

REGIONAL GROUP PILOT GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

January 2017



SoA regional group meetings are organised and run *by* members, *for* members. **We'd love to see more members getting together locally to share stories, experiences and laughs, and to discuss the issues that are important to you.** Attending group meetings also gives you the opportunity to raise issues you want your local representative to put forward to our Management Committee.

The SoA can help by occasionally providing a speaker, but otherwise we simply assist you by promoting your meetings to local members. If you're interested in setting up a meeting of members in your area, the guidelines below will explain how we can assist you.

Why a regional group?

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

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

How we can help

1. We can let you know the number of members living in your area and email them to gauge initial interest in a meeting.
2. If there is sufficient interest: you organise the meeting and we'll notify members by email, as well as listing the event on our website, through our newsletters and on social media.
3. You're in control: we'll direct members to contact you for further information and you can maintain your own contact list from details collected at meetings (if you wish) or we can contact members on your behalf (which ensures the mailing list is up-to-date).
4. Before the meeting we can supply you with a meeting pack, which will include these guidelines, a selection of SoA printed materials and any other relevant printed materials.

Please note that the SoA does not have the resources to become involved in taking bookings, handling payments and organising speakers.

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As the Organising Author, you will need to:

- find and book a suitable venue (e.g. a pub with a space that can be cordoned off).
- organise food (if desired).
- send us the details so that we can inform members with plenty of lead time (6 weeks).
- liaise with the venue (e.g. over numbers).
- invite, liaise with and, if appropriate, pay expenses and/or fees to guest speakers.

Top tips for successful planning:

- **Forward plan:** successful groups plan meetings well in advance.
- **Avoid the need to pay room hire or cancellation fees:** if meeting mid-week, pubs are usually happy to reserve an area for free.
- **Avoid expenses:** members suggest that meetings are organised so that individuals are responsible for buying their own food and drink.
- **Have a direct contact:** it is helpful if members are able to contact the organiser direct, to ask for further information and to advise them whether they can come etc.
- **Avoid overkill:** meetings more frequent than once a month can be overkill. Most of our local groups meet somewhere between once a month to twice-yearly.
- **Keep your list up-to-date:** liaise with the SoA over publicity; if the SoA sends mailings out by email, new members are automatically invited, which means the group is always changing. The SoA advises a minimum lead time of at least six weeks to promote a meeting.
- **Decide your format and regularity:** use your initial meeting to discuss the format and regularity of meetings etc. Once the operating details have been established, the group is then added to the SoA website.
- **Book speakers well in advance** (two-three months' in advance is best): it is possible for a member of SoA staff to give a one-off presentation to the regional group (a treat for SoA staff to be able to leave the office to speak to members!).
- **Keep in touch in between meetings:** members might find a Facebook group valuable or use the members-only 'Regional Groups discussion forum' on the SoA website.
- **Welcome new members:** some groups have a 'buddy' system for new members. Consider sharing transport to and from meetings.
- **Make use of the SoA:** if you need help, ask. We're able to provide limited assistance like printing name labels, if required.
- Make the most of other networks: link up with other writers groups, local literature festivals or writer development agencies.
- Build your group profile: local BBC radio stations often have a short arts programme, the group could offer to participate in a series of light-hearted interviews with members of the group. There may not be any money in it, but it does help the group to develop a public profile. And it's good radio skills practice!

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Ideas for types of meetings:

- **Talks:** some group meetings include a talk by a 'featured writer'. This could be someone from within the group talking about their books and style of writing, or it could be someone from outside the group.
- Networking or social events: you might simply want to meet to share ideas, and make new friends and colleagues.
- **'Introducing your local writers':** present an afternoon or evening of literature (favourite poems, introduction to a favourite book, working methods etc.) at a pub, bookshop, library.

To be listed as a Regional Group on the SoA website, the group must be:

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

**Some SoA groups offer partner rates to meetings, where appropriate. Groups may wish to consider making some of their speaker events open to non-members at a different rate, and in which case the two-meeting rule would not apply for this type of event.*

How established groups (not run by SoA members) can partner with the SoA:

If there is already an established group of writers who meet regularly in your area, we are happy to partner with them in some way, perhaps by offering:

- an SoA speaker to attend a meeting.
- a Management Committee member to be their point of contact with the SoA.
- a membership offer.
- to promote their local meetings on our regional groups page.

To feed in your tips and advice, or for further information about setting up a meeting in your area, please contact Poppy Rosenberg at the SoA on 020 7373 6642 or by email at PRosenberg@societyofauthors.org