



# Live Literature in Australia:

Understanding the landscape of  
author/illustrator events  
in schools, libraries and bookstores.

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# Summary

**This research investigates the considerations of event hosts (public libraries, school libraries and bookstores) and the barriers they face in finding and programming authors and illustrators in Australia.**

The aim of this project is to understand the process of programming author/illustrator events and to identify practical solutions to address any challenges associated with this process. To date, there is no empirical research that focuses on how librarians and booksellers organise author/illustrator events, what information they use to choose and connect with authors, what factors shape programming decisions, and what barriers exist in this process, particularly in finding new and relatively unknown authors.

This research fills this gap by asking:

- 1 what factors shape how event hosts organise author events,
- 2 what are the barriers in this process,
- 3 and what resources would be useful for event hosts in finding and programming new authors and illustrators?

The research team collected empirical data (surveys and in-depth interviews) from a sample of booksellers, public librarians and school librarians around Australia. The insights gained from this research provide a foundation on which Australia Reads can plan and build resources to improve relationship building between public and commercial event hosts and a wider range of Australian authors and illustrators.

### To cite this report:

Parnell, C and Dane, A. 2024. *Live Literature in Australia: Understanding the landscape of author/illustrator events in schools, libraries and bookstores*. Melbourne: Australia Reads.

Available at: [australiareads.org.au/live-literature-research](https://australiareads.org.au/live-literature-research).

This research was conducted on the land of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Confederation. We acknowledge that sovereignty of this land was never ceded. We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the bookstores, libraries and schools represented in this report are located, which includes Woiworung, Kunrua, Wiradjuri, Eora, Nuenonne, Yugerra, Wajuk.

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# Introduction and background

Author and illustrator events are a vibrant part of Australia's book culture. They contribute to the marketing and publicity of books, local literary communities, and the broader national reading culture.

Scholarly research into book industry events has historically focused on literary festivals, which benefit authors, cities and tourism, and act as sites for public debate.<sup>1</sup> Research indicates that festivals work with other agents of consecration (e.g., literary prizes and reviews) to confer value onto authors and their works.<sup>2</sup> They are also key spaces where readers can engage directly with authors and deeply and critically with literature, both on and offline.<sup>3</sup>

Author events also have important educative functions, particularly in schools and public libraries, where they spotlight the importance of reading for literacy.<sup>4</sup> Library services play a particularly important role for children in their promotion of children's books and reading for pleasure,<sup>5</sup> as well as teachers' knowledge of children's literature for educational purposes.<sup>6</sup> Deborah Robertson's reference book *Cultural Programming for Libraries* provides some insight into the logistics associated with organising and publicising author and illustrator events at libraries, but overlooks how decisions are made or why libraries run them in the first place.<sup>7</sup>

Author and illustrator events make significant contributions to Australia's reading culture. They promote book buying and book borrowing, help to supplement author incomes, build individual author's readerships, and deepen readers' engagement with books. But, as Ellen Wiles argues, the impact of live literature events on participants, communities and cultures "extends far beyond what can be measured and proved instrumentally or quantifiably."<sup>8</sup>

While the research into the cultural and civic impact of author events in bookstores and libraries is limited, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo's examination of mass social reading programs illustrates the community-building effect that literary events can foster.<sup>9</sup> We contend that the author events and live readings in bookstores, public libraries and schools can have similar effects, supporting a lively community of readers. However, as yet, there is no research investigating the decision-making, strategies and approaches of event hosts when it comes to programming authors and illustrators across different organisational contexts.

This research investigates the landscape of author and illustrator events across public libraries, school libraries and bookstores in Australia, focusing on the programming decisions made by event hosts and barriers to organising events. We ask:

1. What factors shape how event hosts organise author events?

2. What are the barriers in this process?

3. What resources would be useful for event hosts in finding and programming new authors and illustrators?

To answer these questions, we conducted a survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews with event hosts that work in bookstores, public libraries and school libraries around Australia. Our findings show the importance of locality and localness to author and illustrator events and relationships between different constituents (e.g., authors, event hosts, publishers, other businesses). We also find that the significant issues in organising author and illustrator events relate to resourcing, including labour, space and, most significantly across contexts, cost. The insights gained from this research will provide a foundation on which Australia Reads can build resources and make recommendations to support great author events in future.

<sup>1</sup> Delanty et al., 2011; Ommundsen, 2009; Weber, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Dane, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Driscoll, 2015; Weber, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Nassimbeni, 2011; Ihmeideh, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Ee Loh et al, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Collins & Safford, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Wiles, 2019

<sup>9</sup> Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, 2013



# Aims and methods

This is a mixed-methods research project.<sup>10</sup> We conducted a quantitative and qualitative survey of people involved in organising events in bookstores, public libraries and school libraries across Australia. Three individual surveys were created for each type of event host organisation (bookstores, public libraries, school libraries), and were designed to ascertain a broad understanding of the current practices around the programming of author and illustrator events, including the current and past practices and decision-making factors. Following the survey, we conducted nine in-depth interviews with survey respondents. Participation in this research was voluntary and anonymous.

