worried about angry emails and disappointed reviews. I'm not thinking about them (readers) at all for the first time in over a decade. Because what I'm writing now is for me. It's not about money or clout or viral-ability or all the other things that have to happen to make it so I'm not losing money every time I give the world a book. And I'm finally okay with that."

For author [Gabriella Anderson](#), continual hard knocks finally became too much. Her last agent even told her she was the unluckiest author she'd ever met.

"Emotionally, I was a wreck," Anderson says. "After my last book came out, after 14 published novels, after always having dreams and plots and an active imagination, they were gone. I was empty. I couldn't even read, and I was always a voracious reader. I didn't even have dreams at night (at least that I could remember), and I've always had vivid dreams."

Anderson says that the feeling that is common among writers—the "can't not write" one—is dead for her now.

"It was who I was, and everyone knew me as an author. How does one give up one's identity? The bright spot in my entire dilemma was learning that I could still learn and change at my age," she said, noting that she recently earned a black belt and plays volleyball all over the country.

For Anonymous Author B, her choice to retire soon has been a combination of wanting more free time to do other things plus changes in the market.

"One reason I really want out is my aversion to promotion on Facebook/social media even though I realize online promo is the most effective way to reach more readers," she says.

When to quit

"Ask yourself why you're writing," says [Susan Aylworth](#). "If your work is still fulfilling that purpose, write! If not, try imagining your life in five years with or without writing and compare the two. If you're happy either way, maybe it's time to call it quits."

Before quitting, however, you'll want to make sure it's actually what you want—or can afford—to do rather than simply taking a break.

"I know authors who've quit for a while and seem to have a hard time getting back into the markets," Worth says. "This job demands consistency and constant deadlines. I've talked to a lot of authors who've let their agents go and they never find another one, or they've stopped submitting because of disputes or rejections. It is very hard to keep that steady income going. If you miss a few paces, you throw yourself off completely."

[Jeannie Moon](#) suggests taking even an extended break before making the final decision to quit for good. To get over burnout, she took a break in 2021. Even when she dipped her toes back in, it was with books where the rights had reverted to her. She edited the books, added content, had new covers designed and is re-releasing them.

"That's inspiring me to keep going and write new material," she says.

Moon also says to not let the idea of taking an extended break make you think that you'll lose all your readers.

"The whole idea that you'll lose all your readers if you don't publish is not valid. It's a publishing scare tactic."

Anonymous Author A says that just because you quit doesn't mean there's no turning back from that decision if you change your mind. She suggests when making the decision whether or not to quit that you talk to your inner circle but don't bring readers into the discussion.

Claire says Julie Ortolon was a wonderful emotional support to her when she was agonizing over how to deal with never being able to write again.

"She had retired by choice, and she assured me that choosing to do so—for whatever reason—was something every author had an absolute right to do," Claire says. "I felt guilty about disappointing my readers, but she helped me see the irrationality behind that idea. As much as we love and appreciate our readers, we don't owe them a lifetime of servitude. When other employees retire, they close their office door and walk out. Authors can do that, too. Whether we retire by choice or dictate our last novel from our deathbeds, our legacies will still live on."

Trish Milburn is the USA Today bestselling author of more than 50 books, the latest of which is Wish Upon a Star, the ninth book in her Idol in Love romance series set in the world of K-pop music.

Writing and Reading Romance

Why a happily-ever-after matters

By Jean Oram



The power of a feel-good love story

The romance genre and its almost-guaranteed happily-ever-afters (HEAs) have a history of being dismissed. Is it because most romances are written by and for women? Or it is simply that romances are emotional stories of hope, with a theme that we are all deserving of love just the way we are—and that’s something mainstream society’s subtle messaging often tells us should be difficult to accept?

But why shouldn’t we accept love and assume it will be there for us even if we’re not perfect? Most bestselling stories, whether in book or movie format, have elements of a love story. (For example, you’ll find threads of love stories in *The Hunger Games*, *Independence Day*, and even *Harry Potter*.)

