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**WRITERS**  
FEST

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# 2022 Annual Report





The Vancouver Writers Fest imagines a world in which the transformative power of books and ideas creates the foundation of an empathetic, inspired, and just society. Through year-round programming and our flagship October festival, we connect people to exceptional books, ideas, and dialogue that ignites a passion for words and the world around us.

In 2022, we deepened our commitment to accessibility and community engagement through our Accessibility Round Table, community partnerships, and first ever Digital Festival. In a year of ongoing unpredictability, we're proud to have been buoyed by incredible authors, volunteers, staff, and audiences.



The Vancouver Writers Fest carries out our work on unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) territory.



*Left to Right:*  
 Nadifa Mohamed,  
 Graeme Macrae  
 Burnet, Ashley  
 Spires, Chief Robert  
 Joseph, Lisa Thomas-  
 Tench, Sarah Polley,  
 audience members at  
 the 2022 Festival

# Our Direction

*“Having been to a lot of these things in a lot of different places over the years, I can say with some certainty that Vancouver is lucky to have one of the world’s truly first-rate literary festivals. The depth of thought the organizers put into every facet of the program, coupled with the wonderful, electric intimacy of Granville Island, make this a week where, on any given night, an audience might glimpse something truly magical on stage.” —Omar El Akkad, 2022 Guest Curator*

**Our 2022 Festival reflected on what it means to be “home”—and also in transition.** A compelling prompt in a year when we were returning to a fully in-person festival: seeking to embrace new opportunities and pandemic lessons, while also longing for the comfort of favourite traditions, locations, and conversations.

While it was tempting to plan for a “return-to-normal”, the past three years have altered the live events landscape. Events and festivals across Canada have seen a 30% decline in in-person audiences. Through strong marketing efforts, outreach, and patron enthusiasm, we were able to overcome these disadvantages—near pre-Covid audience numbers turned out for the Festival and Special Events last fall.

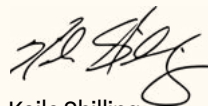
We recommitted to hosting Canadian and international authors in-person. The community of writers and storytellers from across the globe that gathers in the unique setting of Granville Island is a crucial part of what makes VWF a favourite event for authors and audiences alike. In addition, we continued to offer our volunteers some of the best perks around to show our appreciation for their time, patience, and enthusiasm. In short, we invested more deeply in the things we believe make the Festival so special, and make it feel like home to so many.

We also embraced new innovations and partnerships. We convened an Accessibility Round Table—a group of community members

with lived expertise from the Blind, Deaf, and Disability communities who gathered monthly and shared their wisdom and perspective on our work. The results are detailed later in this report and will be on our website. We look forward to this work continuing in 2023.

We livestreamed all our Youth events, so those who couldn’t attend in person—for whatever reason—could tune in, for free. We launched our first-ever Digital Festival, a collection of 30 professionally recorded events, released online over the holiday season for those who faced accessibility challenges, or who simply missed an event and wanted more. And with the rising cost of living in mind, we became certified as a Living Wage Employer.

This has been a year of transitioning into the new, while also coming home, as we strive to create community through sharing books, ideas, and dialogue; to increase literacy by fostering a love of reading; to entertain and delight; and to connect readers with words that expand and deepen our worlds. We’re proud to share the successes—and challenges—of this year with you in this report.



Kaile Shilling  
Executive Director



Leslie Hurtig  
Artistic Director

## By the Numbers

19,568

Individual Tickets

122

Festival Authors

10,956

Youth Participants

1,600

Students Supported Through  
Ticket and Bus Subsidies

80

Festival Events in 2022

18,100+

Newsletter Subscribers

# A Message from Our Board

**As the Board of a festival that is full of joyful encounters** and a forum for thoughtful conversations between storytellers and audiences, we know it is critical that we continue to create the types of spaces that are welcoming, accountable, and reflective. This seems all the more important as we navigate the devastating effects the pandemic period has had on VWF and other arts organizations in our community.

The Board is so proud of the commitment and hard work of Leslie, Kaile and the entire VWF team in overcoming these challenges. They have truly managed to build on VWF's strength and reputation during these challenging times, giving people in our community, our province, our country, and indeed worldwide continued access to the quality of discourse for which we are celebrated.

