CREATING COMMUNITY: THE SAN FRANCISCO WRITERS

CONFERENCE – A GROUNDED-THEORY STUDY

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A Thesis

Presented

to the Faculty of

California State University, Chico

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Recreation Administration

_____

by

Robb P. Lightfoot

Spring 2019

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DEDICATION

To my fearless mother, who at age 16, made a solo-bus trip from a military base in Texas to the small--in more ways than one--industrial town of Oildale, California. Mom gave birth to me not long afterward. Her life was punctuated with challenges and setbacks, but through it all she remained an upbeat, larger-than-life presence for all those fortunate enough to be in her inner circle. One of her favorite catch-phrases and pep talks was to remind us all that: "You bloom where you're planted."

These words mean even more to me now that I have completed this place-based research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

books. Completing this degree tested and proved the hypothesis that, to quote John

Steinbeck: "One can never own enough books."

Now that we can put this volume on the shelf, I think we'll need another

reading room. No?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Appendices

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

CREATING COMMUNITY: THE SAN FRANCISCO WRITERS

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The San Francisco Writers Conference is situated in the second-largest

publishing center in the United States and each year attracts more than 300 attendees. The

five-day event's tagline is: A Celebration of Craft, Commerce, & Community. This full-

service conference has a budget in excess $300,000 and offers an opportunity for

studying best practices in event management of a creative-writing conference. This

grounded-theory study began by posing the question: What features of the SFWC are the

most important to its participants? Initial data capture was done on-line with a five-

question, anonymous survey. Forty-six responses were recorded over a six-month period.

Responses included organizers/leaders of the SFWC, presenters, paid attendees,

exhibitors, and volunteers. After a process of constant comparative analysis, the key

category that emerged in the survey was "community." Forty out of forty-six, or 87%, of

participants' responses were coded into the category of "community" when they were

asked to identify the most important feature of the conference. Additional data were

captured by accessing public statements made by the current SFWC board, public records

pertaining to their non-profit status, and by conducting a face-to-face interview with a previous SFWC director/co-founder, Michael Larsen. A final round of data-gathering was make done by downloading publicly accessible documents and newsletters found on the SFWC website. All this material was organized, coded, and analyzed within NVivo 12 Plus. The initial processing was via word frequency. Coding was iterative, as additional data became available. As secondary and axillary coding reached saturation, again, the key theme emerged: the centrality of "community." These findings were explored using Michael Storper's concept of cultural economics. Using this framework, the SFWC's methods of community-building were parsed to find features that can be replicated by other creative writing conferences. Recommendations were offered specifically for each of the five classes of participants.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a solitary act.

Yet author-coach Cathy Yardley has observed that "all writers write alone, but no one succeeds that way" (Yardley, 2013, p. 25).

So, discounting the occasional genius, the majority of those who aspire to excellence must seek and receive instruction, encouragement, and editorial guidance.

And while it is a given that serious writers desire to improve their skills, many lack the time, temperament, or resources to pursue an advanced degree in creative writing. In fact, the leading national organization of Creative Writing programs, The Association of Writers & Writing (AWP) programs, cautions aspiring writers to be mindful of the financial consequences of their writing education. The AWP suggests that writers should probably "pay down your debt a few years before entering graduate school" (Fenza, 2000). It is not surprising, then, that many writers chose shorter and more affordable alternatives. Some of the options available to both fiction and nonfiction authors include writing workshops, retreats, and conferences. Of these, conferences typically offer the broadest range of alternative to both beginners and the seasoned writer, and there are a wide range of offerings that writers can chose from. According to the AWP (2019b), there are 292 conferences operating in America, and these fill an important need for writers at all levels.

These creative writing conferences are places where beginners can get specific technical instruction from competent professionals. Experienced writers find such

conferences useful as a place to pitch their projects to agents, and publishers can seek emerging talent. Conferences also provide a place for writers to meet and form networks with peers who share their passions for a specific genre, and they can be the spark that ignites a life-long collaboration when writers find their ideal "first reader," illustrator, publicist, or even business manager.

But for a conference to deliver these potential benefits, it must be well designed, effectively organized, and properly executed. The AWP offers "guidelines and hallmarks" (AWP, 2018) for organizers to mount and run successful conferences, but, to date, there has been no peer-reviewed scholarship to investigate and assess the effectiveness of creative writing conferences. Specifically, no research has surveyed the various types of *attendees* as to which attributes of a conference are particularly important to them and what specific design features matter the most. This information, if available, could then be viewed against the organizers' intent and align the event's design with attendees needs and improve outcomes for all. Research that looks at attendees, organizers, presenters, vendors and volunteers simultaneously may yield insights into how creative writing conferences could deliver optimal benefits. This grounded-theory study proposes to make such an inquiry and contribute to the increased effectiveness of these conferences and the consequential direct benefit to writers and other professionals in related fields.

The data gathered will be examined through the conceptual framework of economist Dr. Michael Storper. Storper focuses on the effects a specific geography—a given city—has on the success or failure of various cultural activities, including

interactions among artists and the factors that can contribute to a robust artistic culture (Storper, 2013).

This study seeks to identify best practices that are amenable to replication.

Statement of the Research Problem

The opportunities provided by creative writing conferences are substantial but so, too, are their costs to both attendees and organizers. A multi-day writing conference can cost an individual attendee a registration fee of $900 to attend (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), as well as the costs of transportation and housing. Prudent conference-goers must make an informed decision as best they can as to whether such an investment is worthwhile. This can be hard to do. The two leading trade publications, *The Writer*, 32,000 subscribers (The Writer, 2019), and the *Writer's Digest*, 69,000 subscribers (Writers Digest, 2019) are the most widely read publications that regularly offer such listings. Both contain a great deal of paid advertisements from those conferences with budgets big enough to underwrite such promotions, but their free conference listings contain sparse announcements limited, typically, to the date, location, and contact information. Beyond this bare-bone information, both have recurring columns in each issue that focus on conferences. The *Writer's Digest* offers the "Conference Scene," which features about three or four conferences. *The Writer* magazine's offering is the "Conference Insider," which focuses on a single conference. Both of these magazine columns offer additional information about the event, its faculty, and highlights that may make a particular conference appealing. But neither column routinely reviews, rates, or otherwise analyzes the conferences they feature. The tone of their columns is upbeat, bordering on the promotional, and most of this content is

3

provided by the conference organizers. As such, these articles cannot be considered objective reviews. The only other major writing publication, *Poets & Writers*, circulation 60,000 (Brewer, 2018), has monthly listings that are a bit more detailed—these include the price and a sentence or two identifying lead faculty, curriculum, and highlights of the schedule. Again, this material is offered as straight information and not critically reviewed.

Therefore, most information readily available to the aspiring novelist or working professional writer falls short of offering an actual assessment of a particular conference, and that which can be found is limited to a single perspective, typically provided by the organizer in hopes of enticing a potential attendee-writer. There is, currently, no literature or research that assesses a creative writing conference from multiple viewpoints: organizers, paid attendees, presenters/faculty, exhibitors, and volunteers. Moreover, there is no popular or peer-reviewed information on any given conference that offers systematic, substantial analysis of a creative writing conference from a best-practices perspective. Such work, if attempted, might benefit all participants by developing and refining conference processes.

This study attempts to fill that gap. It examines a major creative-writing conference to identify which features are most valued by the participants. A Grounded-Theory approach is applied to gather and examine multiple forms of data from different categories of conference participants: organizers, attendees, presenters, exhibitors, and volunteers. This information was coded and assessed in an attempt to find patterns and recurring themes that point towards best practices in conference design, curriculum and management.

Background and Need

If reading were an animal, it might be considered an endangered species.

Consider the following quote from the Association of Writers & Writing Programs.

> In 1998, the American Council on Education and the University of California conducted a survey on the habits and aspirations of 275,811 college freshmen entering 469 institutions. The survey found, among other things, that 80.4% of these students had occasionally played a video game in the past year while only 18.7% had frequently checked out a book or journal from a school library. Among their reasons for going to college, the ability to make more money ranked highest among 74.6% of these new college students.
>
> These are troubling indicators to anyone who believes in the arts and scholarship and the humanistic values of higher education. In a culture that keeps accelerating the mind-numbing titillations of its entertainments, scholars and writers must work together to preserve the slow and profound pleasures of books. Classes in creative writing are an excellent means of introducing students to a wider range of intellectual inquiry and humane virtues. As William Hughes Mearns had proven in the 1920s, the practice of writing, poetry, and storytelling can motivate students to levels of intellectual curiosity and accomplishment that may surprise the students themselves as much as the cynics. (Fenza, 2000)

Those who aspire to write and seek an audience may have their work cut out for them. Despite this, though, there are those artists who still aspire to write, no matter what the odds are of publication, making a living, or even finding an audience. Keeping abreast of the ever-changing landscape of culture, technology, and readers' tastes drives most writers to keep a watchful eye on the major trade publications for guidance.