It’s no wonder that we humans—social beings—are drawn to feel-good love stories as we, at one time, literally needed to belong to a pack in order to survive. Thus, it’s no surprise that in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, “love and belonging” is listed as one of our five needs. In fact, it is a prerequisite to “self-actualization.” In other words, we *need* love.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

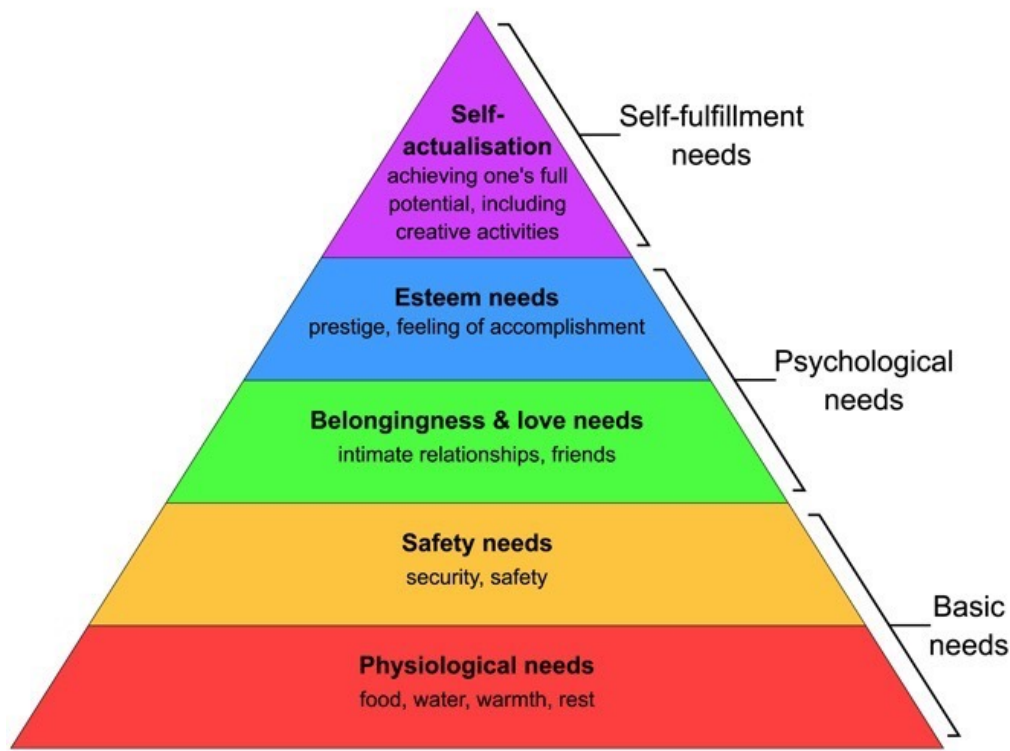


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Looking at Maslow's model, we can see how it lines up with the HEA of a romance with self-actualization occurring after the main character receives love (from the right person). This love helps them become a better version of themselves, and that love often also reveals the key piece they needed in order to heal their internal wound, complete their elusive goal, and become the person they were meant to be.

Love stories and love hormones

Could our attraction to a HEA also be rooted in brain chemistry? Neuroscientist Paul Zak studied the effects of compelling stories and the release of chemicals in the brain. Zak discovered we are the most invested in the hero or heroine and their journey to love at the height of a story. This is also where readers empathize the most, and when their brains release oxytocin. (This chemical is nicknamed the "love hormone" as it's released when we hug others. It is also associated with lessening the effects of anxiety and depression and providing that feeling of "love and belonging," as shown in Maslow's hierarchy.)

Therefore, when we read and become a part of the story, we often feel the same things the characters feel. So by reading, we can trick our bodies into releasing the same chemicals it would if we were falling in love or being hugged!

Why readers like HEAs

Feeling curious as to why my readers leaned toward HEA romances, I asked them why HEAs were important to them. Here are a few things they told me:

Reader Donna Wolz: "I read to... feel good. A HEA makes me feel good."

