The Society of Authors has a growing network of local groups across the UK and abroad with the aim of bringing members together. Being an author often means you’re working in isolation and can sometimes be a lonely business.

Our local groups are a great way to meet fellow authors in your area, share knowledge, support and inspire one another. Local groups are run by members for members and hold regular informal online meet-ups and events. We’d love to help more members to share stories, experiences and laughs, and to discuss the issues that are important to you with your fellow authors.

If you’re interested in setting up an online meet-up of members in your area, this guide covers how The Society of Authors can help you, top tips for getting started, and applying for financial assistance to help with your event costs.

*Please note: due to the restrictions on gatherings and meeting people from outside your household, local group activity is now taking place online for the foreseeable future.*

**Why set up a local group?**

*Connect.* Get to know your local member community

*Get together online.* Regularly meet and talk with fellow Society of Authors members

*Support.* Share your knowledge and experiences in writing, publishing and self-publishing

*Listen.* Discuss members’ professional queries and possible solutions – a problem shared is a problem halved!

*Learn.* Share your skills and learn new ones from fellow authors and industry professionals

**Getting started**

If there isn’t a Society of Authors local group in your area, we can help you get one up and running.

- First, email [localgroups@societyofauthors.org](mailto:localgroups@societyofauthors.org) to let us know where you’d like to set up a group. Include the postcode areas you’d like the new group to cover.

- We will let you know the number of members living in your area and email them to gauge initial interest in being part of a local group. We’ll let you know how many members are interested.

- If there’s enough interest, it’s time to arrange the first meet-up! We have a pro Zoom account for local group organisers to use for their online meet-ups – you will be provided with the login details to schedule and host your online sessions. Please see below for how to schedule your Zoom meeting.

- Let us know the date, time, Zoom joining details (link, meeting ID and password) and any other details, such as the structure and format for the first meet-up. We’ll notify members in the area by email, through our newsletters, on social media and an event listing on our website. We’ll
also set up a registration form so members are automatically emailed the Zoom details so you
don’t need to reply to RSVPs.

- We’ll direct members to contact you, as the organiser, for further information about the group
and meet-up. There’s no need for you to keep your own mailing list as we handle all local
group communications about future meet-ups and events from our central mailing list. That
means the contact list for your area is always up to date as new authors join.

- All that’s left to do is have a great time with your fellow authors! Keep in touch with us to let us
know how your first meet-up went and your plans for future sessions.

Setting up your Zoom meeting

Download the Zoom app to your device and sign in using the local groups Zoom account
login details.

Click schedule and fill in your local group meet-up details:

- Topic – please start with your local group name so we can clearly see which meeting belongs
to which local group.

- Description – optional, but good if you want to give details about the meet-up.

- Date/time/duration – there are no time limits but we recommend 45-60mins.

- Recurring meetings – you can select this option if your group meets at a regular time.

- Meeting ID – select ‘generate automatically’ so you have a unique ID for each meet-up.

- Meeting password – we advise setting a meeting password so your meet-up is more secure.
  For more tips on keeping your meetings secure, read this article.

- Video settings – select off as the default – host/participant can always turn on their video
  when they join the meeting if they feel comfortable.
  Audio – select both as default. It is unlikely that anyone will be dialling in so leave the settings
  as is.

- Meeting options – ‘enable join before host’ means attendees can join at the specified time
  before you’ve started the meeting as host. If you want to get set up before anyone arrives,
you can select ‘enable waiting room’ and then admit all to the meeting when you’re ready to
  start.

- Alternative host – do not set an alternative host

Click save and your meeting will be added to the upcoming meetings calendar. Select your
meeting to show the details, including the Zoom link, on screen.

Please note: Zoom stores names and email addresses of meeting attendees. By using the SoA
Local Groups Zoom account, you agree to not collect, use or save attendee contact details
unless you have express permission from the attendee to contact them after the meeting.
Knowledge exchange

The Society of Authors encourage members to network, learn and support each other. During the first or second meet-up of your new group, it's a good idea to find out more about your local members to see what skills and knowledge they would be willing to share with the group at future meet-ups. This can form the basis of a knowledge exchange session. Members can give a talk or lead a discussion on a topic which they have in-depth experience of, in exchange for learning something new from a fellow member at a future meet-up.