The surveys were designed by researchers from the University of Melbourne in consultation with Australia Reads. Australia Reads is a not-for-profit collaboration of the Australian Library and Information Association, Australian Publishers Association, the Australian Society of Authors and the BookPeople. The three surveys included the same questions, though some options were added to multiple choice questions that were specific to schools: for example, on a question around programming decisions, we added a response option related to fitting with school curriculum. The surveys were advertised by Australia Reads and publicly promoted in industry news newsletters in publications such as *Books + Publishing*. The online survey was delivered via Google Forms and questions were grouped into three groups: contextual information (i.e. location), those who did host events, and those who did not host events. The survey ran in June 2023. In total, 131 event hosts responded to the surveys. This included 28 people working in bookstores, 57 working in public libraries, and 46 working in school libraries.

Bookstore respondents were located in cities and regional centres, and every state and territory is represented in the sample. The majority of respondents worked in independent bookstores or part of an independent chain that primarily stocks trade fiction, trade non-fiction and children's titles. 27 of the 28 participating bookstores currently host author events.

The majority of public librarian respondents were located in New South Wales (51%) or Victoria (19%), but Queensland (14%), South Australia (9%), Western Australia (3%), the Northern Territory (2%), and Tasmania (2%) in both regional areas and city centres are also represented. Of the 57 respondents, only 3 did not currently host events with authors or illustrators.

The majority of teacher and school librarians were also located in Victoria (39%) or New South Wales (30.5%), but Queensland (17.5%), Western Australia (6.5%), South Australia (4.5%) and the Northern Territory (2%) were represented. School librarian respondents worked in schools across both regional and city metropolitan locations, across levels and types. This included those who worked in primary schools (41.5%), secondary schools (37%) and P-12<sup>11</sup> (13%), as well as government/public (54.5%), private/independent (22%), and religiously-affiliated (17.5%) with the remainder retired. Of the 46 respondents for this group, 9 did not currently host events with authors or illustrators.

The researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with nine survey participants, including four bookstore owners/workers, three public librarians, and 2 school librarians. Interviews were conducted via Zoom in June and July 2023, and lasted between 25–35 minutes. Questions focused on more nuanced and contextual details to complement the survey questions and responses. Interview transcripts were analysed using inductive thematic coding, focusing on decision-making, organisational processes, and resources.

<sup>10</sup> This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne (Australia Reads, ID number 26507).

<sup>11</sup> Given the differing school systems across states and territories P-12 can refer to Prep-Year 12, Kindergarten-Year 12, and Pre-school-Year 12.

# Findings

**1**

Booksellers and librarians see author and illustrator events as a major factor in supporting Australia's reading culture.

**2**

Events typically reflect local economies.

**3**

Event programming is built on relationships.

**4**

Cost, labour, and physical space are the most significant barriers to organising and running events.

**5**

Author and illustrator events are often dependent on individuals within organisations who are invested in organising them.

**6**

Decisions around who to program are influenced by personal, organisational and industry factors.

**7**

Everyone wants more resources to help with the planning and promotion of author and illustrator events.

**8**

Having a diverse and inclusive program of authors/illustrators remains a challenge for many booksellers and librarians.





## FINDINGS

1

## Booksellers, public librarians and school librarians see author and illustrator events as a major factor in supporting Australia's reading culture

Fostering a national culture of reading is the primary aim of Australia Reads: "Australia Reads is on a mission to get more people reading more books, more often!"<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, we asked research participants about the role of author and illustrator events as a way to develop and support the reading culture in their community. And while the motivation for supporting their community to engage with books and reading differed for booksellers, public librarians and school librarians, all three groups agreed that events, including author and illustrator talks, are a vital factor in achieving this goal.

### Booksellers

Speaking with booksellers about the notion of fostering a reading culture prompted responses about the readers and book buyers in their local community. Speaking to these booksellers, there was a distinct sense that bookstores and booksellers act as a bridge between readers and the literary sector, making authors available to readers but also making engagement with literary culture less intimidating. The booksellers we spoke with were keen to establish a space for readers to come and discuss books and reading.

more often than not, people will come to those events and buy the books. People love to engage with the authors. You know, they love to feel like they're part of that broader literary community... like 'I met this person' or 'they signed my book'... which I find amazing.

(Bookseller 2, inner city)

...our events are quite casual. We try to, by every means possible, make sure that all the authors presenting, but also all of the people attending events, feel that they are as much a part of what's happening... [And] sometimes we get a combination of more experienced authors reading alongside quite new authors so we try not to make any distinction between all of these people and just kind of give everybody kind of equal attention and equal care... It's interesting to think about literary culture versus reading culture... I guess what literary culture might bring in that reading culture doesn't is writers' perspectives. But also I think writers are readers, you know, first and foremost, I think. Like, you know, all of our events, the first question we ask everyone is, what have you been reading lately? Because that's something that we're always asking... each other at the shop... and because we love getting book recommendations, but also because... what someone's reading interests are, really are a great way to segue into what they're writing as well. So for me, reading always comes first.