Yet, as noted in the previous section, trade journals may not be the best source of information for gaining substantial information on creative-writing conferences. These publications seem to lack a critical perspective. This section will consider another vantage point, that of the Association of Writers & Writing Programs—AWP, the sole national organization devoted to assisting organizations that offer degree programs or writing events. Its mission statement can be found on its website.

(The) AWP provides support, advocacy, resources, and community to nearly 50,000 writers, 550 college and university creative writing programs, and 150 writers' conferences and centers. Our mission is to foster literary achievement, advance the art of writing as essential to a good education, and serve the makers, teachers, students, and readers of contemporary writing. (AWP, 2019e)

To this end, the AWP Board of Trustees offers a list of "hallmarks" as to what constitutes a well-conceived and properly executed conference. Their design criteria fall into five categories. The AWP says that such a conference has:

o   A High Standard for Conference Faculty

o   A Well-Focused Program

o   Administrative Support

o   Selection Criteria

o   Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure (AWP, 2018)

The AWP offers specific benchmarks for best practices for each of these areas. But nowhere in its web presence or various publications does it appear to subject these standards to review. In other words, the guidelines and hallmarks appear sound when considered at face value. They also represent the only recommendations to be found, in extensive literature searches, and they bear the endorsement of the only organization of its kind. Yet, when viewed from the standpoint of event management scholarship, the question that goes begging is whether these standards can be improved by subjecting them to scholarly study. Are the ones set forth strictly necessary? Can an event lack some or all of them and still be considered a success, when assessed by its various participants? Also, is this list exhaustive? Are there other elements that can and should be added?

It also should be noted that the AWP's recommendations appear to be aimed at organizers and don't account for the perspective of other classes of event participants.

A casual review of the AWP's website and publication reveals that a great deal of its content deals with literature review and literary scholarship. A relatively few pages are dedicated to the above recommendations regarding best practices. Yet, the world that confronts writers in the 21st century is going through profound changes (Larsen, 2019). Technology has made it possible for very direct, writer-to-reader interactions, setting the publishing world on its ear. Distance learning and social media also have made it possible for writers and publishing professionals to "meet" and "confer" in ways not imaged decades ago. Whether these advances should drive changes in how creative writing conferences are designed and executed is a question that remains to be answered but that, nevertheless, appears to be worth investigating. The AWP also recommends that organizers continually research and assess the effectiveness of their operations (AWP, 2018).

Exploring these questions from the viewpoints of multiple categories of participants, which elements of a particular writing conference are most important to them, and in turn, the processes that foster or inhibit these elements, would be beneficial to the field of event management. Identifying, if possible, the design elements of a particular creative writing conference that mattered most to various classes of participants, could allow events to be optimized with respect to meeting these needs within professional standards of best practices.

In addition to the AWPs guidelines, this discussion employs an adapted, streamlined, version of a conceptual framework devised by economist Michael Storper.

Storper's work (2013) explores the concept of spatial economics, and offers insights into how local conditions can enhance or inhibit the interactions and output of artists.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the most important aspects of a creative writing conference as seen through the eyes of various participants of the 2019 San Francisco Writer's Conference (SFWC), and to compare these practices to the standards proposed by the Association of Writers & Writing Programs. The study was structured to survey all participant categories: organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers. The goal was to identify those practices that could be emulated, refined, and adopted by other conferences to good effect.

Scope of the Study

This study was focused primarily on the participants of the 2019 San Francisco Writers Conference. The online survey was available to all categories of participants: organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers. Responses were received from all five categories. In addition to the survey, one of the event's co-founders was interviewed using a 10-question, semi-structured interview, and the interaction recorded and transcribed for qualitative, thematic analysis (Larsen, 2019). Similarly, a public presentation, made by the board of directors to promote participation in the SFWC 2019, was captured from a publicly accessible Facebook page hosted by the Mechanic's Institute Library (Library, 2019). This presentation was downloaded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis. All the public web pages from the SFWC (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a) were downloaded between March 1-3, 2019

and converted to PDFs for NVivo analysis of word frequency. So, too, were all the

publicly posted newsletters from the SFWC between 2007-2019 (Santos, 2019) . Finally,

62 handouts publicly posted by presenters from the 2019 event were downloaded, and

converted to PDFs when needed, and analyzed for recurring words and themes (San

Francisco Writers Conference, 2019b).

Definitions

Abductive Logic

> Decision making when constantly comparing data relies on a combination of
> inductive and abductive thought. Inductive thought is defined as 'a type of
> reasoning that begins with study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates
> patterns from them to form a conceptual category' (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: 608),
> whereas abduction is defined as 'a type of reasoning that begins by examining data
> and after scrutiny of these data, entertains all possible explanations for the observed
> data, and then forms hypotheses to confirm or disconfirm until the researcher
> arrives at the most plausible interpretation of the observed data' (Bryant &
> Charmaz, 2007: 603). (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 90)

Attendee

> Typically those individuals who have paid a conference fee and who are not

designated as volunteers or serving as faculty.

AWP

> Association of Writers & Writing Programs, found at

http://www.awpwriter.org.

Axial Coding

> First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data. Pattern Coding,
> as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller
> number of categories, themes, or concepts. For quantitative researchers, it's an
> analog to the cluster-analytic and factor-analytic devices used in statistical analysis.
> It's parallel to grounded theory coding methods is Focused Coding or Axial
> Coding. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020, p. 79)

9

Case Outline

A plan that provides a lens through which to examine data and adjust data gathering as needed. In studies where the initial conceptual framework is clear and explicit, the outline may include notes about planned research questions, the context in which they will be asked, the key actors, key events and core processes to be pursued and coded. (Miles et al., 2020, 2020, pp. 148-150)

Clustering

Clustering involves clumping together things that "go together" by using a single or multiple dimension. A related tactic is to ask, "What is this specific thing an instance of? Does it belong to a more general class?" This tactic is similar to the analytic processes for pattern coding …. Classic grounded theory calls this the "constant comparative method." One tries to categorize a particular action, event, participant, state, and so on into a more abstractly defined class. That class may have been predefined, or it may have emerged as a result of coding or analytic memoing. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 281)

Code

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey responses, drawings, artifacts, photographs, video, Internet sites, e-mail correspondence, academic and fictional literature, and so on. The portion of data coded during first cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph, an entire page of text or a stream of moving images. In second cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, analytic memos about the data, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed thus far. Charmaz (2001) describes coding as the "critical link" between data collection and their explanation of meaning. (Saldana, 2015, p. 4)

Coding Categories

To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize. When you apply and reapply codes to qualitative data, you are codifying – a process that permits data to be divided, grouped, reorganized and linked in order to consolidate meaning and develop explanation (Grbich, 2013). Bernard (2011) succinctly states that analysis is "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (p. 338). Coding enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or "families" because they share some characteristic – the beginning of a pattern (see the examples of Pattern Coding and

Focused Coding in Chapter 5). You use classification reasoning plus your tacit and intuitive senses to determine which data "look alike" and "feel alike" when grouping them together (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347). (Saldana, 2015, p. 9)

Computer Assisted/Aided Qualitative
 Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

"CAQDAS offers tools that assist with qualitative research such as

transcription analysis, coding and text interpretation, recursive abstraction, content

analysis, discourse analysis, [1] grounded theory methodology, etc." ("Computer

Assisted/Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software," 2019).

Context

The division of labor and the networks in which actors find themselves defines the structural component of a context. This is the informational environment for individuals, and hence their "input" structure of cues and reference points. In turn, individual actors engage in their search behavior (prospecting) and goal formation (emulation/aspirations), leading to choose and evaluation behaviors (strongly influenced by rules of thumb and framing that unfold in both network as well as geographical environments). (Storper, 2013, p. 161)

Continuous Coding

"In this view, qualitative data analysis is a continuous, iterative enterprise.

Issues of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification come into play

successively as analysis episodes follow each other" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 10).

Constant Comparative Analysis

Part of the process of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories. This is termed constant comparative analysis and is a process that continues until a grounded theory is fully integrate. (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11)

Creative Writing Conferences

This term is coined by this researcher to distinguish a particular type of

writing event from other applications of the more generic term, "writing conference." In

the peer-reviewed literature, "writing conferences" typically occur in academic

environments, K-12 or college. The meaning in these academic contexts is a one-on-one

meeting.

Data Condensation in Grounded Theory

> Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying,
> abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of
> written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical
> materials. By condensing, the data becomes stronger. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 8)

Data Display

"The second major flow of analysis activity is data display. Generically, a

display is an organized, condensed assembly of information that allows analytic

reflection and action" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 9).

Exhibitors

Vendors that have been approved to display and market their services at the

event.

Faculty

Presenters in conference workshops, panels, presentations. May be lay

experts.

Grounded Theory

An inductive method to generate theories from fieldwork, and observations.

Grounded theory avoids pigeon holing perception by not offering initial hypotheses

(Patton, 2002, pp. 11, 56-57).

Journaling/Note-Taking/Jotting

See "Memos."