Sessions might include a couple of members sharing their paths to publication, learning about marketing and self-promotion from an experienced member, or sharing tips and advice about speaking at literary festivals. Using your group's knowledge and learning from your peers is a great way to boost your skillset, make new connections, and hone your approach to making the profession work for you.

The local organiser role

During the first group meet-up, it's a good idea to talk about what members would like to get out of the group and how often they would like to meet. You can’t please everyone, but it's important that online meet-ups work for you as the local group organiser. You could also ask if there are other members who would be willing to help organise the group – many hands make light work and you can take it in turns to host or lead a session.

As the local organiser, you will need to:

- Plan, schedule and host your online Zoom meet-ups.
- Invite, liaise with and, if appropriate, agree expenses and/or fees to external guest speakers. See page 5 for details on handling finances.
- Send us the meet-up details so that we can inform members with plenty of lead time - ideally a month in advance.

There’s no need for you to keep your own mailing list as the Society of Authors handles all local group communications about future meet-ups from our central mailing list which is kept up to date with new members and leavers. Any member details you keep in the form of spreadsheets or mailing lists may breach GDPR regulations and leave the Society of Authors vulnerable to investigation and a fine.

The local organiser network

As a local group organiser, you’re part of a growing network of Society of Authors members across the UK organising meet-ups and online events which provide valuable opportunities for authors to build connections in their local area. We’d like you to share your top tips and experiences with fellow organisers to help our local groups thrive.

Local group organisers discussion group

Join our Facebook group to connect with fellow organisers, ask questions, share what’s worked well for your group and ideas for events which could be replicated by other local groups.
Monthly Zoom chat
On the first Wednesday of the month from 12-1pm, join our Zoom chat with Society of Authors staff and fellow local group organisers. Ask questions, share what’s worked well and chat through your ideas or issues.

Buddy scheme
If you’ve just started a local group, we can pair you with a more experienced local group organiser to discuss ideas and find out what’s worked well for them.

Top tips for successful local group meet-ups

Forward plan – Successful local groups plan meetings well in advance.

Have a direct contact – It is helpful if members are able to contact the organiser directly with any queries and to find out more about the group.

Decide your format and regularity – Use your initial meeting to discuss the format and what members would like from the group. Monthly meetings tend to work well.

Liaise with the SoA – Make sure you send us the event details at least a month in advance so we can publicise them.

Use your group’s expertise – Group members are encouraged to share their knowledge and experience by leading discussions or giving an informal talk.

Book external speakers well in advance – If there are gaps in the group’s knowledge, arrange a speaker two to three months in advance to visit the group. Remember to agree fees in advance and decide on a ticket price to cover costs.

Keep in touch in between meetings – Members might find a Facebook discussion group valuable. Let the SoA know if you would like us to set one up for your group.

Welcome new members – ensure new members feel welcome and included during online meet-ups.

Make use of the SoA – If you need help, ask! We’re happy to talk through ideas for events and put you in touch with fellow local group organisers to share your experiences of running a group.

Top tips for running Zoom meetings

Have a clear start and end time – 45-60 minutes works well for online sessions.

Host the session with a welcome and short hellos from attendees – ensure new members feel welcome and included during online meet-ups.

Decide on a structure for the session – introduce yourself, 2-3 minutes each for updates before moving onto a focused discussion if you have a topic. Limit the ‘doom and gloom’ chat on current circumstances and try to stick to talking about writing!
Avoid distracting background noise - Encourage attendees to mute themselves when they're not speaking and use headphone if you're having audio trouble.

Use the in-meeting chat - share links mentioned during the discussion or ask questions if a group member is giving a talk.

Use breakout rooms to split off into smaller groups – good for smaller group discussions and then feeding back to everyone in the main Zoom room. See this article for help on managing breakout rooms.

Zoom has video tutorials to show you how to do most things, so it’s worth checking the video tutorials for a quick how-to session.

**Ideas for local group events**

**The Publicity Problem Solver**
Host a skills sharing evening for members to share top tips and advice for publicity, promotion and spreading the word about your work. From pre-publication advice to keeping sales going, share what’s worked well (or not so well) for you and help fellow members.

**How to Work with your Local Bookseller**
Why not approach your local independent bookseller to see if they could host a Q&A session led by a group member on how authors and booksellers can work together? Download this sheet for suggested questions and topics to discuss.

**My Author Life**
Invite group members to discuss how they make up their writing, illustrating or translating life, what they’re currently working on and share their advice on how to support yourself as an author while you work on your next project.