(Bookseller 1, inner city)

I think what the reading culture means for the shop is... the people coming in and browsing, people valu[ing] books enough to be willing to pay the retail price... I think a reading culture for us [is] also people who want to turn up and talk about books, so it's our author events programs, but it's also our reading groups.

(Bookseller 4, inner city)



## FINDINGS

1 (continued)

**Booksellers, public librarians and school librarians see author and illustrator events as a major factor in supporting Australia's reading culture****Public Libraries**

98% of the public librarians who responded to the survey cited 'fostering a reading culture in their local area' as a benefit for hosting author and illustrator events in their libraries.

In response to our questions about fostering a reading culture in their local communities, the public librarians we interviewed for this research expanded upon this idea, highlighting the role of the different kinds of events and services that are essential to their libraries. What was clear from these discussions with librarians was the conscious and meaningful contribution that librarians make to supporting readers, and the discussion of books, in their local communities.

...it's all part of trying to build that reading culture and get people to talk about reading and books and sharing that. We support a number of book clubs, both in the library and those who meet externally, and we also have two book clubs where we just say just bring whenever you're reading. One of those is in a pub, one is in a cafe and it's just on Meet Up and [we] say just turn up, bring a book, have a chat, have a drink. So we are trying to do that and encourage people to talk about reading.

(Public librarian 2, suburban)

[Patrons] also wanted curated collections, they wanted the books, like the books are a huge part of why they come here. They loved getting reading suggestions from staff, they loved talking about books, they loved having, like, you know, signage, and recommendations and book lists, and, you know, newsletters, and all of those things that guided them towards different reading options. And also just the act of browsing the shelves and, you know, being surrounded by books and having all the choice.

(Public librarian 1, inner city)

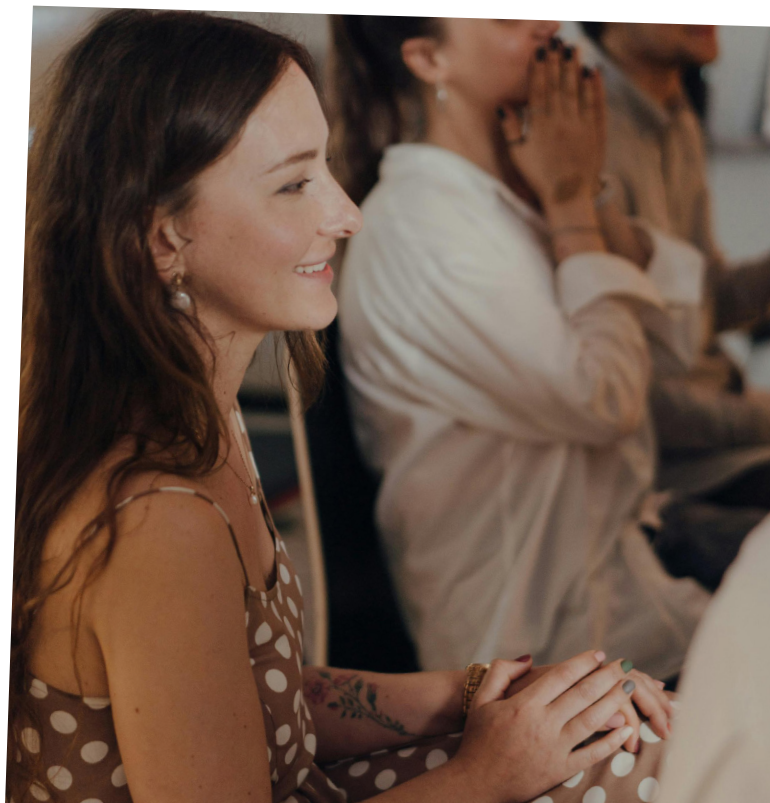
**School Libraries**

Every school librarian who has hosted authors and illustrators in the past cited 'fostering a reading culture among students' as a benefit for hosting author and illustrator events at their school. However, unlike the public librarians and booksellers, hosting author/illustrator events and building a supportive reading culture has more tangible outcomes in schools. This was best illustrated by a school librarian we spoke with from a regional area:

...like with anything with our students, showing them that you can actually do [writing] as a career is really important. So seeing real life authors in front of them speaking about what motivates and interests them does actually give that little spark of, 'Oh, I could do this myself.' And we do see, after author [or] illustrator visits, we see in the library an upturn in borrowing statistics for that given author or the genre that they read or write to, and it does actually feed back into the classroom as well.

(School librarian 1, regional)

While the notion of fostering a reading culture can initially seem quite nebulous, our research suggests that booksellers, public librarians and school librarians have a clear sense of what a culture of reading means in their particular contexts, and how events contribute to these efforts.





## FINDINGS

## 2

**Events typically reflect local economies**

Interviews with booksellers, public librarians and school librarians revealed the role that location plays in the programming of authors and illustrators. The location of a bookstore, library or school commonly determines the availability of authors. We found that bookstores and libraries located in Melbourne and Sydney had a variety of authors who they could include in their program. For bookstores and libraries located outside of these publishing hubs, and especially for those located in regional areas, the access to or availability of authors was greatly restricted.