Memos

There are a number of things that can be written about in respect to an individual's research…

- o   Your feelings and assumptions about your research.
- o   Your philosophical position in relation to your research.
- o   Musings on books and papers that you have read.
- o   Potential issues, problems and concerns in relation to your study design.
- o   Reflections on the research process, including factors that influence quality in your study, such as those discussed above.
- o   Procedural and analytical decision making.
- o   Codes, categories and your developing theory. (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 42)

Nodes

A node is a collection of references about a specific theme, place, person or other area of interest. References are gathered by 'coding' sources such as interviews, focus groups, articles or survey results. For example, while exploring your sources (documents, datasets, pictures, video or audio) you could code any content related to 'illegal fishing practices' at the node illegal fishing. … Nodes, there are folders for nodes, relationships and matrices—relationships and matrices are special types of nodes. Relationships are nodes that define the connection between two project items. For example, a relationship node could be created to record the relationship between two of the case nodes in a project (perhaps two people are married to each other). ... Nodes are containers for themes, people, places, organizations or other areas of interest. (QSR, 2019)

Opportunity Costs

When economists refer to the "opportunity cost" of a resource, they mean the value of the next-highest-valued alternative use of that resource. If, for example, you spend time and money going to a movie, you cannot spend that time at home reading a book, and you cannot spend the money on something else. If your next-best alternative to seeing the movie is reading the book, then the opportunity cost of seeing the movie is the money spent plus the pleasure you forgo by not reading the book. (Henderson, 2019)

Pre-coding

In addition to coding with words and short phrases, never overlook the opportunity to "pre-code" (Layder, 1998) by circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you – those "codable moments" worthy of attention (Boyatzis, 1998). Creswell (2013, p. 205) recommends that such quotes found in data contained in a CAQDAS program file

13

can be simultaneously coded as quotes with their other codes to enable later retrieval. (Saldana, 2015, p. 20)

Saturation

One of the ultimate goals during Axial Coding (along with continued qualitative data-gathering and analysis) is to achieve saturation – "when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). (Saldana, 2015, p. 248)

Screening

Processes that limit the people we allow into our personal and professional worlds either through requiring potential connections to be certified, or admitting them only through informal networks (Storper, 2013, p. 171).

SFWC

San Francisco Writers Conference.

Situationalism

"The unifying theme in behavioral economics is situationalism—where one is matters to what one knows and what one chooses (Ross & Nisbet 1991; Haselton, Nettle, & Andrews 2005)" (Storper, 2013, p. 160).

Spatial Economics

Spatial economics is the study of how space (distance) affects economic behavior (Kasper, 2019).

Tacit Knowledge

"… also implicit knowledge … that one does not get from being taught, or from books, etc. but get from personal experience, for example when working in a particular organization" ("Tacit Knowledge," 2019).

<u>Writing Conference</u>

In the majority of extant, peer-reviewed literature, this term will lead into scholarship often used to indicate a one-on-one meeting in a K-12 setting or college tutoring center between a teacher and student. For the purposes of this study, the term "creative writing conference" will be used to signify non-academic writing events. Creative writing conferences typically include writers of various levels and abilities, artists, editors, agents, publicists, and vendors.

<u>Writing Retreats and Workshops</u>

Usually refers to smaller events aimed at experienced writers. Unlike most writing conferences, retreats and workshops often entail a vetting process that can require an application with a resume and a writing sample.

Research Question(s)

The central questions of this study were: What aspects of the SFWC are most/least appreciated by *all* participants, and how can this information be used to improve the SFWC or other conferences? To this end, a series of five related questions were posed to five categories of participants (organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers). The initial, five-question, on-line survey asked:

1. Why do you participate in the SFWC?

2. What do you do at the SFWC?

3. How long have you participated in the SFWC?

4. What are the best elements of the SFWC?

5. What, if anything, could be done to make the SFWC more rewarding or successful?

Concurrently with this, a 10-question semi-structured interview was conducted in a face-to-face meeting with the SFWC's co-founder, and sent via email to the organization's five current board members. These ten questions were intended to reveal the central goals pursued and difficulties encountered in mounting an undertaking the size and scope of the SFWC. These questions were:

1. If you were a part of bringing your writing conference into being, please describe that process.

2. What did you hope your conference would accomplish?

3. What were the biggest obstacles you faced?

4. How did you go about assembling the team that brought your conference into being or that helped you run an ongoing conference?

5. What advice do you have for anyone who is tasked with running a writing conference and have it be a successful, sustainable, event?

6. Please give a brief rundown on the processes and logistics of arranging a venue, volunteer pool, financial backing, faculty/presenters panel, and marketing to recruit potential participants.

7. What is the most important pitfall to avoid?

8. What is the best advice to attract sponsors and partners?

9. What are the differences in running a brand-new conference from one that is up-and-running for several years?

10. What would you say to anyone hoping to launch a conference, retreat, or workshop aimed at helping writers?

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study include that survey respondents were truthful and candid in their responses and that these responses would illuminate key features of the conference. It was further assumed that the San Francisco Writer's Conference would be a worthwhile object of study due to its size and location in a city with the second-largest publishing industry in the United States.

Significance to the Field

Writers who seek to improve their art often seek out competent professionals for instruction, and the options available are as varied as the writers they serve. The most expensive approach, pursing a creative-writing MFA, can cost a writer anywhere from $63,000 to $120,000 in tuition and require a commitment of two years or more (Warner, 2017). MFA programs, numbering more than 240 in the US alone (Falcon, 2014), produce in excess of 3,000 graduates a year (Warner, 2017). An MFA is a necessity for those seeking teaching jobs, even though the number of jobs is far less than the annual number of graduates, as noted by the Association of Writers & Writing Programs, the AWP (Falcon, 2014). This five-to-six figure level of cost and extended time commitment is beyond the reach of many aspiring novelists or nonfiction writers. These non-MFA-track writers, though, are often no less serious about the improving their craft and succeeding in their chosen art, but they need a different form of instruction. Fortunately, such alternatives do exist.

The AWP says that creative writing events, including workshops, retreats and conferences in the US now number in excess of 800 per year (AWP, 2018). These events cater to writers of every level of ability and span all genres of fiction, non-fiction,

screenwriting, poetry, and memoirs. Yet despite the fact that such conferences outnumber MFA programs, little academic research has been done in this area. There are no published peer-reviewed articles that study creative writing conferences in the scholarly presses. The AWP, the sole professional organization to serving the literary arts in this manner, does offer a substantial body of intellectual inquiry to support the literary arts, but these come mostly in the form of literary criticism , discussions around appropriate pedagogy in MFA programs, and the occasional analysis of how the National Endowment for the Arts-NEA spends its funds supporting the arts (White, 2000).

Despite this lack of systematic study, the AWP does attempt to support a canon of best-practices by offering guidelines to those who organize and promote creative writing events. The AWP notes that conferences can come in many forms and serve many functions, but they assert that there are still "hallmarks" that distinguish a good conference from an inferior one. These standards are referenced in this survey and can be referenced online (AWP, 2018) and seen in Appendix A.

The AWPs hallmarks are available on a publicly accessible website (AWP, 2018), and they provide an excellent starting point for inquiry. But as noted above, these hallmarks are directed at organizers. Writers who seek to improve their craft are mostly on their own to find, evaluate, and select a conference that meets their needs. The AWP does not rate or rank writing events, nor does the popular press. Trade publications for writers do list conference events, but most of these articles that focus on a given event read more like the promotions and advertisements that surround them. This topic will be addressed in the literature review below, bit it is worth noting at this point. The three major writing magazines commentaries do not offer critical reviews. Their rubrics mostly

discuss an event's price, location, and genre. Occasionally, these articles may list the big-name authors that are slated to speak and highlights of the curriculum. All this material is no doubt useful, but it may lack the telling details that, for a particular conference-going writer, justify spending from $1,000-$2,000 or more that a four-day conference may entail.

It is the goal of this study to make a deep, systematic exploration of a suitable writing conference to determine, from the participants' point of view, what are the key features and best practices of an effective writing conference. This information could prove useful to organizers it getting a clearer picture of what truly matters to attendees, and it may provide attendees additional tools and resources to choose creative writing conference that meeting their needs, even those that may not be immediately obvious.

To accomplish these ends, this project focused on the San Francisco Writer's Conference.

This event, now in its 17th year, is hosted in downtown San Francisco, a city with the United States' second-largest publishing industry (Larsen, 2019). It is a mid-sized conference, with approximately 350-400 attendees (Larsen, 2019), and the organization's budget, the bulk of which goes to mount the conference, in the neighborhood of $300,000 (ProPublica, 2017). The SFWC is considered by some the premier event on the West Coast (Larsen, 2019), and therefore a worthy subject of study. In addition, such a study is recommended by the AWP as a characteristic of best practices.