Reader Audrey Burger: "Our brains are mini computers. My data professor always said if you input garbage, your results will be garbage. By reading positive, I'm putting positive in my brain. That helps make my outlook positive."

Reader Janet Lewis: "I love to laugh, and I love the feeling of completeness when I read a book that I'm heavily involved in and get to the end and read a HEA. I guess, to me, it's like leaving a friend's house knowing that they are happy and doing okay. And that's a great feeling."

In summary, these readers pick up a story with a HEA to uplift their mood, de-stress, escape and find connection.

Romance can be inspiring

HEAs can also be inspiring. For example, if readers identify with a character who is achieving something, it empowers them to believe that they too might be able to achieve that something. And in a romance, that can be anything from following their dream to opening a B&B, finding sexual empowerment, standing up to a nasty boss, or finding love later in life.

As reader Nancy Schreib says, "They [HEAs] just leave me with a sense of hope. If those characters in the story can make it to a happily-ever-after, maybe there is one waiting for me too."

You may have heard stories of romance authors receiving emails from women (and their husbands) about how reading their books has improved their intimacy and sex lives. I write sweet romance so I don't get emails about my readers' sex lives, but recently a man emailed to thank me for my stories as he reads my books to his wife. He said they enjoy the sweet intimacy and bonding in my stories, and from the tone of his email I can presume that these HEA-rich stories are something they bond over, increasing their connection to one another.

Skewed sense of reality?

But is there a chance that a steady diet of inspiring HEAs could skew a reader's view of reality? Maybe, but not likely. As reader Vicci Lucas says, "I know that no life or relationship is a fairytale. But I want to be left with the promise, or hope, that come what may, love, justice, and happiness are real and can happen to anyone."

Furthering this point, a good friend just had a reader leave a review stating that her books always ended on a happy note which was unrealistic. The reader went on to say that happy endings weren't how life worked. There is no fooling readers!

This reviewer aside, many readers, especially those who consume romance, often intentionally choose HEAs for the reason stated by reader Elizabeth Crosman: “We need the happy ending for our spirit, our soul, our sanity, in a world that doesn’t always give us what we want.”

Just as we might search out funny cat videos when we need a few laughs, romance readers search out HEAs to give them hope and that guaranteed emotional lift—solidifying the importance of a HEA within the romance genre.

So, as we recover from some of the craziest times in our living history, reading and writing romance can be beneficial, if for no other reason than this one offered by reader Margaret C.: “It is nice to escape into a story and leave reality behind, to go somewhere where everything works out just right.”

Amen, sister. I’ll meet you in the bookstore’s romance section where I’ll be choosing my next happily-ever-after.

Jean Oram is #6 Positivity in her Clifton Strengths, which has drawn her to write over 30 sweet, small-town HEAs for her readers. She lives in Canada with a dog that frequently nudges her hands off the keyboard and a cat that sheds all over it. Her son is trained to alert her to new rom-coms on Netflix, a daughter who lets her sneak books from her bookshelf, and a husband who helped Jean reach “self-actualization” with his love.

Smart Marketing for Savvy Authors

By Tawdra Kandle



*This year of Smart Marketing
is all about reinventing our businesses.
For the first quarter, we'll deep dive into:
Why and when we might start over;
A new way of looking at publishing goals;
The crucial element of mindset!*

What does success in publishing mean to you?

It's a complicated question, isn't it? Not too long ago, many authors would have defined success as writing a book that was traditionally published, maybe with a decent advance as part of the contract. When indie publishing was born, we all took another look at how we define success, and often it had a great deal to do with royalties earned.

It's far too easy to forget that of all the population that has listed *write a book* as a dream or an item on their bucket list, we have actually done it. If you are reading this article as a NINC member, then you are not only a successful author just once but at least twice over. No matter how many people read those books or how much money we cleared, we have written and published at least two books that have earned a significant amount of money. Soak that in for just a moment.