A librarian we spoke to from an inner-city library described the ease of programming major authors because of their central location:

...because we're in inner [major city], I suppose it's an easier sell. It just becomes part of the promotional tour for the author... And [publishers] do all of that at no cost. Because it suits their promotional schedule. So it's all tied in. It's always new release authors, so it's all tied in with their initial promotion. And generally, if [the publisher has] got authors touring, then they will contact us well in advance to say, can we come and do an event.

(Public librarian 3, inner-city)

This sense of ease is significantly different from the experiences of a school librarian in a regional area, who described the more limited opportunities to see author and illustrator talks. They often relied on larger events that attracted authors to the area, rather than programming authors and illustrators themselves:

So we had someone who was organising for us a literary festival, where we could take a whole group of students or a whole cohort.

(School librarian 1, regional)

The cost associated with these events is also significantly influenced by the location of the library or school holding the event. For the inner-city library, there was very little cost associated with hosting an event for their community, but for regional and remote libraries and schools, the cost of travel for the author presents a significant barrier to event organisers.

Our interviews with booksellers also revealed the ways in which programming decisions and author events are part of the fabric of the local literary economy. We interviewed booksellers in both large and smaller cities, and they spoke of the way author events connect the store to the local community:

Simply put, it's a community. I mean, and I'm talking here about [a] geographical community rather than a wider community. Our geographical community is a reading community because they value having a bookshop [nearby].

(Bookseller 3, suburban)

We have a fairly active poetry events program as well... we do our best to try and support the local poetry scene.

(Bookseller 4, inner city)

We have used local bars near us... [one] that's just a couple of doors down from us... And it's a tiny bar, but they have a basement space... And what's really fantastic for us is that they provide the space to us for free.

(Bookseller 1, inner-city)

We can see from the experience of these three booksellers that the local community, including nearby businesses, is a major driver for their event programming. Whether it be the enthusiasm of the community, the facilities they provide, or the desire to support them, both the geographic location and the interests of the community can contribute to the success of author events.





## FINDINGS

3

## Event programming is built on relationships

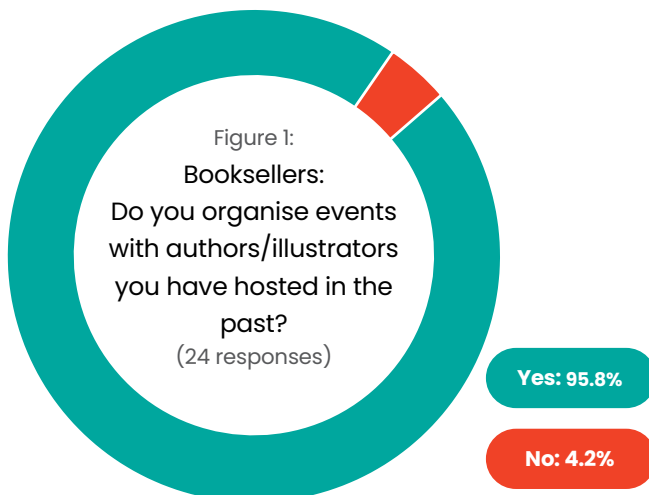
Our research revealed that author/illustrator programming decisions are largely driven by relationships between the event organiser and the author/illustrator. These relationships are built from past interactions, are sometimes facilitated by publishers or publicists, or initially brokered by speakers agencies. The results emphasise the importance of relationship-building in the Australian publishing industry.

### Booksellers

Survey results indicate that booksellers are highly likely to host in-store author events with authors that they have previously hosted.

96% of survey respondents said that they host events with authors and illustrators they have worked with in the past.

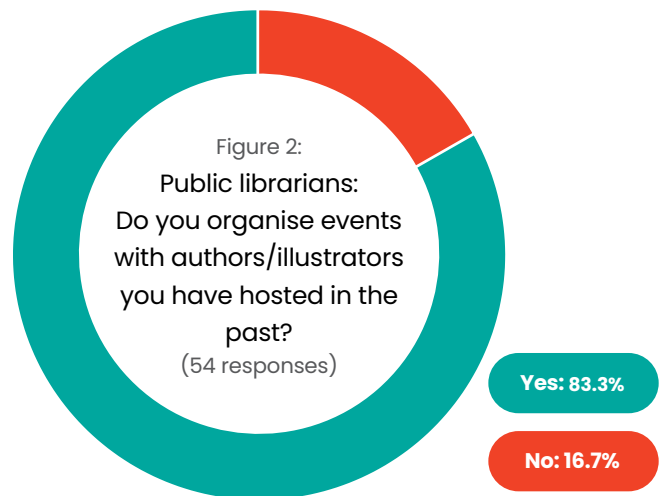
The majority of booksellers who participated in the survey reported that they are most likely to contact authors directly, primarily via email, if they have worked with them in the past. When it comes to programming authors they have not worked with in the past, the majority (70%) reported that they would contact the publisher in order to organise an author or illustrator event in their store. However, being approached directly by the author/illustrator was the strongest factor that influenced decision-making when programming events. More than 77% of bookseller respondents reported that being directly approached by the author/illustrator influenced decision-making when arranging author events.