This past year brought renewal for our board of directors. After saying farewell to some dedicated and long-serving members, we were joined by six new directors. We are thrilled to be working together

to support the initiatives of staff, deepening our own commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and reimagining how we provide equitable access to the arts for all in our community.

After so many years, when so much has been taken away, we have a renewed appreciation for what writers and storytellers give us: perspective, inspiration, beauty, entertainment, and understanding. Now more than ever we are committed to supporting the work at VWF and the tremendous value that authors and storytellers bring to all of us and our communities. Of course we cannot do any of our work without the essential and unwavering support of our volunteers, members, festival-goers, and government, individual, and corporate sponsors. Your contributions are what makes all of this possible and we truly thank each and every one of you!



**Alexia Jones,**  
*Board Chair*



## Our 2022 Board of Directors



**Alexia Jones**  
*Chair*



**Kyla Epstein**  
*Vice-Chair*



**Robert McLean**  
*Treasurer*



**Michelle Blackwell**



**Hurriya Burney**



**Allison Felker**



**Karen Gilmore**



**Julie Iannacone**



**Luan Li**



**Krystal Paraboo**



# Our Impact

Our funding streams remained diverse and robust in difficult times. As public funds for Covid relief phased out, we sought to rebalance our revenue sources.

We were supported by a stronger-than-anticipated return from our audiences, mitigating projected box office deficits. We continued to offer discounts for students and seniors, ticket and bus subsidies for schools, and accessibility subsidies.

Author tours were minimal in 2022, but we were glad to see a pickup towards year-end, enabling at least a few of our signature Special Events and the critical revenue they generate in the off-Festival season.

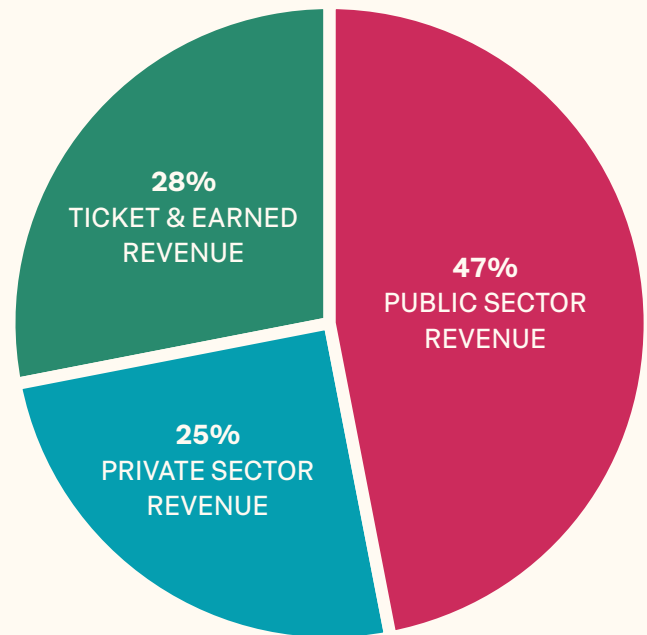
**Total Income 2022**  
**\$1,317,349**

**Public Sector Revenue**    **\$622,091**

**Ticket & Earned Revenue**    **\$370,611**

**Private Sector Revenue**    **\$324,647**

**Total Expenses 2022**  
**\$1,469,414**



***Pandemic support from the government offset decreased earned and private revenue.***

Like most Festivals, we found the third pandemic year the most challenging financially, as public funding declined dramatically, while audiences remained slow and cautious in their return to live events and festivals.

We're proud that we were careful with our resources in prior years, enabling us to access reserves. At the same time, we're pushing hard to increase revenue in 2023 to recover lost funds.

# Audience Snapshot

**92%**

of patrons are “extremely likely” or “very likely” to recommend future Vancouver Writers Fest events to their friends and family

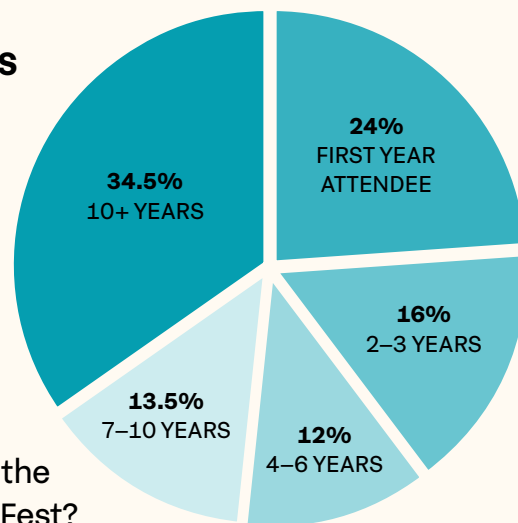
**Over 55% of attendees** surveyed bought books by authors featured at the Festival



**NEW &  
RETURNING FANS**

*How  
many  
years*

have you attended the  
Vancouver Writers Fest?



