
PROPOSAL BY THE QUEBEC WRITERS' FEDERATION, PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE FOR THE 2014 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

(514) 933-0878
admin@qwf.org

Quebec Writers'
Federation
1200 Atwater Ave.
Westmount, Quebec
H3Z 1X4

August 6, 2014

To the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Executive Summary

- The Quebec Writers' Federation is one of many community service organizations across Canada delivering crucial services to linguistic minority groups, often scattered across disparate geographical areas, and providing education and skills to prepare them for the job market.
- Canadians in the most vulnerable socio-economic conditions, including many children, rely on these services to become productive citizens contributing to our national prosperity.
- Despite successful private fundraising, organizations such as the Quebec Writers' Federation cannot fulfill their duties to their memberships and their communities without financial assistance from the municipal, provincial, and federal governments.
- The QWF proposes that the 2015 federal budget acknowledge and provide support for organizations delivering these services.

Maximizing the number and types of jobs for Canadians

The Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF) expresses its appreciation for the opportunity to submit this proposal. The QWF is a registered charity whose mandate is to protect and strengthen English-language literature in Quebec. As an organization that has provided critical services to English-speaking writers in the province since 1998, and through them to a far greater number of English-speaking and other citizens, we have seen first-hand the tangible results that federal budget allocations have brought, improving the livelihoods of working writers across the province. This support enables the work and the skills of those writers to reach many other residents of Quebec, whose lives are enriched and whose own creative and linguistic skills—vital for success in the workplace—are thereby reinforced.

The challenges of many community groups with regard to creating and exploiting job opportunities and professional development are largely hidden from view. It takes supportive organizations such as QWF to reach out, bring them together, uncover the roadblocks to employment and provide the tools they need to become job-ready.

Good writing, whether in the form of novels, graphic novels, non-fiction, essays, journalism, plays, travel writing, poetry, short stories, and children's literature, requires different types of expertise that are difficult to come by. Federal support for writers is thus a vital component of the cultural ecosystem, which literally makes possible the continued participation of many writers in the work of cultural and linguistic reinforcement. This is particularly true for linguistic minorities, who set a high value on the continued support of the federal government.

Our staff and teams of unpaid committee members administer programs that deliver the following crucial community services, among others, that would not be possible without federal funding:

- Writing workshops for all skill levels, with the goals of preparing participants as editors and skilled writers, and, in some instances, getting manuscripts ready for publication.
- Mentorship program that pairs the most talented emerging writers with established authors, as they prepare for entry into the job market.

-
- The Quebec Literary Database, a growing online database of English-language Quebec writers and their books, launched in 2006 and now featuring approximately 860 authors and 1500 books (<http://quebecbooks.qwf.org>).
 - Industry networking events.
 - Annual literary awards in six categories, bringing public attention—and increased sales— to 18 short-listed books each year.

We are often asked whether these types of activities deliver results. In response, we are proud to be able to demonstrate that they most certainly do.

The QWF has supported such writers as Yann Martel, whose novel *Life of Pi* sold seven million copies and was turned into a blockbuster feature film grossing \$609M with post-production generating hundreds of Canadian jobs. More recently, the novels of QWF member Rawi Hage, Kathleen Winter, Madeleine Thien and others have won or been shortlisted for major international literary prizes and inspired a new generation of writers to take up or remain devoted to their vocation. A significant number of young writers have made the progression from our writing workshops to our mentorship program, emerging with a manuscript that became their first book. Countless others have also become successful in the fields of writing, editing, communications, publicity, and marketing.

In 2013, we hired or published over 150 writers, paying out over \$96 700. While the amount may be infinitesimal in the context of the entire budget, it is a well-known fact that many artists piece together such small contracts to make ends meet. The larger contracts QWF offers definitely help to keep some talented writers afloat, so that they can continue to write and contribute to the cultural vitality of English-language Quebec and Canada.

The impact that federal funding can have on a writer's ability to contribute to national prosperity should not be undervalued; it is clear from these examples that significant economic multipliers come into play in the cultural industries.

Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on education and training

The QWF does more than equip emerging writers to become job-ready. We have an active education program that has put us in touch with all aspects of the school sector:

- Writers in Schools and Writers in CEGEPs, programs of the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications that bring authors into the education system.
- Writers in the Community, a community outreach program for severely at-risk adolescents, in collaboration with the Centre for Literacy of Quebec. The demand for this program is so great that schools are now on a waiting list.

Every year, these programs positively affect many children and youths. Under the tutelage of the program leaders, they create pieces of writing, sometimes for the first time. This gives them a sense of value, and offers positive role models for future paths they will take.

It's worth noting that the QWF's reach and impact have grown far more rapidly than our budget. This is another indication that economic multipliers are at work here. We are in good financial health, but not all similar organizations can say the same. There are many other groups like QWF who do valuable work educating and fostering upcoming generations, yet they may not have the necessary allocations.

The primacy of local community organizations with broad reach

Originally, the QWF's work of providing market training and education to English-language writers was limited to Montreal. It recently became apparent that we needed to extend the reach of QWF across the entire province as far as possible, with the following preliminary results:

- Montreal-based writers now travel to remote communities for job opportunities working with at-risk youth, including members of First Nations communities.
- There are now stronger links and economic partnerships between Anglophone and Francophone communities that would not otherwise have been created. This promotes greater cross-cultural understanding and creates new synergies

that make stronger collaboration possible, with potential new benefits downstream.

Conclusion

Our community fundraising efforts are strong and successful, but organizations such as the Quebec Writers' Federation cannot fulfill their mandates without continued financial support from municipal, provincial, and federal governments, assistance that the QWF administers in a cost-effective manner. Just as plants die without food, communities without resources—not simply financial, but cultural, educational, linguistic, and creative resources—will starve.

Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser was a guest speaker at the Quebec Writers' Federation Awards gala on November 19, 2013. He addressed the particularly fragile ecology of English-language writers in Quebec and the need to support them, underscoring the essential nature of federal contributions in ensuring a fully viable cultural and linguistic ecosystem in all parts of Canada. He also spoke to the strength and potential he sees.

“This kind of celebration speaks to the fact that Montreal continues to be a cultural engine, not simply for French-speaking Canada but also for the English community in this country.... I think this an indication of how many young writers are drawn to Montreal because of its energy, its cultural vitality, and its importance as a literary centre.”

Sincerely yours,

Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, Quebec Writers' Federation

Linda Morra, President

Daniel Allen Cox, Vice President

David Graham, Treasurer

David Homel, Past President