### Public librarians

Like booksellers, the majority of public librarians (83%) reported that they regularly program authors and illustrators that they have worked with in the past.

The public librarians who responded to the survey reported that they commonly reach out to the authors and illustrators they have programmed in the past directly, either via email or through author/illustrator social media accounts, or by way of their publisher.



## FINDINGS

3 (continued)

## Event programming is built on relationships

### School Librarians

Again, school librarians commonly program authors and illustrators that they have previously worked with, but for both authors and illustrators they have previously hosted, and for new authors and illustrators, arranging speaking events through a speakers' agency is the most common method to contact authors. This is a stark difference to the surveyed public librarians and booksellers, and indicates that for authors and illustrators who have not worked with school libraries before, establishing a relationship with a speakers agency might be beneficial. However, a school librarian we interviewed noted that many of the speakers' agencies that they had worked with in the past had closed down during COVID:

...we usually go through [a] speakers agency if that person's not contactable through their website... There's actually not as many [speakers agencies] – a few have folded in recent years since COVID so that sort of pool [is] down a little bit so it's a bit harder to get in contact with people.  
(School librarian 1, regional)

These results indicate that authors and illustrators should aim to develop strong working relationships with booksellers and librarians if they would like to increase their speaking engagements. However, the relational nature of event programming indicated by these results also illuminates a level of inaccessibility as there are inequities around which authors/illustrators are more easily able to develop these relationships or break into these networks.





## FINDINGS

## 4

## Cost, labour, and physical space are the most significant barriers to organising and running events

The financial reality of organising author and illustrator events was the most pronounced difficulty faced by school (89%) and public librarian (79%) survey respondents. For the schools and public libraries that do not currently host author and illustrator events, the primary reason is the cost associated with programming events.

School librarians adopted several strategies to minimise the costs associated with booking and organising events, including approaching authors directly, rather than through speaker agencies to avoid booking fees; booking local authors to minimise travel and accommodation expenses; and coordinating with other local schools and public libraries to share travel costs, particularly in regional areas where travel is more expensive. However, the latter was often not able to be implemented due to challenges associated with conflicting budget timelines between schools and libraries.

There are significant costs associated with hosting author and illustrator events, which tend to fall on the event hosts.

About half (55%) of respondents cited financial considerations as a difficulty to organising author and illustrator events.

In interviews, booksellers noted that they do not typically make a profit from events, particularly when you factor in labour, time and overhead costs (i.e. extra staffing hours), which are unlikely to be entirely covered by book sales during events. Perhaps due to this financial reality, 93% of bookstore survey respondents stated that they did not pay authors and illustrators for event appearances. Moreover, when asked if booksellers would be open to paying authors for their appearances at the Australian Society of Authors suggested rate, more than 65% of the participating booksellers said that they wouldn't, and around 27% responded 'maybe'.

Through the surveys and interviews, event hosts reported a variety of models employed to lessen the financial burden on them, including implementing ticketing that may or may not include a sale of the book. However, many of the event hosts we spoke to who had not ticketed their events to supplement costs said they hadn't done so because they wanted the events to be accessible across socioeconomic groups.

One bookseller we spoke with detailed the financial commitment required to host author events in their store, saying:

There's no non-controversial way to assess what any one particular event costs us. But it's somewhere in the space of... \$500 to put on an event... that's if it's in the shop where we don't have to pay for additional venue benefits. And so the overriding consideration is always [cost].

(Bookseller 4, inner city)

The labour involved with programming and hosting events was another barrier for public librarians and booksellers. The most common labour challenges mentioned in interviews included the burden of extra administrative work (e.g., organising, marketing); physical work (e.g., setting up and packing down chairs, cleaning glassware afterward); and expertise (e.g., whether staff members had skills or knowledge to moderate discussion with the author).

In interviews, some booksellers described how the labour associated with organising events could be lessened through greater collaboration with publishers. For example, an inner city bookseller noted:

We almost work with any author that approaches us, especially if we think that [they'll draw a crowd]... The one thing that really guides us more than anything else is a sense for how many people we think we can get along to [the event].

(Bookseller 4, inner city)

The final capacity-related barrier to organising author and illustrator events was one of physical space, which primarily impacted public libraries and bookstores. Space impacted if and how public libraries and bookstores ran events. While some public libraries had the budget to hire out larger venues (e.g. town halls), smaller bookstores tend to develop relationships with nearby businesses (e.g. restaurants, cafes, bars) and public libraries.

## FINDINGS

5

## Author and illustrator events are often dependent on individuals within organisations who are invested in organising them

Bookstores, public libraries and schools host author and illustrator events because of their perceived benefits for customers, patrons and students as well as the desire to contribute to a literary and reading culture more generally. However, many schools, libraries and bookstores do not have formal event quotas or mandates in their workplaces, and so it is often individuals' enthusiasm and support for running these events that make them happen, in spite of the financial risk and administrative burden associated with organising events.