Early in my indie publishing career, I realized how vastly different the perception of success was to authors. Some only wanted to see one of their books on a shelf in a traditional bookstore. They didn't care if it never moved a copy, as long as they saw it there. For others, it was all about the sales numbers, the ranking, and eventually, making bestseller lists. And of course, there was the money, because while we might have different aims, very few of us would turn down a nice hefty royalty payment.

I mentioned last month that at a certain point in my publishing life, I began looking at authors—especially those who appeared to be financially successful—and I tried to emulate what they were doing to make that bank. I also noted that this was not a good model for me, that it resulted in me moving forward in a way that was not unlike throwing pasta at the wall—and it was just as effective as doing that.

As I've gone about the process of recreating my business over the last year or so, I've tried to be intentional about curing my case of comparisonitis, because I've realized that this is *my* business. It's built on *my* books, and so how I write and market my books should be unique. I've begun being more intentional about setting my goals based on this mindset.

A big part of this shift is all about how I react to the success of those around me. Romance and abundance mindset authors Renee Rose and Lee Savino advise that when we see others achieving what we want, too, we should be intentional about saying, "I'll have that, too, please!" While that might feel very woo-woo to you, it's been hugely helpful for me.

Instead of getting frustrated and turning myself inside out to try and replicate what someone else has done, I take a deep breath and remember that the number of readers or amount of money or success in the world is not limited—and seeing an author hit a homerun reminds me that it's possible for me as well.

I've also accepted that my process is my own. Releasing trends come and go in publishing. Back in 2014, we were advised that rapid release was the key to selling a lot of books, and it definitely worked for a while for many authors. Back then, I had no problem writing and releasing pretty quickly. But in the nine years since, not only has my life changed but my perception of the market has too. While putting out a book a month (or even more) may very well be the perfect rhythm for some authors, it's not what I want to do anymore.

My view on the quality of book I want to publish has also evolved. I am not saying that multiple quick releases are guaranteed to be poorly written books. But for me and my business, oftentimes I feel less than pleased with the books I've rushed to publish. So, I'm not doing that anymore.

I've spent a great deal of time pondering what my ideal publishing schedule and routine would be. It has been enormously freeing to realize anew that I'm in charge of this decision—I don't have to do what any expert advises or what I've convinced myself is the one way to go. What independence!

Given the fact that part of my brave, new world is segmenting my backlist into specific branding (one is small town, another is steamy, angsty football) and republishing under different author names, I'm aware that my energies these days are also divided. While I might be *publishing* under three different personas, Tawdra is the one doing all of the heavy lifting. This means that Tawdra cannot commit to writing and releasing six books a year if her two other personalities require admin, marketing—and oh, yes, writing time!

For me, at least for now, I'm writing and publishing only two books per year as Tawdra. My other pen names will publish books regularly and steadily beginning this year, and those

will take up a fair amount of my time. But on the advice of Joe Solari, I've been thoughtful and intentional about how I space the re-release of my backlist books under these names: this allows me to set expectations for the readers as far as future publication. Author A's audience will begin to understand that her books come out every ten weeks—and they can count on that. Author B will have a more complex release schedule for reasons that we'll discuss here in the next few months.

Setting my goals this way has allowed me to begin to really enjoy my writing and publishing life again. The anxiety and stress that had begun to accompany every anticipated release is easing. An added bonus is that my readers are hungry for my words and very excited about getting their eyes on new books from me! That's always a good thing.

Which brings me back to our first question on how we define success. Part of rebuilding my business has been taking a long, hard look at what I've been calling success in the past ten years and deciding if that understanding still serves me well.

I've decided that it does not, and maybe it never did.

If you had asked me six years ago to name traits or hallmarks of an author who had made it—who was successful—I probably would have put together a list not unlike the one below:

- She consistently has books in the top 5K on Amazon—whether or not she has a release or a BookBub Featured Deal.
- She has a large and active reader group that enthusiastically shares her books without even being asked.
- At live events, her table is always mobbed, with readers lined up just to spend a few moments talking with her.
- Readers travel to events specifically to meet her.
- She's making a lot of money from her book royalties.
- She knows what she's doing as far as marketing. She understands ads.
- Vendors and other author support companies are all vying for her attention and offering her amazing merchandizing for her books—even though she doesn't really need it because the books just sell themselves.