**10,900+**

**K-12 Students**

Inspired by authors & poets

**43%**

of patrons attended *more  
than two events*

**74%**

said that attending a Festival event caused them to

*think  
differently*

about an issue or topic

**10%** of 2022 attendees reside in B.C. outside of Metro Vancouver

**58%** of attendees have a graduate or post-graduate degree

**9,600+ Twitter followers**

**8,900+ Facebook followers**

**10,500+ Instagram followers**



*Left to Right:*  
Shelagh Rogers,  
Brian Thomas  
Isaac, audience  
members, Heather  
O'Neill, Jen  
Sookfong Lee,  
little audience  
members, Billy-  
Ray Belcourt,  
João Reis, on-  
site bookstore  
managed by Book  
Warehouse



# Our Strength



The Vancouver Writers Fest is powered by the incredible time, energy, expertise, and effort of our staff, seasonal workers, and volunteers.

We're incredibly proud of our volunteers—some of whom have been volunteering nearly as long as the Festival itself! Our volunteers contributed a staggering total of **4,048 hours**, and we were delighted to welcome back many familiar faces, as well as **95 new volunteers** this year. Our volunteers represent a wide range of skills, abilities, ages, and backgrounds. One priority we learned from our Accessibility Round Table was to strengthen our ability to bring on volunteers from disability communities, as key assets in increasing our accessibility support for audiences and authors.



## 91%

of volunteers surveyed indicated plans to return



We saw new people rise to take on leadership roles during Festival time. We welcomed a new Volunteer Manager and Assistant Volunteer Manager, a new Festival Operations Manager, and a new Production Coordinator. We're incredibly grateful for the behind-the-scenes team that makes the Festival and our year-round events run so smoothly.

## *Our Year-Round Team in 2022*



Leslie Hurtig  
*Artistic Director*



Kaile Shilling  
*Executive Director*



Chelsee Damen  
*Operations Manager*



Lauren Dembicky-Polivka\*  
*Development Manager*



Leena Desai  
*Senior Education and  
Development Coordinator*



Matt Ros  
*Operations & Admin  
Coordinator*



Joyce Wan  
*Marketing & Digital  
Production Coordinator*



Sarah Wang  
*Programming  
Coordinator*

\* We said goodbye to Lauren Dembicky-Polivka in spring 2023, as she left the organization to spend time with family and pursue new opportunities. Also in spring 2023, we welcomed April Thompson as our new Senior Development Manager.

Our Festival family grows each year in the months leading up to the October Festival. We are thrilled to regularly welcome back Events and Festival-time team members like Marketing Consultant Zoe Grams and Festival Marketing and PR Manager Ariel Hudnall from ZG Stories, Production Manager Eduardo Ottoni and his team at EventLAB, Catering Manager Elizabeth Glancy, and many more valued collaborators.



The Vancouver Writers Fest is proud to be a certified Living Wage Employer.

# Our Work

Anchored by Festival Week, the Vancouver Writers Fest is a year-round celebration of literature and storytelling, with a variety of events from the intimate to the grand, and a mix of genres and voices that invite audiences to explore complex issues, spark curiosity, build empathy and connection, and to simply delight in great stories well told. Our flagship October festival, held fully in-person for the first time since 2019, re-established itself as that most treasured of events: a combination of personal, heartfelt touches and exemplary professional quality.

This year we invested heavily in accessibility. Thanks to input from our Accessibility Round Table, we added ASL to more events, fully captioned our Digital Festival, provided a Simple Text version of our Program Guide, shared venue accessibility information (including visual stories), added trainings for our volunteers, improved our seating holds for those with accessibility needs, and provided subsidized and companion tickets. We recognize that accessibility is an intersectional issue, and are thus continuing to add layers to our understanding of and support for accessibility in the Festival and year-round.