The booksellers we spoke to recognised the role of author events in promoting authors and their books, and facilitating relationships between authors and readers through conversations and book signings. More than 90% of bookseller survey respondents chose engaging with customers, publicity for authors, and fostering a reading culture as the key benefits of author and illustrator events. When asked why they organised events given the administrative load, one inner city bookseller said:

We organise them for a couple of reasons, but I think the main one is because it does create an incredible sense of community and if you choose the right events for your customers... they just love it so much and it's like when you go to a writers festival and it's really exciting to hear people talk, it's just a very different experience.

(Bookseller 2, inner city)

This quote, which speaks to the affective experience of book events for the audience, author and event host, highlights the motivations behind organising author and illustrator events: they do it for the love of books and book culture, and the community of readers who also love them.

The school librarians we spoke to talked about the importance of having a supportive principal for organising events. Principals that were supportive of improving the reading culture of their school facilitated access to money, which influenced if and how many author and illustrator events the school librarian could organise. One school librarian who is based in a regional area described the support they received from their principal:

This year we've had three [events] so far. But that is a little bit extraordinary, I'll say. We would usually aim, in the last few years, to do one, at least one a year. But I have a very supportive principal, I'm extremely lucky. And yeah, she sees the value in it. So I've been able to facilitate actually hosting a couple more this year, and we already have some booked for next year as well.

(School librarian 1, regional)

While the event hosts we spoke to seemed passionate about the work they did, the reliance on individuals' enthusiasm to run these events poses a risk to existing and future live literature events nationally given the condition of overwork associated with organising them and limited institutional or economic support.





## FINDINGS

6

## Decisions around who to program are influenced by personal, organisational and industry factors

In addition to locality and the financial considerations of organising events, perceived audience interest, organisers' individual tastes, and political imperatives influence decisions around which authors and illustrators are programmed.

### Personal and organisational factors

In interviews, programming decisions by booksellers, public librarians and school librarians were primarily driven by their audience. Booksellers worked to organise events that they thought would be of interest to their customers or that their community will respond to, while school librarians programmed authors and illustrators that might benefit their students.

In the survey, school librarians also cited requests by either students or teachers and/or authors who were prescribed reading for students in their schools as the factors in programming decisions, and observed students' borrowing and reading practices to inform their understanding of what authors and genres were popular among their students. Unsurprisingly, children's fiction, middle grade fiction and young adult fiction were most commonly programmed by the school librarians who responded to the survey, and half of all school librarian respondents reported that they would like to include more graphic novels in their school library programs.

Public librarians similarly use borrowing metrics, including books on hold and with long waiting lists, to see what's popular among their community to inform programming decisions. They are also commonly guided by requests from their community members, and driven by organisational needs.

[We] make all of our programs align in some way with literacy, reading, literary engagement... one of the main objectives for [our] library, particularly as a public library, is to support reading, to support literacy, literary engagement, for all ages, across all formats

(Public librarian 3, inner city)

Bookshops range from being very selective, choosing and approaching the authors they want to work with, to quite open to publishers and authors approaching them. While bookstores were concerned with organising events with authors and illustrators who would resonate with their community, they also prioritised their own personal tastes and tended to organise events around books and authors they liked:

We've always wanted to do author events that suit us, not that suit the publisher, in a way... more often than not, we would have some kind of genuine connection with the authors before we chose to organise that event.

(Bookseller 3, suburban)

...where we are, it would have been really easy for us to sell rural romance and... I've [programmed authors that speak to] politics. And we actually took a conscious decision, not so much to respond to the community, but tell the community what they wanted to read.

(Bookseller 3, suburban)

So we select our authors quite carefully, I suppose, and we try to pick books that we find especially interesting and that we want to champion... [or] if a member of staff reads a book and really loves it, and thinks that 'I'd really like to or I think this person would be really great to do a... conversation with [this person]... [or] if not having read the book, but thinking it sounds really interesting and wanting to champion a new author or a small press.

(Bookseller 1, inner city)

## FINDINGS

6 (continued)

**Decisions around who to program are influenced by personal, organisational and industry factors****Industry factors**

Event hosts are also guided by what is popular and prominent in the broader literary landscape. For the majority of public librarians who responded to the survey, programming ideas are commonly sourced from book reviews and literary prize shortlists. Likewise, bookstores will often consider recently published books. While bookstores are common spaces for book launches, public libraries – particularly in Melbourne and Sydney – sometimes work with publishers as stops on various author tours.

Conversations happening more broadly in the culture also influence decision-making. Bookshops tended to lean into organising author talks around political topics and current debates.

I think nonfiction is easier [to program], especially when it's kind of maybe with a political bent.

(Bookseller 2, inner city)

Being local governmental organisations, public libraries had a much more fraught relationship with organising author events around political topics, which seemed to depend on the local political landscape. One public librarian in a more conservative local government area spoke of how authors writing books about current issues affected their programming:

...because we are a council... we're a political organisation... and our council works very differently to a lot of councils around Australia, where we're very overtly political... If it's something that has a potential to, like, have a really overtly one sided opinion on something that would cause a bit of havoc amongst the community, we would probably avoid that.