**Working with your local library service**
Your local library service may have a library development officer who could speak to the group about their upcoming projects and programmes authors can get involved with, such as delivering workshops or readings.

**Wellbeing session**
Staying connected in your professional author community is often more important for our health and wellbeing than we realise. Get together for a chat over a cuppa and find out how members are doing.

**Author incomes session**
The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society can speak to the group about author incomes, secondary licensing and copyright. For more information, get in touch.
Meet the Editor session
The Society for Editors and Proofreaders have a network of ambassadors who are happy to speak to local groups. For more information, please contact the SfEP.

The London Library
The London Library has been a place for readers and writers since 1841. Hear about the history of the Library, the writers that have written there and how you can use libraries and the skills of librarians to help with research, inspiration and productivity. For more information, get in touch.

Developing your craft
Contact your local writer development agency and invite them to speak to the group about ways they can support you to develop your craft.
Scottish Book Trust | New Writing North | Writing East Midlands | Writing West Midlands | National Centre for Writing | New Writing South | Literature Works | Literature Wales

How to apply for funding
Contact your local literature development officer or relationship manager and invite them to give a presentation on how to apply for funding towards a creative project.
Creative Scotland | Arts Council England | Arts Council Wales | Arts Council Northern Ireland

SoA sessions
The Society of Authors staff can speak to local groups and answer queries. Topics include:

- The business of writing, illustrating or translating
- How to make a living as an author
- Poetry as a profession
- How to run an effective campaign
- Copyright and permissions
- Top tips for contracts and negotiations
- Know your rights: the C.R.E.A.T.O.R campaign
- From page to screen: the adaptation process
- Prizes, awards and other sources of income
- Getting started in self-publishing

Please get in touch to organise a session at least eight weeks in advance. If there is a topic you’d like to know more about that’s not listed here, just ask in your email request.
Funding and Support

Local group costs

Local group meet-ups and online events should be cost-neutral and free to attend. You can use the local groups pro Zoom account so there is no need to set up your own pro account. Using expertise within your group will allow you to run online events that are free to attend and allow members to share knowledge and skills as part of their local author community.

Alongside free meet-ups, you may want to organise events that incur costs to run. Where there are costs attached to running the online event, you should aim to break-even by introducing a ticket charge to cover the expenditure.

If there is a gap in the group’s knowledge and members would benefit from hearing from an external speaker on a topic, you can invite someone to give a talk or run a workshop. If they are employed by an organisation or company, such as a publisher or an agency, we would not expect to pay a fee as they will be able to claim their time back as part of their role. If the speaker is freelance or self-employed, you will need to agree a fee in advance. Please see the recommended rates and fees paid by the SoA. If in doubt about whether to offer a fee, ask the SoA.

Applying for financial support

The SoA has some limited funds available to support local group online events and to help cover any potential shortfall if your event fails to break-even. To be eligible for financial support, your online event must achieve at least one of the following aims:

- Improving authors’ business skills
  Events could include a practical workshop on publicity skills, or feature an external speaker sharing expertise.

- Providing access to local professional networks
  For example, joint events with other local writing groups or literary festivals in your region.

- Encouraging emerging writers or those just starting out
  Events could be in partnership with your local writer development agency and raise the profile of the group amongst non-members.

To apply for funding, please complete and return this form.

Groups can apply for up to £300 per event and may submit two applications in a twelve-month period. You must apply for funds at least eight weeks in advance of your event and costs must be agreed in advance. We cannot guarantee support for all events and each application will be assessed on a case by case basis. Please contact us to discuss any queries.

Please bear in mind that the amount of funding each year is limited, and once the budget has been allocated, further requests for financial support will not be considered. If SoA financial support is vital to running your event, you may wish to consider holding your event once more funding becomes available in the next calendar year.
Handling local group finances
To avoid local groups handling their own funds, the SoA will make payments for event costs. Invoices should be addressed to the SoA and sent directly to us for payment.

If there is a charge for your event, the SoA will set up an online bookings page for attendees to purchase tickets for your event and will handle all income from ticket sales. Local groups should not set up their own individual bank accounts as there is no need for you to handle group funds.

Get in touch
Ready to take the plunge and set up a local group in your area? Contact localgroups@societyofauthors.org and we’ll help get your new group up and running!