> All conferences can benefit from their ongoing research, annual self-evaluation, and periodic independent assessment in its effort to offer the best education for writers and to make the best possible contribution to the advancement of an educated audience for contemporary writing. (AWP, 2018)

19

While the AWP spells out benchmarks for these areas, the organization does not offer any specific advice in its guidelines for *how* to assess a conference or how to promote a sense of community within a creative writing conference. This is worth noting because "community" emerged as a key theme in the data, and the concept of community aligns with the conceptual framework proposed by Michael Storper's work in the field of geographical economics. Storper argues that "local effects" enhance certain kinds of cultural activities in a region, and that this can be seen in both the behavior of groups and individuals (Storper, 2013, pp. 159-160).

The initial findings in all data, the survey, the interview (Larsen, 2019), the board presentation video (Library, 2019), the materials on the website (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), in years of newsletters (Santos, 2019), and even in the 2019 presenters' materials (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019b), all point to the centrality of community and the unique experience of being present in the city of San Francisco.

Given the solitary nature of writing, it is, perhaps, not a surprise that an event that embraces writers of all types, all levels, and from diverse backgrounds, would prove to be a worthwhile experience and be seen as fostering professional success and personal satisfaction. Discerning which processes and design elements enhance a perception of community and are worthy of study, emulation, and dissemination would be a significant benefit to all writers, present and future attendees of conferences, and those who aspire to organize such events.

Furthermore, economists have recognized the importance of artists in cities for both the artists themselves and the regions in which they are situated.

Cities from London, to Hong Kong, to Providence, Rhode Island, to Seattle, Washington have sought to harness the collective economic power of their artistic communities. Decades ago artistic communities began to be noticed for their contributions to the economy, both in terms of creative outputs and in creating desired urban places beyond the artist community (Rose 1989; Smith 1996). The Creative London Initiative, for example, reported that London's creative economy generates more than U.S. $34 billion annually and generates more 500,000 jobs (Robert Huggins Associates 2003). (Krueger & Buckingham, 2009, p. iv)

And while much of this literature deals with what spatial economists call

"hard infrastructure," buildings and venues, there also is ample research that looks at the

importance of the "soft" elements within artistic communities, their social makeup and

how these bonds are formed, strengthened, and sustained.

Yet these conditions are worth serious consideration. Gertler argues that, although 'the presence of creative activity drives competitiveness throughout the rest of the urban economy[,] . . . its success depends to a large extent on its quality of place and community characteristics that promote strong social cohesion.' (Krueger & Buckingham, 2009, p. vi)

To date, no scholarship has examined these dynamics and potential benefits of

creative writing conferences. It is the purpose of this research project to make such an

inquiry with the San Francisco Writers Conference as its object of study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Creative writing events are popular in the United State, growing from a

handful in the early 1900s to more than 292 a year today (AWP, 2019b). But despite the

popularity of these activities, repeated, extensive searches of the CSU Chico Meriam

Library databases in Fall of 2018 and Spring of 2019 revealed not a single peer-reviewed

article or study that explored the processes or practices of creative writing conferences.

The peer-reviewed articles that appeared when searching for "writing conferences"

focused one of two areas: one-on-one English tutoring and instruction in K-12 and

college settings (Franklin, 2010; Martin & Mottet, 2011; Mochizuki, 2017), or the

efficacy of writing retreats to help scholars complete their dissertations or journal articles

(Jensen, 2017). The instructional environment, pedagogy, and participants' goals in these

settings are so different from those in a creative writing environment that this scholarship

did not provide any appropriate analytical tools or models.

Trade Publications

To find additional resources, the search was expanded into the popular

literature did bring to light three trade publications: *The Writer, Poets & Writers*, and the

Writer's Digest. These publications dominate the field of not-academic writing and run

the gamut from articles on how to write for middle-school or young adult readers, as well

all specific genres: romance, science fiction, mystery, and more. The magazines have

articles cover topics of interest to nonfiction authors, columnists, screenwriters, novelists,

and poets. These three publications are, as noted below, the largest-circulation trade magazines. They attempt to offer something for everyone. In addition to articles about the craft and business of writing, all three magazines print announcements of upcoming writing events, by region, in terse lists that share the date, location and contact information. Alongside this sparse information, set in agate-type, there were colorful, paid display advertisements offering photos and lush ad copy to entice participation. Apart from the AWP, these three publications offer the most readily accessible information on creative writing conferences to those individuals mostly likely to seek or benefit from this information. Two of the three publications, The Writer's Digest and The Writer, also offered recurring columns on conferences. *The Writer* had "The Conference Insider," which featured a single-event in depth, and the *Writer's Digest* had "The Conference Scene," which covered three conferences. The format for both publications was similar. The articles listed the location, the date, the cost and contact information. They also explored, briefly, the faculty and the curriculum, highlights or recreational activities that were available to conferees or their guests, and offered some commentary on what sort of writer might have been best suited for the featured conference.

There were no ratings or reviews in any of these columns, which typically had an upbeat, somewhat promotional feel. And the content of these articles appeared to be provided by the conference organizers.

The primary benefit of these articles, in relation to understanding writing conferences, is that they afford an initial, if not overly obvious, rubric with which to examine and discuss creative writing conferences and the coding and sorting of data related to their operations. This rudimentary criteria then can be compared against the

guidelines and hallmarks of the AWP as noted below to provide an initial "lens" or

viewpoint when beginning a grounded-theory inquiry (Miles et al., 2020, p. 27).

Specifically, these rubrics can be merged into the AWP guidelines that call for

transparency in finances and conflicts of interest, substantial curriculum, accessibility of

the faculty to students, and suitable facilities (AWP, 2018).

<div align="center">

The AWP - A Professional Organization
for Creative Writing Conferences

</div>

The other significant source of conference information that appeared in non-

peer reviewed searches was a substantial body of material published by the Association

of Writers & Writing Programs - the AWP. The AWP is the only organization in the US

that serves to support the development and best practices of writing programs and events.

It came into existence in 1967 when 17 MFA programs banded together to lobby for

more funding from the NEA ("Association of Writers & Writing Programs," 2019a). The

AWP later absorbed the CCA, which began in 1990 to support organizations that hosted

creative writing conferences, workshops, and retreats (Rothman, 2014).

The AWP has an extensive website, www.awpwriter.org, with a great deal of

material available to the public, including a search feature for its databases. This resource

offers more than three decades' worth of publications and articles dedicated to the

advancement of creative writing. Most of the articles focus on creative writing MFA

programs in the U.S. and the robust discourse and dissent surrounding them. The AWP

also has on its website blogs, articles, organizational policies, and various reports. Of

particular interest for this research project are those, noted below, that focus on creative

writing conferences. But it is worth noting that the AWP's publications were *entirely*

excluded from search results when the "peer reviewed" criterion was applied. Given its

dominance of the field, there is little outside discourse to examine its publications and

conference presentations. Wikipedia, in its listing of the AWP, cautions that there is a

lack of secondary materials cited ("Association of Writers & Writing Programs," 2019a).

That is not to say the AWP is monolithic: there are controversies galore explored in its

pages. But, even so, the AWP sits somewhere between the world of academe and the

popular press.

Despite all the assets of the AWP—which have proven invaluable to this

research project—there does not appear to be, at this writing, any systematic, *scholarly*

investigation or independent review as to what constitutes best practices for creative

writing conferences. The closest relevant artifact found was a 2015 AWP survey of its

WC&C membership—the branch of their organization that includes those who organize

writing events (AWP, 2019c). Sixty WC&C members were queried. The report offers a

starting point for further research, but its limitations should be noted. First, as per AWP's

disclaimer, the results combined and did not dis-aggregate responses from its members.

Therefore, the report included responses from festivals, writing centers, retreats,

residencies, as well as writing conferences. Second, by the AWP's own estimates,

elsewhere in their publications, there are more than 800 events each year in these

combined categories (AWP, 2018). This is significant because there are differences in the

curriculum and, often, the selection processes for participants in writing retreats

(LaFemina, 2012).

Finally, the most succinct document found was on an AWP web page:

Writers' Conferences & Centers (WC&C) recognizes the diversity among its
affiliated workshops, festivals, conferences and colonies. For simplicity's sake, all

of these organizations will be referred to as "conferences" for the rest of this document. The purpose of the professional association of these diverse groups is to uphold the highest standards possible. WC&C recognizes that each organization has a different strength and mission, and WC&C encourages innovation and variety in the programming of conferences.

Among its member conferences, however, WC&C has recognized common elements of successful conferences. "Guidelines and Hallmarks" of effective Writing Conferences. (AWP, 2018)

These hallmarks represent a superior writers' conference that serves attendees expectations: to further their craft of writing, make them better readers, invigorate their own work by stimulating interaction with other writers and with teachers.

The AWP's guidelines list six primary areas of concern. See Appendix A for an unabridged copy. These six areas are:

1. A High Standard for Conference Faculty
2. A Well-Focused Program
3. Administrative Support
4. Selection Criteria
5. Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure
6. Contracts and procedures:
    ○ Conference promotion:
    ○ Amenities and other offerings (AWP, 2018)

These guidelines and their specific recommendations were incorporated into the research design of this study, including the initial survey and follow-up interview questions. The guidelines also provided a lens for the initial rounds of coding. Later, these guidelines provided part of the framework used to systematically review and discuss the data.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory provides a flexible method of inquiry that uses field work and data gathering in a manner that allows themes to emerge without limiting potential insights by premature hypothesis formation. Therefore, this study proposed questions

rather than offering initial hypotheses as recommended in *Qualitative Research &*

Evaluation Methods.

> Qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source of grounded theory, theory
> that is inductively generated from fieldwork, that is, theory that emerges from the
> researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world other than in the
> laboratory or the academy. (Patton, 2002, p. 11)

This inquiry process can be interpreted and employed in many ways, but some

agreement exists on Grounded Theory's core aspects.

> We consider the following to constitute a set of essential grounded theory methods:
> initial coding and categorization of data; concurrent data generation or collection
> and analysis; writing memos; theoretical sampling; constant comparative analysis
> using inductive and abductive logic; theoretical sensitivity; intermediate coding;
> identifying a core category; and advanced coding and theoretical integration. (Birks
> & Mills, 2015, p. 10)

These processes are recursive and may involve backtracking through the data.

The grounded theory method also suggests working through the data, analyzing it, as it is

gathered. Some experienced practitioners mention the "rhythm" or "flow" of data

collection.

> The cyclical collection, coding, and analytic memo writing of data are not distinct
> linear processes but "should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of
> an investigation to its end" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 43). This is one of the major
> principles developed by grounded theory's premiere writers, Barney G. Glaser and
> Anselm L. Strauss, and elaborated in later writings by Juliet Corbin, Kathy
> Charmaz, Adele E. Clarke, and Janice Morse. Bryant and Charmaz's (2007) edited
> volume. (Saldana, 2015, pp. 54-55)

This researcher's use of the grounded theory method has implications for both

the design of survey instruments, interviews, and the minimum number of interviews of

data points. There is no set number, and it is possible to have a few, well-chosen

observations inform the process.

> Strauss and Corbin (1998) advise that at least 10 interviews or observations with
> detailed coding are necessary for building a grounded theory (p. 281), but other

27

methodologists have recommended a minimum of 20, 30, or 40 separate interviews. One grounded theory study (Saldaña, 1995) utilized interview data from 15 young participants, and the data corpus provided sufficient variability to construct the core category and its properties and dimensions. (Saldana, 2015, p. 55)

Another aspect of grounded theory is that the researcher must adopt a stance

or philosophical position from which to operate. This can be that of a detached observer,

or observer-participant, as was the case in this study of the SFWC. The lead researcher,

as a seven year volunteer, was afforded a wide scope of access due, in part, to many years

of volunteer service to the conference.

An important first step in becoming a grounded theorist is deciding how you position yourself philosophically. As Birks (2014) explains, everyone has a unique conceptualization of existence and reality. How people understand the world is influenced by their histories and the context in which they find themselves. One's personal philosophy is very important because it defines what one consider to be real and how one can legitimately acquire knowledge about the world. (Birks & Mills, 2015, pp. 1-2)

Specifically, grounded theorists must consider their distance from the subject,

as Birks and Mills notes:

Depending on their philosophical beliefs and adopted methodology, researchers take either a position of distance or acknowledged inclusion both in the field and in the final product of the study.... As well, and crucially for grounded theory, the methodology subscribed to influences the analysis of the data as it focuses the researcher's attention on different dynamics and alerts them to possible analytic configurations in the process of conceptual and theoretical abstraction. (2015, p. 4)

Taking a stance is unavoidable and will result in a research process, and

potentially findings, that are the unique result of this "position" and the researchers' "life

experience(s)."

Some people get very uncomfortable thinking about what they consider to be 'fluffy' questions such as these. However, the answers to each guide how you position yourself as a grounded theorist and, in turn, how you work with participants, the approach you take to data generation/collection and analysis, and the way you formulate your final grounded theory.

When considering the question of how we define ourselves, think about the various roles that you engage in on a daily basis. You might consider yourself an expert in your chosen professional field, but a novice researcher. In addition, you may have other 'selves' where you are a member of a religious congregation, or a minority cultural group, you may play a team sport, parent young or older children, be a spouse, a daughter, a son. All of us have multiple selves that we live out, and all of these roles impact on how we think about the world. When we begin a research study we do not only think about this work as a novice researcher – rather we draw upon the totality of our life experience in deciding how to proceed. The multiple selves that we live out, or the many 'hats' that we wear, influence the methodological approach we choose and in turn how we use essential grounded theory methods. (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 50)

The coding process for grounded theory is not a once-and-done proposition; it

is repetitive and recursive. Moreover, different kinds of coding may happen concurrently.

Process Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that search for the routines and rituals of human life, plus the "rhythm as well as changing and repetitive forms of action-interaction plus the pauses and interruptions that occur when persons act or interact for the purpose of reaching a goal or solving a problem" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 173). Processes are also embedded within "psychological concepts such as prejudice, identity, memory [and] trust" because these are things "people do rather than something people have" (Willig, 2008, p. 164). For grounded theory, Process Coding happens simultaneously with Initial Coding, Focused Coding, and Axial Coding, and a search for consequences of action/interaction is also part of the process. Processes can also be broken down into subprocesses for finer detail (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 174). (Saldana, 2015, p. 111)

Grounded theory and theoretical "tentativeness" require researchers to

maintain awareness that, when the data is unclear, more work is still ahead, and that the

process of inquiry may well change.

With the outline (a lens of key actors, key events, and core processes) clearly in mind, the researcher begins the first round of data collection. The raw field notes are coded without being transformed into write-ups. The researcher reviews the coded field notes, enters data directly into displays, and writes accompanying analytic text—that is, the tentative conclusions drawn from the displayed data. There will be instances of missing or unclear data, and of unanswered research questions; these provide the targets for the next round of data collection. Early versions of the case outline can be limited to descriptive material, "reflective remarks," and a subsection on "puzzles and unanswered questions" in each chapter of the case. This procedure is iterated until data collection and the completed case

are done. Thus, the processes of data collection, analysis, and report writing are condensed into one evolving procedure. With some experience, the researcher has a constant sense of being on top of the data and remains open to checking and extending findings. Feedback from study participants can be sought and incorporated along the way to verify and revise preliminary conclusions. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 150)

Therefore, at the core of this method is openness to letting patterns in the data emerge and then seeking to explain them with a theory or theoretical construct that is an appropriate fit. That said, the methods of grounded theory support the development of tentative, evidence-based hypothesis from the earliest moments that data is gathered. This is typically done in a process referred to variously as "memoing," "jotting," or "journaling," a highly individualized method where researchers record their impressions. These notes are an important part of the analytical process, and also make this method ideally suited for a research project that seeks to understand the mind of writers.

Charmaz advises in her grounded theory workshops, "Let your memos read like letters to a close friend. There's no need for stodgy, academic prose." I simply write what goes through my mind, then determine what type of memo I wrote to title it and thus later determine its place in the data corpus. Yes, memos are data; and as such they, too, can be coded, categorized, and searched with CAQDAS programs. Dating each memo helps keep track of the evolution of your study. Giving each memo a descriptive title and evocative subtitle enables you to classify it and later retrieve it through a CAQDAS search. Depending on the depth and breadth of your writing, memos can even be woven as substantive portions into the final written report. (Saldana, 2015, pp. 44-45)

The culmination of the coding process comes if and when saturation occurs, and additional research does not yield any additional coding or insights. Note that this happens late in the process.

Subsuming particulars into more general classes is a conceptual and theoretical activity in which you shuttle back and forth between first-level data and more general categories that evolve and develop through successive iterations until the category is "saturated" (new data do not add to the meaning of the general category).

Arbitrary abstraction, however, gets you nowhere. Suppose you observed a teacher writing her name on the dry-erase board on the first day of school. That specific action can be subsumed into a larger class of "written communication," then into a larger class of "information transmission," and finally into a still larger class of "human action." That is a sort of taxonomic classification without useful meaning, however. You cannot decide in a vacuum which of these classes is "right" or "best." There must be a clear linkage to the study's conceptual framework and research questions. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 282)

For saturation to occur, and for it to be realized, the researcher must, as Miles et al. (2020) notes above, be immersed, and effective coding requires a conceptual framework, which will be discussed in the next section. Once saturation is reached, and not before, can the data point to "key themes." Even then, grounded theorists have to admit to inherent limitations of the abuctive process and the fact that findings will always be from a partial, particularly situated—even if well selected—view of the world. Grounded theory research typically points the way for further work, which is true of all research to a degree, but it is admittedly tentative, as its both its critics and even supporters note.

Yet, in the flurry of this activity, we should be mindful of some pervasive issues that have not gone away. These issues include the labor intensiveness (and extensiveness over months or years) of data collection; frequent data overload; the time demands of processing and analyzing data; the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be managed; the generalizability and transferability of findings; the credibility, trustworthiness, and quality of conclusions; and their utility in the world of policy and action (Miles et al., 2020, p. 4).