But when I think about it, many of my author achievements have left me less than thrilled. Hitting the *USA Today* bestseller list multiple times hasn't affected my bottom line one iota. Being a BookBub favorite (for a while, at least!) didn't push my royalties into the stratosphere. Having a story—and being a headliner—in a much-talked-about anthology was fun but didn't bring me any new readers.

This year I've shifted my view on success and how I'd like to find it. It looks more like this: I want to write books that make me happy, that my readers love and want to read. I want to love all of my existing books unashamedly to such an extent that my readers—and my new readers—fall in love with the stories. I don't want to torture myself with things like Facebook or

Amazon ads—processes I've never *quite* been able to master well enough to make a difference to my bottom line.

Sure, I'm going to have to slog through the scut work we all do (or hire out!), but beyond that, I don't intend to make myself crazy trying to be any author other than myself.

(And the two new author personas I've invented, of course.)

Next month we're going to do a deeper dive into mindset and how our thinking can affect our books and business plans. Will it be woo-woo? Maybe just a little. Perhaps just one woo. But it's also essential to my reinvented way of doing business.

Tawdra Kandle is the USA Today bestselling author of over 100 romances that span genres from contemporary through paranormal. Her engaging and realistic characters bring readers back again and again to devour the steamy love stories she spins. She lives in central Florida with a husband, a mischievous pup, and too many cats.

The Mad Scribbler

NINC Bylaws & the Room Where it Happens

By Laura Resnick



“To be considered for membership, an applicant must have published two works of book-length fiction.”

—NINC Bylaws: ARTICLE II, Section 2

I was in the room in 1989 when the founding members of NINC were debating the membership requirement quoted above. It happened during the business meetings at our first-ever conference. It was so early in this organization’s history that NINC didn’t even have a name yet (we debated and eventually decided on “Novelists, Inc.” at that same conference), let alone bylaws or a Policies & Procedures Manual (PPM).

The thinking behind the two-published-novels requirement in the bylaws was—and still is—that NINC would be an organization for career novelists, for writers who were in this profession for the long haul, writing and publishing book after book, and who needed a more consistently advanced level of networking, information, and conference sessions than was available in other writing organizations.

You can find the NINC bylaws [here](#). (Due to problems with the website, you may need to clear your browser cache to access it.) Granted, the bylaws don’t make for scintillating reading, but they are fairly brief, and they define the fundamental composition and structure of our organization.

NINC has changed in various ways since 1989 (for example, we have nearly 1,200 members now, rather than barely 100), and the times have also changed. This also means the bylaws periodically have to change, and so we amend them from time to time; the most recent amendment was in 2016.

The 2023 Board of Directors is proposing a new set of bylaws amendments (voting will open on **March 5**). In my current role as NINC Central Coordinator, I was in the room for this discussion too, so let me go over some of the reasoning for these new proposals with you.

In each instance, proposed changes to an existing bylaw appear below in *italics*.

ARTICLE VII: Membership Committee

Current text: Section 1: The Membership Committee shall be composed of up to three active members selected by the Board of Directors who shall serve for a period of one year. No person shall serve as a member of the Membership Committee for more than three consecutive terms.

Proposed change: Remove: *No person shall serve as a member of the Membership Committee for more than three consecutive terms.*

The Membership Committee is responsible for processing new member applications to NINC. The members of this committee serve a one-year term at the invitation of the NINC board. A member of this committee can step down at any time; and the board can remove a member of this committee at any time.

The rule limiting members of this committee goes back to 1989, when our membership qualifications were a *lot* more vague. NINC's definition of "published" back then was something like "generally available in stores." Serving on this committee was a much simpler job back then, so limiting volunteers to three consecutive years didn't cause any disruptions.