*Left to Right: ASL interpreter and jaye simpson, Douglas Stuart, Eddy Boudel Tan, Kern Carter, Ivan Coyote, Marcus Youssef, Aamina Ahmad*





# Our Programming

## Festival Week

Each October, Granville Island comes alive with the energy of enthusiastic readers, visiting and local authors, and the hottest books of the season. In 2022, we welcomed Giller Prize-winning author **Omar El Akkad** as our Guest Curator. Featured authors included **Douglas Stuart**, **Elif Batuman**, **Billy-Ray Belcourt**, **Heather O'Neill**, **Gabor Maté**, and many more. Spoken Word Curator **Jillian Christmas** and Musical Director **Sally Zori** returned for our Word! and Literary Cabaret events.



*Nadifa Mohamed and Sally Zori enchant the audience at The Literary Cabaret.*

“As a newly published author and a literary agent with clients at the festival, and as a first-time visitor to Vancouver, I found VWF’s atmosphere, programming, and disposition truly singular and delightful and so, so warm. Numerous writers, fellow agents, and publishing people I’ve spoken with about their festival experiences this year have especially expressed love for VWF, and I think you and your team set a precedent for how to enshrine a sense of community amongst seemingly disparate writers, stories, and ideas.”

**Cody Caetano, 2022 Festival Author**



## Digital Festival

New in 2022, the Digital Festival offered highly in-demand online access to 30 of the most beloved events from our flagship October Festival. 288 all-access passes to the Digital Festival were sold at a Pay-What-You-Can rate, with generous support from the Y.P. Heung Foundation. With over 94% of survey respondents indicating that they would purchase a similar pass again, we are excited to bring the Digital Festival back in 2023.

## Our 2022 Programming (continued)

**Incite**, presented in partnership with the Vancouver Public Library, provides bi-weekly conversations with authors from January through May that are free and open to all, in-person or online. These events jumpstart the literary season each year by mixing the entertaining and provocative, highlighting anticipated new releases in poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. In 2022, we featured local favorites and internationally recognized authors, including **Jessamine Chan**, **Sheila Heti**, **Rawi Hage**, **Damon Galgut**, and **Tolu Oloruntoba**.

**My Roots** writing workshop returned as an in-person workshop this year! In this free workshop of mini-lectures and short writing exercises, participants worked with award-winning local writer **Lindsay Wong** to create “ghost stories” that examined leaving and finding home. Writings were shared in our Books & Ideas Newsletter, which has over 18,000 subscribers. In 2023, we’re excited to expand My Roots with a new workshop for youth aged 16–19.

The loosening of Covid restrictions meant that our **Special Events** could return in-person to Vancouver’s premiere stages in 2022. **Sarah Polley** (*Run Towards the Danger*), **Chief Robert Joseph** (*Namwayut—We Are All One: A Pathway to Reconciliation*), **Christine Sinclair** (*Playing the Long Game*) and **Ian Rankin** (*A Heart Full of Headstones*) shared their stories with eager audiences in sold-out venues.

With demand for in-person events returning, we bid a fond farewell to our online **Book Club**, presented in partnership with SFU Continuing Studies. Authors **Emma Donoghue** (*Haven*) and **Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard** (*Rehearsals for Living*) rounded out the series with thought-provoking conversations.



*Ian Rankin signs books after a sold out Special Event.*

## From our Guest Curator, Omar El Akkad



To follow in the footsteps of some of my literary heroes—most recently, the brilliant Lawrence Hill—is a daunting thing, but to the best of my ability, I have tried as Guest Curator of this year’s Vancouver Writers Fest to leverage what I think makes this particular festival so special: the unique collision of intimate space and polyphonic lineup. Perhaps as a result of having spent so much time in isolation over these last years, my curatorial intent with many of this year’s panels veered in the direction of home and community—where we anchor ourselves and what we grasp for when those anchors are, through fate or malice, suddenly lifted. In both fiction and nonfiction, much of the finest writing I’ve read this year has tackled these questions.



# Supporting Youth

***VWF is committed to increasing youth access to free, high-quality educational programming which expands perspectives and creates space for critical thinking in our venues, online, and in the classroom.***

Nearly one third of our 2022 **Festival Programming** consisted of events for youth. Our special Youth Brochure, produced annually, was sent to BC teachers, providing curriculum connections and reading levels for class visits to Granville Island or when streaming online. 10,900+ students participated in youth events at our 2022 Festival thanks in part to support from TELUS, with an estimated 1,600 students supported through Festival ticket and bus subsidies.