<center>Three Key Studies in Spatial Economics:
Creative Class, Creative Clusters,
and Situationalism</center>

<u>The Creative Class</u>

While grounded theory allows for flexibility and the emergence of patterns from the data itself, it still necessary to have a conceptual structure to facilitate analysis

<center>31</center>

and to focus the discussion. A theoretical framework was sought that would apply to

creative writers and that would accommodate the emerging key codes of "friendly

people," "sense of community," and "San Francisco is special."

In the early stages of journaling, note-taking and jotting, the lead researcher

used a social-ecological framework. This allowed the data to be analyzed for one-on-one

interactions, group dynamics, and the relationship of the conference-goers to the City.

But while the social ecological model facilitated descriptions of attitudes in these codes,

the framework was less useful in discerning underlying causality. Searching for a better

framework led to research in urban studies and the emerging field of "spatial economics."

There is a substantial body of work in this area that looks at artists in relation to their

communities and among themselves. This field emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s

and has continued to develop to this day. Early work in this area recognized how specific

environments and group dynamics could foster creativity. Some of the initial work in this

area was done by Richard Florida in 1991 when he described the importance of social

climate for fostering creativity (Florida, 1991). Florida continued to develop these

concepts in later works, discussing how social climate includes tolerance for differences

arising from culture, religion, and sexual preferences (Florida, 2000). More than just

making people feel better, it has been proved to have actual economic payoffs.

> Openness to enterprising people from around the world has always been a pillar of
> the American spirit. The nation was built by immigrants. And a continuing
> commitment to openness and diversity across all segments of the population is a
> necessity if the New Economy is to continue to thrive.
> The nation's leading high-tech centers are places where people from virtually
> any background can settle and make it happen. The growth and development of
> great cities comes from their ability to harness diversity, welcome newcomers, and
> turn their energy and ideas into innovations and wealth. In Silicon Valley, the
> world's leading high-tech center, nearly a quarter of the population is foreign-born.

Almost one-third of the Valley's hightech scientists and engineers hail from foreign countries….

Our analysis of cities with populations of more than 700,000 shows a striking correlation between the concentration of gays in a metropolitan area and high-tech industry. Six of the top 10 gay cities are also among the top 10 cities for high-tech. Our "gay concentration index" explains the location of high-tech firms and workers better than any other measure.

This close relationship between tolerance and high-tech isn't because gay people attract technology companies. Rather, a place that's a comfortable home to the gay community is likely to be open to all. The key to growth in the New Economy is to be open and have low entry barriers for human capital. (Florida, 2000, p. 1)

Florida's later work extended on these ideas, and he shifted his focus away

from the internal dynamics of a particular firm to the importance of "place" when doing

economic analysis. He took note of how "creative clusters" enhance creativity by

occupying and interacting in shared space.

But I had come to the conclusion that it was not the technologies we build or the knowledge that is poured into our heads that is our key human and economic resource, but our shared creativity—a creativity that extends across all kinds of people, that is embedded in every kind of occupation, and that cuts across all social categories. Unlike land, capital, and labor, creativity is not a stock of things that can be depleted but an unlimited resource that is constantly renewed and improved by education, on-the-job experience, and the stimulation that is provided by human interaction. (Florida, 2014, p. 198)

Florida also came to be known for his research on how upscale amenities

could attract creative people, and developers used his research to justify expensive tax

breaks to lure businesses into a community. This has drawn criticism over issues related

to social justice and gentrification (Krueger & Buckingham, 2009, pp. iv-ix).

Of course, my ideas have been misappropriated and misunderstood; politicians have justified everything from "cool cities" to bigger stadiums and everything in between in the name of "magnetizing" the creative class. When this happens, I am reminded of the "theory of maximum feasible misunderstanding," Daniel Patrick Moynihan's donnish description of the distortions that some of his own ideas were subjected to when they were adapted in the War on Poverty in the 1960s (Moynihan, 1969). (Florida, 2014, p. 202)

Yet Florida feels these criticisms overlook much of his work, and he reminds critics that, at the heart of his work, is a core concern for compassionate communities.

> The second is that cities need what I have dubbed a "people climate," not just the more conventional business climate of low taxes, minimal regulation, and generous subsidies. By a people climate, I mean a general strategy aimed at attracting and retaining people across the board. This people climate needs to have something for all people across all age groups, single and married, gay and straight, parents and childless. Half of us are unmarried; many parents are gays and lesbians. Communities need to offer something to all of them. As I mentioned earlier, places need to provide low barriers to entry for talent and that means being open and welcoming. They need to focus on quality of place more than quality of life. By quality of place, I refer to the unique set of characteristics that define a place and make it attractive— what I have come to refer to "quality of place" or as what I sometimes refer to as the fourth T: "Territorial Assets." Quality of place cuts across three key dimensions: what's there or the combination of the built environment and the natural environment, the setting it provides for the pursuit of creative lives; who's there or the diverse kinds of people that can be found, signaling that anyone can make a life in a community; and what's going on, the vibrancy of street life, café culture, arts, music, and outdoor activities. (Florida, 2014, p. 203)

Florida's work is helpful in light of this study's findings, that point to the importance of kindness, warmth, and friendliness in a conference setting, as well as the larger context—the city—in which a creative writing event occurs. Tolerance does matter, but Florida's generalized admonitions for kindness do not provide a substantial framework that can be put to use. Nor does Florida's work offer a means of developing actionable recommendations applicable to a creative writing conference. Therefore, the work of other spatial economists was explored to seek more effective analytical tools.

<u>Creative Clusters</u>

Another early theorist in spatial economics was Michael Porter, and his work is worth consideration, particularly in light of his concept of "creative clusters."

> Today's economic map of the world is dominated by what I call clusters: critical masses-in one place-of unusual competitive success in particular fields. Clusters are a striking feature of virtually every national, regional, state, and even metropolitan economy, especially in more economically advanced nations. Silicon Valley and

Hollywood may be the world's best-known clusters. Clusters are not unique, however; they are highly typical-and therein lies a paradox: the enduring competitive advantages in a global economy lie increasingly in local things-knowledge, relationships, motivation-that distant rivals cannot match. (Porter, 1998, p. 77)

The interaction between organizations and their local environment, when studied through the lens of economics, can yield valuable insights.

Untangling the paradox of location in a global economy reveals a number of key insights about how companies continually create competitive advantage. What happens inside companies is important, but clusters reveal that the immediate business environment outside companies plays a vital role as well. This role of locations bas been long overlooked, despite striking evidence that innovation and competitive success in so many fields are geographically concentrated-whether it's entertainment in Hollywood, finance on Wall Street, or consumer electronics in Japan. (Porter, 1998, p. 78)

One problem with previous business models is that they didn't capture the unique features of creative clusters.

Clusters rarely conform to standard industrial classification systems, which fail to capture many important actors and relationships in competition. Thus, significant clusters may be obscured or even go unrecognized. In Massachusetts, for example, more than 400 companies, representing at least 39,000 high-paying jobs, are involved in medical devices in some way. The cluster long remained all but invisible, however, buried within larger and overlapping industry categories such as electronic equipment and plastic products. Executives in the medical devices cluster have only recently come together to work on issues that will benefit them all. (Porter, 1998, p. 79)

Porter's work was an important step in providing a lens through which to view a community or a region to detect creative clusters. He noted that increases in productivity that come from clustering are due in part to:

- o Better access to experienced employees with specialized skills.
- o Better access to specialized suppliers who are close at hand, thereby speeding productivity, reducing delays, and lowering transportation costs.
- o Better access to specialized information because competitive technology accumulates in clusters.
- o Personalized relationships that foster trust exists within the clusters.

35

- o   Complimentary linkages make for synergy. The whole is more than the sum of its parts.
- o   Better access to institutions and public goods increases business productivity.
- o   Easier recruitment of talent
- o   Better motivation and measurement—local competition can be highly motivating through the power of peer pressure. (Porter, 1998, pp. 81-83)

All of these are worthwhile goals, and while Porter's work is seminal, and establishes the importance of creative clusters, it does not offer much that can be of use to event planners who hope to enhance the effectiveness of a creative writing conference. Porter suggestions are aimed primarily at businesses seeking to outsource some of their operations while still holding onto an effective, stateside creative-cluster presence.

Situationalism

The third and final key study that this review will consider is that of urban economist Michael Storper. His work is particularly useful because his framework provides three advantages. First, it allows for both descriptive and explanatory analysis. Second, it focuses on the role communication, especially face-to-face communication, plays in artistic societies and in the creation of what Storper calls "buzz," which exists alongside physical infrastructures. It is this human side of spatial economics that Storper examines most closely (Storper, 2013, p. 180). Third, the concept of buzz applies to one-on-one communications, small group communications, and the interactions between groups and the unique local, "situational" contexts in which they exist.