But that was more than 30 years ago. These days, NINC's [membership requirements](#) are detailed and complex, so the committee's knowledge base and processes have changed substantially since NINC's early days. There are a lot of specific procedures, learned tasks, and accumulated experience involved in investigating, compiling, and reviewing detailed information—including monitoring international currency rates—to evaluate applications. Sometimes, for example, the membership team has to explain to applicants how to access, collate, and present sales and income data from multiple vendors and formats for their two qualifying titles so that NINC can accurately evaluate their qualifications.

NINC, our application procedures, and the experience of writers applying to NINC all benefit from having an experienced team on this committee, and we are not served well anymore by requiring them to step down after three years if they're willing to keep serving.

So the board wants to remove this now-outdated rule from the bylaws.

ARTICLE XV: Amendment

Current text: These Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the membership represented in person or by proxy at the annual business meeting or by mail vote, or by online vote. No amendment may be voted unless the membership has had at least one month's written

notice of the proposed changes before a vote is taken. Proposed amendments may be brought by the Board of Directors or by petition of 25 percent of the membership.

Proposed changes: *These bylaws may be amended by a vote by members online, by mail, or at the annual business meeting; if the vote is at the annual general business meeting, then a quorum must be present in person or by proxy. Two-thirds of the votes cast must approve any proposed amendment for the amendment to pass. No amendment may be voted on unless the membership has had at least one month's written notice of the proposed changes before a vote is taken. The announcement must also appear in Nink before the vote opens. A bylaws amendment vote shall remain open for a period of one month.* Proposed amendments may be brought by the Board of Directors or by petition of 25 percent of the membership.

The proposed changes to Article XV, which defines how to amend our bylaws, would clarify some of the language, as well as adding some safeguards to the procedure.

One possible interpretation of the current bylaws language “a two-thirds vote of the membership” is that this phrase means that 2/3 of NINC members need to participate in order for the vote to be valid.

This is a huge hurdle to clear, because it's hard to get enough members to vote. It's a common phenomenon that members tend to be disinterested in the excruciating nuts-and-bolts details of their organizations (ex. bylaws, policies & procedures, articles of incorporation, operating agreements, etc.). To give a familiar example in NINC, we typically have very low participation each year in elections for our Board of Directors despite repeatedly encouraging members to vote.

However, another possible interpretation is that a NINC bylaws amendment will pass if 2/3 of *the votes cast* approve it. And, in fact, the Advisory Council informed the board that this was how they interpreted the intention of that clause.

(For those who don't know: The Advisory Council is comprised of most of NINC's past presidents. They embody a vast human library of NINC institutional knowledge, and they are available to answer questions and offer feedback to the board when asked. Every year, a member of the Advisory Council sits on the NINC board, which further enhances this organization's continuity over time. I declined to join the Advisory Council when my term as NINC president ended because, by then, I never again wanted to try to be tactful with my colleagues.)

Obviously, the Advisory Council's interpretation (approval by 2/3 of *the votes cast*, rather than 2/3 of the whole membership) of that first sentence in Article XV was far and away the more propitious one. But the board wanted to be sure it was the correct interpretation, so NINC consulted attorney [Matthew Hoy](#), who has advised us on other occasions on matters related to our status as a nonprofit organization incorporated in the state of Kansas (where two of NINC's five founders lived in 1989).

Hoy found the phrasing of Article XV unclear on its own, so he reviewed the other articles in our bylaws, our Articles of Incorporation, and Kansas state law with regard to nonprofit organizations and their bylaws. His conclusion was that, based on his legal inference from those various documents, Article XV can indeed be correctly interpreted to mean a NINC bylaws amendment can be passed by *2/3 of the votes cast*, rather than *2/3 of the entire membership* voting. *But*, he added, the phrasing was nonetheless unclear, and so his legal advice in this matter was a valid result but not a perfect one.

He advised NINC to amend Article XV with clearer language so that future boards don't have to consult a lawyer to interpret it. So that's what we're doing with this proposal.