(Public librarian 1, suburban)

Other public librarians did not feel so constrained. Our interviews took place in the months leading up to the 2023 Voice to Parliament referendum and one public librarian said that "anything related to [the Voice referendum] we might push for"

(Public librarian 3, inner city)





## FINDINGS

## 7

## Everyone wants more resources to help with the planning and promotion of author and illustrator events

Event hosts cited a wide range of additional resources that could be provided from authors and/or their publishers that would help in the planning and promotion of author events, including:

- Author bios, including social media handles
- Detailed book descriptions
- High-quality author photos
- Authors' websites
- Preferences for format (e.g., solo or in-conversation, online or in-person)
- Suggestions for MCs or moderators
- Appearance fees and other associated costs
- Coordinated marketing efforts around the event.

Survey and interview participants also noted that they might watch videos or listen to podcasts of authors speaking at events to get a sense of what they can offer. Authors and their publishers could support bookseller events by providing detailed author and book descriptions that include information about reader demographic and public interest. Some public librarians added that recommendations from other libraries, including school libraries, would be useful in organising events. School librarians, specifically, stated they would find it useful for authors or publishers to provide information about what kinds of presentations and/or workshops they offer, the age ranges they could cater to, as well as teacher notes to accompany associated classroom activities.



## FINDINGS

8

## Having a diverse and inclusive program of authors/illustrators remains a challenge for many booksellers and librarians

For the sample of public and school librarians we interviewed, establishing a diverse and inclusive program of author and illustrator events was a priority to varying degrees. However, what emerged from these conversations is that: a) the librarians we interviewed do not explicitly factor diversity and inclusion into their strategic programming; and b) the resourcing limitations faced by many of the librarians we spoke to impact the diversity of the program of authors and illustrators.

We also look for First Nations authors. We want to be able to represent First Nations authors and stories so we are always on the lookout for people who can talk about that.  
(Public librarian 1, suburban)

Yeah. At the moment, that's not been something that's within our scope, because we have been 'this is the price we can pay, this is the date we need, and these are the age groups.' As we now have more flexibility and funding, we'll be able to look for that. So I've started with diversity in terms of what they're writing. But I'm very much looking for different voices, I want people who are Black... standing in front of my students, because I know when they're picking up a book, and I had this with the Year Sevens, they had to pick a fantasy novel to read, they were standing in front of the shelves, and there was no one that represented them. And so I went, okay, fantasy section, that is the next one. Because of the budget, I've gotten just working on little sections as I can.  
(School Librarian 2, suburban)

It is clear from both these librarians' testimonies that while including more First Nations and people of colour (FNPOC) authors and illustrators is important, there is no formal strategic plan in place to ensure the inclusion of authors and illustrators of colour in their programs or shelves.

For the booksellers we spoke with, the attitudes towards more inclusive programming clustered around two polls: a conscious decision to include more authors of colour, and a desire to have an inclusive program of authors, without any conscious effort or strategy. For example, an inner-city bookseller explained that:

I think it does happen naturally, that we have a diverse range of authors. But we are also mindful of it. So especially, we don't kind of look at, like, at the beginning of the year, look at the program as a whole and... kind of calculate a kind of diverse spread of authors. But if we do, for instance, a group reading, we want to make sure that there's a balance of different kinds of authors from different backgrounds.  
(Bookseller 1, inner city)

Whereas a suburban bookseller noted that their approach to author diversity in programming was less of an explicit priority:

...if the work is good, it doesn't matter where the work comes from, basically, we would certainly, obviously, never choose not to profile something or support something because of who wrote it.  
(Bookseller 3, suburban)

Both scholarly and industry research into the pervasive and rigid whiteness of the Australian publishing sector indicates that without explicit and sustained efforts to include more authors of colour in programs, the dominance of white authors in these spaces will remain.<sup>13</sup>



# Recommendations for the Australian book industry to improve the organisation of author and illustrator events

## Creating opportunities

- 1 Develop direct relationships between authors, publishers and event hosts.** Authors seeking event opportunities should consider approaching host organisations to indicate interest in events, and build long-lasting relationships.
- 2 Make it easier for event hosts to get in contact with authors.** Provide an author website with clear contact details, a presence on social media (under the author's published name), or consider listing with a speakers agency.

## Resources and capacity building

- 3 Create informational packages that give event hosts a clear and practical sense of what authors/illustrators can offer as part of their events.** This includes: author bios, geographic location/s they can regularly do events in; short, detailed book descriptions; event/presentation formats; information on reader demographics, and a showreel of event presentations if possible.
- 4 Bookshops, schools and public libraries should consider partnering locally and sharing resources to facilitate author visits to local council areas.** In order to do so, though, different organisations need to be aware of each other's financial and time constraints. To coordinate with schools, for instance, this would require more advanced planning than most booksellers report.
- 5 Regional event organisers, in particular, should consider collaborating locally** to entice authors/illustrators to more regional and remote areas, and minimise costs of funding authors' travel and accommodation.
- 6 Coordinate marketing strategies between authors, publishers, and event hosts** (particularly bookstores and public libraries) to support promotional efforts and help publicise events to the broadest possible audience.