> Choices are typically made with imperfect information and on the basis of a set of limited criteria, notably local points of reference, or anchors. The unifying theme in behavioral economics is situationalism—where we are matters to what we know and what we choose (Ross & Nisbet 1991; Haselton, Nettle, & Andrews 2005). (Storper, 2013, p. 160)

Storper's earliest, seminal scholarship in this area dates to his 1997 publication of "The City: Centre of economic reflexivity" (Storper, 1997). His early

36

work, and that of other economists, such as A. J. Scott, author of "The Cultural Economy of Cities, 1997" (Scott, 1997), helped developed a vocabulary of the relationship between human behavior related to place, its impact on regions. This scholarship began the process of laying out a framework to explain the reasons why art and artists seem to flourish in some areas, often obtaining significant financial success, and struggle in other communities.

Reviews of Storper's most recent book have drawn praise (McCann, 2014), and show that his scholarship in this area is still highly regarded. In *Keys to the City: How Economics, Institutions, Social Interaction, and Politics Shape Development*, Storper offers a comprehensive and thorough-going explanation of the multitude of processes that make a given region thrive. For the purposes of this study, chapters 10, Local Context: The Genius of Cities; and chapter 11, Face-to-Face Contact, offer valuable insights and tools for analyzing the relationship among artists, and between these creative clusters and their community, in this study's case, those who gather at the SFWC.

Storper frequently refers to Paris as an example of a city that produces cuisine that other locations cannot readily duplicate. Even more so, this capacity is widely distributed across Paris, even among many lesser-known Parisian eateries. Storper also cites the auto manufacturing regions of Germany as another example of a specific, local, economy that is able to produce cars that "feel" like none other (Storper, 2013, p. 156). And Storper rounds out his list of examples with specific references to the arts, citing Hollywood and Bollywood as places where films can be made, even at modest costs in some cases, that simply could not be made elsewhere.

As suggested in my restaurant example, when we go from local to geographically distributed contexts, the resulting products are imperfect substitutes. There is not just a change in production technique but also in the envelope of outputs. (Storper, 2013, p. 166)

Storper's ideas bear on the dynamics at play at a creative writing conference, and they address issues that have long puzzled economics. Storper calls this uniqueness a "Dark Matter Problem" (Storper, 2013, p. 156).

Economics has long struggled with how to explain differences in the quality of outputs of economies with similar income levels and similar average factor productivity. … One approach is to assign them to history—for example, German shop-floor efficiency versus the US penchant for de-skilling production jobs (Hall & Soskice 2001). Another is to emphasize demand, such that, in this case, each country has different factors because Americans have different preferences for cars from those of Germans. *Notice that our models are better at describing the what and how of differences than the why* (emphasis mine). (Storper, 2013, p. 156)

It is this very *why* question that chapter 10 in *Keys to the City*, Storper sets out to answer. To the extent he is successful, he provides a powerful tool to apply in this study. His approach is to offer conceptual frameworks and explanations that attempt to account for these differences. These frameworks will be applied in the methods section of this project. Those portions of his work that bear most directly on this project will be summarized below.

Regional Context: Why "Situationalism" Matters. Storper lists five reasons why some cities are able to produce products, particularly artistic products, that do not find their equals anywhere else. Three of them are particularly relevant for the purposes of this study. First, even in the age of the Internet, information is not uniformly available to all. This is particularly true of knowledge that is not easily "codifiable," or translated into abstract, symbolic terms that can exist outside knowers' minds.

First, valuable specialized information is not uniformly available. There are costs to obtaining it, and there are also barriers to access—one's social and economic

position defines whether as well as under what conditions, and sometimes at what cost, one can obtain information. (Storper, 2013, p. 160)

Given that knowledge may be held by an individual, or a small group, access to that information may have to be negotiated through a social process wherein an aspirant must become a member of a group that contains this information, much like the guilds or secret societies of previous ages.

> Third, social and economic networks underpin access to information along with knowing what information to look for (Granovetter 2005; Powell 1990). *Since networks structure our string of opportunities and roles, our membership in them affects who we become* (emphasis mine), and therefore how we frame preferences and choices. (Storper, 2013, pp. 160-161)

The fourth item Storper identifies, and the third and last part of this construct to be considered here, is that people are "strongly influenced by comparison and emulation." This is an important point, and one that also emerged in this study's findings in respondents' frequent references to "people." This issue, though, is not explicitly identified or advocated in the narratives found in the trade journals described earlier or in the hallmarks of the AWP. It seems a significant omission.

Storper explains how social pressures bear on information exchange, and his ideas offer a framework for analysis.

> In the place of fully subjective preferences, on the one hand, or rationally constructed ones, on the other, an enormous body of evidence shows that goals are strongly influenced by comparison and emulation. Status comparison affects virtually every dimension of preference formation. … (Appiah 2010). What we compare to and emulate is not an exercise in global maximizing but instead depends on our social and geographical positions in networks, our role in the division of labor, and what is honorable (Frank 2001; Fine 2006). (Storper, 2013, p. 161)

In short, cultural knowledge and information that is unique to a particular art may exist in subtle ways that defy, or at least inhibit, easy transmission. This information can remain rooted in one region. Storper calls this the "local multiplier effect."

A third type of case is that of winner-take-all systems in the world, such as the City of London, Silicon Valley, or Hollywood, or industrial districts built around a combination of distinctive products and locally constructed techniques rooted in the local system as a whole (Bathelt, Malmberg, & Maskell 2004). … Each core region has a context whose individual dimensions can be imitated to some extent. But copying whole contexts is an almost-impossible collective action problem because the incentives for actors (i.e. individuals taking action, not necessarily thespians) to frame and emulate are interdependent, and hence these aspects of their behavior are strongly interactive and cumulative; this is the local multiplier effect. There are offshoots of Silicon Valley around the globe, but there is only one Silicon Valley. (Storper, 2013, p. 164)

The above ideas are developed in chapter 10 of Keys to the City, and they offer unique, significant, and useful concepts. In chapter 11, Storper continues his analysis, arguing that face-to-face interactions are at the core of the "buzz" that makes people want to live in a particular area and thereby enjoy the benefits that come from such associations (Storper, 2013, p. 180). These will be considered in the next section, and they have implications for how social environments can be engineered to good effect. They also offer a theoretical framework to guide discussion of this study's findings in subsequent chapters.

The Spatial Economic/Situational Benefits of Face-to-Face Communication. Even in the face of interactive technology like Skype or Zoom, Storper says technology can't displace the benefits of being in the same physical space with another person or a group of people. "I will argue that face-to-face contact is still a powerful instrument of economic coordination, and that telepresence is unlikely to diminish it" (Storper, 2013, p. 165).

Storper develops rationale for such a benefit, which may seem paradoxical. Most business tend to migrate where the costs are lower, but the exact opposite seems to be true in when examining face-to-face communication. There are, Storper says,

advantages that arise from the higher costs associated with such meetings. Storper says

this is because meeting face-to-face communication exacts financial and opportunity

costs, they signal a higher level of commitment to another person or group. Sending an

email is easy. Showing up, prepared, for a meeting is much less so (Storper, 2013, p.

167). This forces individuals to be prepared, or face the risks of shame and possible

exclusion from future interactions. Storper unfolds this line or reasoning at length, backed

by charts full of Bayesian analysis (Storper, 2013, p. 173), to argue that the probability of

good, even novel, outcomes increases when people meet face-to-face. He also articulates

his arguments in prose.

> Codifiable is easy, cheap, you can just "plug in" … codifiable information has a
> stable meaning that is associated in a determinate way with the symbol system in
> which it is expressed … Such information is cheap to transfer because its
> underlying symbol systems can be widely disseminated through information
> infrastructure, sharply reducing the marginal cost of individual messages.
> By contrast, noncodifiable information is only loosely related to the symbol
> system in which it is expressed. … If the information is not codifiable, merely
> acquiring the symbol system or having the physical infrastructure is not enough for
> the successful transmission of a message.
> Face-to-face encounters provide an efficient technology of transaction under
> these circumstances by permitting a depth and speed of feedback that is impossible
> in other forms of communication. (Storper, 2013, pp. 168-169)

In the next paragraph, Storper discusses why it is that face-to-face is better

able to transmit complex ideas and therefore lead to situationalism, economic advantages

based on proximity.

> Communication in a face-to-face context occurs on many levels at the same time—
> verbal, physical, contextual, intentional, and nonintentional. Such multidimensional
> communication is essential to the transmission of complex, tacit knowledge. Social
> psychologists argue that creativity results from several different ways of processing
> information at one time, including not only the standard deductive way but also
> analogical, metaphoric, and parallel methods as well (Bateson 1973;
> Csikszentmihalyi 1997). … The full benefits of diversity and serendipity, including
> the urban phenomena of bumping into people that was celebrated by Jacobs (1969),

are only realized through these multiple levels of communication. (Storper, 2013, p. 169)

In addition to clarity, the above passage also notes that proximity can spark "serendipity" and the "joys of bumping into someone." These bear directly on this researched project's key findings, the most valued experiences at creative writing conferences are interactions with others, both because of personal pleasure and gaining valuable information, and the lasting, special, sense of belonging to a community of authors.

Storper continues to explore additional benefits of face-to-face communication, noting that it "reduces risk."