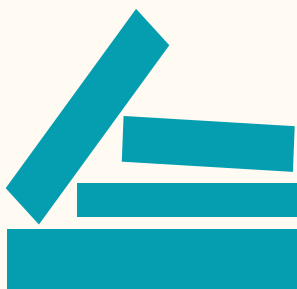
Our **Writers in the Classroom** series brought writers to BC classrooms in-person and virtually in 2022. A hallmark of this series is its intimate structure, where students can engage directly with authors on topics connected to their teacher's current curriculum needs. Over its spring and fall seasons, WITC brought 28 authors to over 1,100 students, covering topics from Indigenous language revitalization to elements that make good poetry. Featured 2022 authors included **David A. Robertson**, **Fiona Tinwei Lam**, **Lawrence Hill**, and **Marsha Lederman**.

Our annual **Youth Writing Contest** continued to grow, with more submissions than ever before. The contest seeks to foster a love of writing and storytelling by providing a cash prize and public recognition for emerging writers. In 2022, alongside our popular contest for high school students, we opened a new contest for middle grade students. The response we received was very encouraging, and instilled in us great hope for the future of Canada's literary community.



*Top: Kevin Sylvester at the 2022 Festival; Bottom: Jael Richardson at a Writers in the Classroom event.*

# Celebrating & Connecting



## Books & Ideas

**Our communications have continued to grow through our Books & Ideas weekly e-newsletter, our social media platforms, and our Books & Ideas Audio series, a monthly podcast produced in-house. We were thrilled that 2022 allowed us to celebrate our 35th anniversary in-person, and return to sharing in-person the power of stories, and the conversations and community they invoke.**

### Newsletter

Started in 2019, **Books & Ideas** has become a trusted resource for educators, librarians, and book lovers across British Columbia. It provides a one-stop digest for VWF's upcoming events, as well as community news and literary events and information in Vancouver. We have a loyal readership, with an email open rate of 48%—well over the industry standard.

### Podcast

Our **Books and Ideas Audio** series released 11 episodes in 2022, including one special episode to kick off Festival Week. Available on every major podcasting platform, our podcast was one of the top 20% most followed on Spotify in 2022. In addition to releasing recordings of some of the top events from our archives, we've begun generating original content, enabling us to further engage with literary topics, and explore conversations that may not have been captured on our stages.

## Whisky & Words

Whisky & Words returned as an in-person event in 2022, to much anticipation and celebration. Featuring whisky tastings from around the world, canapés from local restaurants, and a silent auction, this fundraising event is a vital source of revenue, supporting our expanding Youth Education offerings.

## Vancouver's Poet Laureate

We're proud to continue our partnership with the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Public Library in supporting **Vancouver's Poet Laureate program**. The "people's poet," this unique literary project connects with the city's diverse communities and is funded through a generous endowment from Dr. Yosef Wosk, OBC.

Fiona Tinwei Lam continues her two-year term, and we're delighted that her projects in 2022 have included the City Poems Contest that received 252 submissions, Poetry in Parks free community workshops, and joining our own Writers in the Classroom program.



# Our Partners

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FOUNDATION

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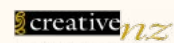
## Government Support



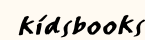
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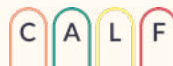
CONSULATE GENERAL OF  
THE UNITED STATES  
Vancouver, Canada



## Festival Supporter



We'd like to thank all of the artisans and vendors of Granville Island who donate food, goods, and services to us during Festival Week and throughout the year.



The Vancouver Writers Fest is a proud member of the Canadian Association of Literary Festivals.

We hope you will be inspired to join our celebration of books, storytelling, ideas—and the possibilities they infuse.

Please contact us to learn more  
Main Office: 604.681.6330

**Sponsorship Opportunities**

April Thompson  
Senor Development Manager  
athompson@writersfest.bc.ca  
604.262.1190

**Education Programming Inquiries**

Leena Desai  
Senior Education & Development Coordinator  
ldesai@writersfest.bc.ca  
778.658.0451

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