## Recommendations (continued)

### Investment

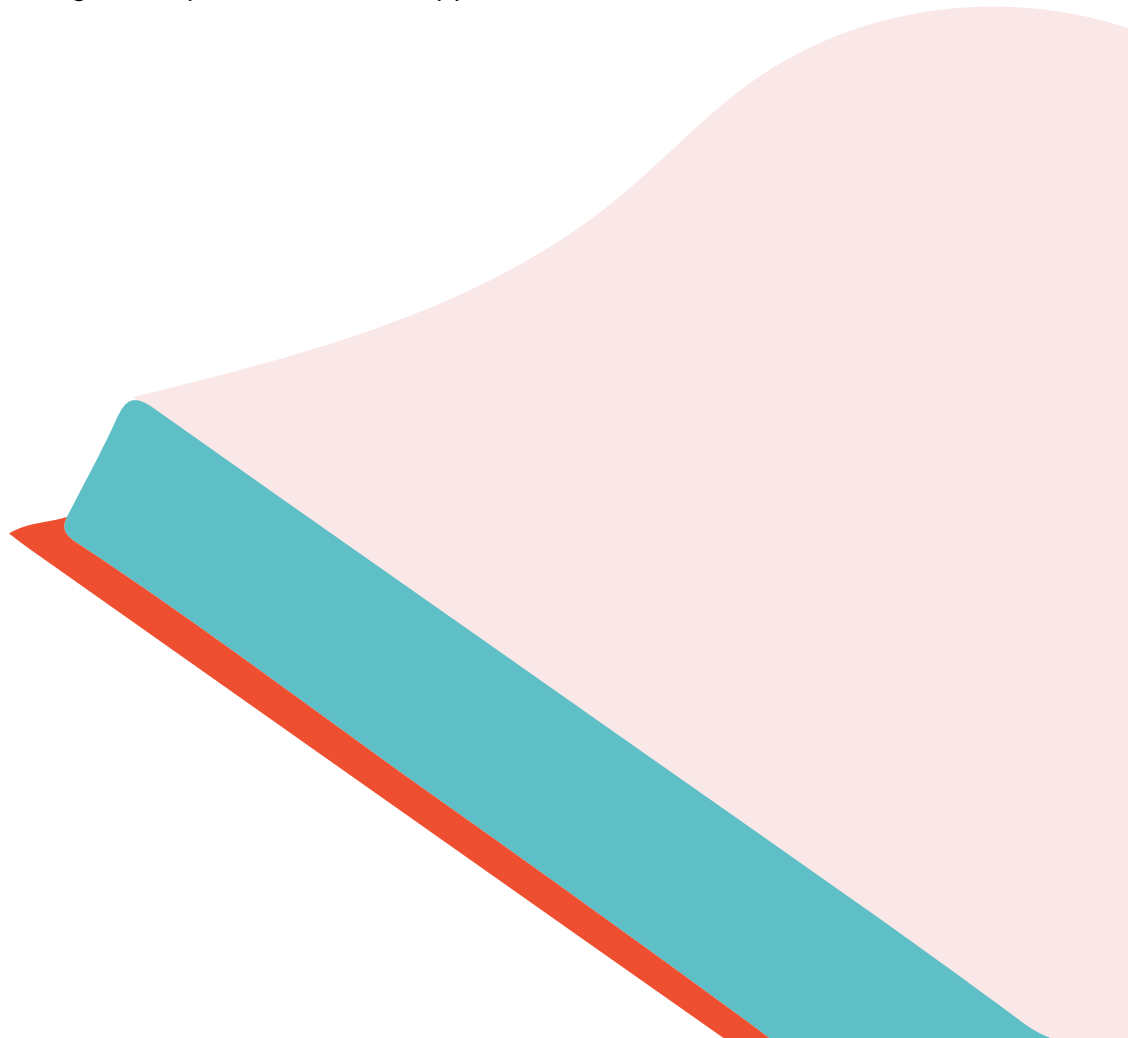
- 7 Support regional Australia through further investment by governments, literary organisations and publishers.** The focus on Melbourne and Sydney as literary hubs undermines efforts towards a national reading culture, and can further entrench socioeconomic inequalities in literary culture.
  
- 8 Improve the diversity of authors and illustrators featured in live literature programs through strategic planning by event organisers, tied to measurable targets.**



# Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand the process by which booksellers and librarians program author and illustrator events to ascertain the challenges events hosts face, and identify the opportunities for authors/illustrators to increase their participation in events at bookstores and in school and public libraries. As outlined in the findings section of this report, programming decisions are influenced by a number of different factors and there are also many challenges that dictate the kinds of events that bookstores and libraries program and the authors/illustrators that are programmed. From these findings, we have put together a list of recommendations for both event hosts and for authors/illustrators.

There is, however, a finding that does not connect explicitly with a recommendation for booksellers, librarians, authors or illustrators, but is worth briefly lingering upon. Event programming is primarily built upon existing relationships and established networks between authors and event hosts. And while we recommend that for authors/illustrators who would like to participate in more events that they actively seek out connections with booksellers and librarians; we must also acknowledge that relying on established relationships can make it difficult for authors without extensive professional or personal networks in the publishing industry to access these opportunities.





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**Australian Government**

**RISE Fund**

This project has been assisted by  
the Australian Government through the RISE Fund