The other changes the current board proposed to Article XV (a bylaws amendment proposal must appear in *Nink* before the vote, and a bylaws vote must remain open for one month) are new additions to the article which would further ensure ample opportunity for members to learn about the upcoming vote and to have plenty of time to debate the proposals and to cast their ballots. Bylaws amendment proposals would therefore also always be available to members in the *Nink* archives for future reference.

Again, the vote on these proposed amendments will open on **March 5**. You will be notified by email and social media, and you'll also be reminded in the March *Nink* to cast your vote! The vote will remain open for one month.

NINC Central Coordinator [Laura Resnick](#) has previously served as NINC president-elect, NINC president, NINC conference coordinator, assistant editor of *Nink*, co-chair of the Outreach Committee, and on the Nominating Committee.

NINC Member Discounts

By Abigail Drake



[IngramSpark](#) is an award-winning independent publishing platform that offers indie authors the same quality print and global distribution services enjoyed by big-time publishers. Once you finish and format your book, IngramSpark makes it possible to share it with the world. Focus on what you do best—create innovative content—and let them do the rest: print, ship, and distribute. It's your content. IngramSpark just helps you do more with it.

IngramSpark has been very generous with the discount they offer to NINC members. To help them continue to reward our dedication to professional independent publishing, here are their reminders:

- New codes will be issued each month to prevent misuse by non-members.
- Each month's current code will be available for reference once you're logged in as a NINC member and accessed the Discounts and Freebies page under Member Benefits.
- IngramSpark asks that our members do NOT share this exclusive code on social media (whether publicly or in member-only forums like our Facebook group.) All members have access to the code via our website and should be directed there. **It is very important we do not share the IngramSpark code with anyone who is not a member of NINC.**

IngramSpark is thrilled by our commitment to successful publishing and decisions to publish through them. They look forward to continuing this honor with this exclusive member benefit.

To find out more about the IngramSpark discount for NINC members, check out the [Freebies and Discounts](#) section on the NINC website.



Abigail Drake, who writes contemporary romance and women's fiction, is the award-winning author of 19 novels. She majored in Japanese and economics in college and spent years living abroad, collecting stories wherever she visited. She and her husband, whom she met in Istanbul, have three adult sons.

Membership Benefits

Need industry intel, software, or legal help? We've got you covered.

Are you taking advantage of all your member benefits?

As a NINC member, your benefits include industry discounts, newsletter and website articles, professional services directory, networking opportunities, and more.

We've compiled all of these—which you can also find on our website—into this list as a helpful reminder.

Networking (these groups are for NINC members only):

- Email list for all NINC members: <https://groups.io/g/ninlink>
- NINC Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NovelistsInc/>
- Follow NINC on Twitter: https://twitter.com/Novelists_Inc
- NINC on [Clubhouse](#): Novelists, Inc. Virtual Tiki Bar
- Critique/brainstorming group: <https://groups.io/g/NINKcritique>
- Traditionally published authors: <https://groups.io/g/NINCTradPubbedAuthors>
- SF/F & speculative fiction writers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCswordsandrayguns>
- Authors of thriller/crime/suspense: <https://groups.io/g/NINC suspense-thriller-crime>
- Discuss creating book covers: <https://groups.io/g/NINCcovercreators/>

Conference:

Conference information: <https://ninc.com/conferences/about-the-ninc-conference/>

Newsletter

- Propose an article: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/propose-an-article/>
- Submit a letter to the editor: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/submit-letter-to-editor/>
- Newsletter archives: <https://ninc.com/newsletter/news-archive/>

Website (You must be logged in to access these services.)

- Legal Fund: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/legal-fund/>
- Sample Letters: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/sample-letters/>
- Articles & Links: <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/articles-and-links/>

Member discounts

NINC members are eligible for certain professional discounts. A complete listing of these can be found at <https://ninc.com/member-benefits/member-freebies-discounts/> along with other member discounts.

Volunteer

One of the greatest benefits of NINC is the opportunity to volunteer your talents to benefit other members—which pays incredible and unexpected dividends in networking and knowledge. Learn more about volunteer opportunities here: <https://ninc.com/members-only/open-positions/>

Open positions include:

- Social Media Committee
- Tweet Team
- Recruiting New Members
- Anything!



Founded in 1989

NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.

NINC is committed to welcoming a diverse and inclusive membership to our organization and serving all members. No author will ever be discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs if any, ability, nationality or age. It is NINC's desire and goal to make sure that every author member feels welcomed and accepted and heard.

Founders

- Rebecca Brandewyne
- Janice Young Brooks
- Jasmine Cresswell
- Maggie Osborne
- Marianne Shock

2023 Board of Directors

If you have questions regarding Novelists, Inc., please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

- President: Celeste Barclay
- President-Elect: Caethes Faron
- Secretary: Sylvia McDaniel
- Treasurer: Timothy Cerepaka
- Newsletter Editor: Harper St. George
- Advisory Council Representative: Steven Womack

Advisory Council

- Lou Aronica
- Brenda Hiatt Barber
- Linda Barlow
- Jean Brashear
- Janice Young Brooks

- Laura Parker Castoro
- Meredith Efken
- Donna Fletcher
- Kay Hooper
- Lisa Hughey
- Tawdra Kandle
- Barbara Keiler
- Julie Leto
- Pat McLaughlin
- Kasey Michaels
- Diana Peterfreund
- Pat Rice
- Erica Ridley
- Marianne Shock
- Wayne Stinnett
- Vicki Lewis Thompson
- Victoria Thompson
- Steven Womack

2023 Committees

Complete committee member listings are available on the website. Many committee positions are open and looking for new volunteers.

- Central Coordinator: Laura Resnick
- 2023 Conference Committee
 - Conference Director: Mel Jolly
 - Assistant Conf. Director & Programming Chair: Tawdra Kandle
 - Assistant Programming Chair: Dylann Crush
 - Trad Liaison: Lou Aronica
 - Sponsorship Chair: Sarah Woodbury
 - Assistant Sponsorship Chair: Hallee Bridgeman
 - Hotel Liaison: Karen Fox
 - Assistant Hotel Liaison: Tegan Maher
 - Registrar: Lisa Hughey
 - Assistant Registrar: Stephanie Julian
 - App Coordinator & Graphic Designer: Laura Hayden
 - NINC After Dark Coordinator: Tamsin Ley
- Authors Coalition Representatives: Rebecca Zanetti & Hallee Bridgeman
- Bookkeeper: Christy Wilson
- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee
 - Chair: Celeste Barclay
 - Misti Boehm
 - Pooks Burroughs
 - Malorie Cooper
 - Lynn Emery
 - Lisa Hughey

- Tawdra Kandle
- Ellis Leigh
- Alison Perry
- Harper St. George
- Social Media Committee
 - Chair: Violet Howe
 - Genevieve Jack
- Membership Committee
 - Boyd Craven
 - Sarah Woodbury
- *Nink* Newsletter
 - Editor: Harper St. George
 - Acquisitions Editor: Trish Milburn
 - Copy Editor: Cynthia Moyer
 - Production Manager: Laura Resnick
- Nominating Committee
 - Chair: Lisa Hughey
 - Tanya Anne Crosby
 - Michele Dunaway
 - Katherine Garbera
 - Cindy Kirk
 - Nancy Robards Thompson
- Discounts Program: Abigail Drake

Central Coordinator

Novelists, Inc. c/o Laura Resnick
 P.O. Box 331, Covington KY 41012
admin@ninc.com

Address changes may be made on the website.

***Nink* Newsletter**

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Nink's goal is to provide our readers with high-quality articles that offer critical business advice, marketing how-tos, advanced craft coaching, or strategy to continue building a career, all geared to established authors. All members should feel confident that *Nink* provides something for them. We welcome pitches and submissions from all members.

To request reprint rights or to **submit an article proposal**, please contact [the editor](#).

Publication: 12 issues annually. Available in PDF and epub formats. Public issues redact NINC members-only information.

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