> Trust and Incentives in Relationships … refers to the ways that copresence reduces risks in economic relationships. With tacit knowledge there is always uncertainty about what the other agent means and intends to do, and hence it is possible for one to free ride or manipulate the other. These moral hazards can sometimes be reduced through improvements in the transparency or clarity of the information itself, or in how well it can be verified. But when this isn't possible, reducing them requires a relationship between the interested parties. Being close enough literally to touch each other allows visual contact and emotional closeness—the basis for building human relationships. (Storper, 2013, p. 170)

This risk assessment is born of the transparency that face-to-face communication fosters, and it makes for an environment that is mutually beneficial.

> It is easiest to observe and interpret a partner's behavior in a face-to-face situation. Knowing the intentions of another actor enables us to decode the practical consequences of what they are expressing to us (Husserl, 1968). Humans are effective at sensing nonverbal messages from one another, particularly about emotions, cooperation, and trustworthiness.
> Face-to-face may promote the development of trust. Trust depends on reputation effects or multilayered relations between the parties to a transaction that can create low-cost enforcement opportunities (Gambetta, 1988; Lorentzen, 1992). Trust also comes from the time, money, and effort spent in building a relationship. These costs are sunk, so increasing them signals a willingness to embark on a repeated relationship; absent a second date, the value of the first date disappears. Yet to create a relationship bond, the costs must be substantial and transparent. Email, paradoxically, can be so efficient that it destroys the value of the message.

42

The email medium greatly reduces the cost of sending a message, somewhat reduces the cost of receiving the message, and makes the costs mostly nontransparent. (Storper, 2013, pp. 170-171)

In the above, Storper notes that spending time with another person or group exacts both financial costs and represents an investment in time that could be spent elsewhere, in other words, an opportunity cost. This has implications and can drive other effects, such as screening. Screening is inevitable because the human condition limits the number of substantial interactions that anyone can sustain or endure.

Even if face-to-face contact is an efficient technology of transacting, it is nonetheless costly, not least because it is time consuming. We do not have the luxury of face-to-face encounters with the entire world, so we need to screen out the people with whom we want to interact. How do we identify such people? One way is formal screening procedures—examination and certification. Another is the development of informal networks in which members of the network develop and share a pool of knowledge about members' competence. (Storper, 2013, p. 171)

Because face-to-face interactions are costly, and to be sustained require regular contact, such relationships tend to have a localized nature—a key aspect of spatial economics, which Storper terms "situationalism."

(Membership) … in some internationalized professions—such as academia—… does not always require colocation, although is certainly reinforced by face-to-face contact in the conference circuit. In other activities, these information networks can only be maintained within a restricted geographical area. In such fields as fashion, public relations, and many of the arts (including cinema, television, and radio) there are international networks "at the top," *but in the middle of these professions networks are highly localized, change rapidly, and the information used by members to stay in the loop is highly context dependent* (emphasis mine). (Storper, 2013, pp. 171-172)

Face-to-Face screening roles first by evaluation and screening, and over the longer time frame, by socializing. As noted above, this is particularly important for those professionals in the middle ranks, or by extension, those entering the arts.

The screening of network members and potential partners is complex because much of what is most valuable about partners is their tacit knowledge, whose meanings

are highly culture and context dependent (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Karl Polanyi (1966, p. 4) argued that tacit and metaphoric knowledge is deeply embedded in specific contexts. Thus, potential partners need to know each other, or have a broad common background. *They learn to share the "codes" that show that they have certain criteria of judgment, which in turn signal to others that they belong to the same social world* (emphasis mine) (Coleman 1990). This gives them the means to get in the loop. Socialization is inevitably achieved in large measure through face-to-face contact, from family, schooling, and the social environment in one's community and workplaces. Notice, then, that face-to-face contact performs its screening role at two timescales in the economic process: in the long run, by socializing people; and in the short run, by permitting potential collaborators to evaluate others' performance in professional groups and networks. (Storper, 2013, p. 172)

Storper's observations and analysis on this point are helpful here because of this research project's focus on a particular community of artists, a creative writing conference. In all of Storper's analysis above, he stresses the social and financial costs, and practical benefits of face-to-face communication. This can be seen at the SFWC. Storper notes that, in short, it takes time and money to meet face-to-face, but the payoffs can be substantial—message fidelity, greater engagement, and higher quality ideas and project outcomes.

The next and final passages of this literature analysis still focus on Chapter 11, face-to-face communication, but they speak more to the emotional or affective components of interaction. This, too, emerged as a key category of the coding process of the SFWC data, and it is for this reason that the passages below are included, despite their length. It will be invaluable in unpacking the data in the findings section.

The Benefits of Face-to-Face Communication. In Chapter 11 of Keys to the City, Storper says that face-to-face communication is "an act," "a performance," and people get a "rush" and "buzz" from it.

The final row of Table 11.1 shows another dimension of the incentive effects of face-to-face contact, which goes beyond verbal or visual communication. Face-to-

44

face communication does not derive its richness and power merely from allowing us to see each other's faces, and detect the intended and unintended messages that can be sent by such visual contact. According to Goffman (1959), face-to-face communication is a performance—a means to information production and not merely more efficient exchange. In this performance, speech, intentions, role-playing, and a specific context all come together to raise the quantity and quality of information that can be transmitted. Moreover, performance raises effort by stimulating imitation and competition. Psychologists have shown that the search for pleasure is a powerful motivating force, and certain kinds of pleasure are linked to pride of status and position: we imitate others, try to do better than them, and derive pleasure from succeeding at so doing. When we make an effort, and are on the route to success, there is a biophysical rush that pushes us forward. All pleasure, however, quickly recedes as it blends into the preceding "normal" state, and it is only by once again changing this state that pleasure is found again; the search for such pride of status and position must therefore be continuously renewed (Scitovsky, 1976). Face-to-face contact provides the strongest, most embodied signals of such desire, *and can generate the rush that pushes us to make greater and better efforts* (emphasis mine) (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1998). (Storper, 2013, pp. 172-173)

The foregoing speaks volumes to the benefits of the meet-ups, minglers, and galas that have been designed into the San Francisco Writers Conference. They add to the joy of communication. Again, though, Storper returns to the practical aspects of one-on-one interactions. He notes that it "cuts down on free riding—both parties must contribute meaningfully." In short, the interactions must be perceived as mutually beneficial if they are to be sustained.

> What can face-to-face contact do to select the symmetrical equilibrium where free riding is reduced? Face-to-face contact—a meeting between the players—can play two distinct roles. First, a face-to-face meeting prior to the start of the game may allow players to coordinate on this equilibrium. It is quite difficult to go into a meeting maintaining a commitment to put in no effort. This is partly because of the inherent simultaneity of the meeting: the two players are placed in a situation where neither has a mechanism to commit to making no effort. And it is partly because of the psychological effects of face-to-face contact; participants want to be highly esteemed by others, and this is likely to be fostered by cooperation rather than conflict. With face-to-face contact, it is thus difficult for one player to maintain the position that they will put in no effort and free ride on the other. (Storper, 2013, p. 175)

Meetings filter out people in a second manner, too. Since being prepared

incurs preparation time—a cost—those who do not prepare tend to drop out or are

marginalized. This is consistent with the SFWC's admonitions for paid attendees to be

prepared and "do their homework" prior to the conference (Library, 2019).

> A second role that a face-to-face meeting can play derives from the fact that meetings are a relatively costly form of information exchange. Suppose that players can only exchange their information in a meeting. Attending the meeting has a real cost, and crucially, each player makes the decision of whether or not to attend on the basis of her own information; it is in the meeting that information is shared and the decision on whether or not to go ahead with the project is taken. How does this change the situation, as compared to costless information sharing? If the meeting cost is high enough, then players who have done no research (as well as those who have received a signal) will not find it worthwhile to attend the meeting. As a consequence, doing nothing is no longer privately profitable; each player has to pay a cost (that of attending the meeting) before obtaining the partner's information, and the cost is not worth paying given the original information. (Storper, 2013, p. 175)

The phrase "attending meetings" may have a corporate flavor, but there is a

counterpart in the world of art when it comes to analogous activities, such as attending

workshops, openings, or clinics. In such cases, art groups screen by allowing members

inside an "in-group."

> The Formation of In-Groups: Getting into the Loop The prior screening or socialization of potential partners can be provided in some contexts by formal certification and institutionalized screening mechanisms such as professional examinations. In other contexts, however—particularly in creative activities, where ability is difficult to evaluate, and where performance criteria cannot be codified and institutionalized—such formal techniques may not be useful. Instead informal networks—being in the loop or the in-group—may take their place as screening mechanisms. (Storper, 2013, p. 176)

In the latter part of chapter 11, Storper explains the process by which such

groups are formed.

> What is the informational basis of such a group? Where prior screening and certification of individuals' ability or effort is not possible, there has to be open although not necessarily costless membership to all. Yet once in, members cease to

46

be anonymous, knowing who is in the group, observing the performance of members, and in turn being observed by other members. This information is used to maintain the quality of the group. At its simplest, a record of failure is used as the basis for expulsion from the group. Group members are therefore continually judging and being judged, and know exactly who is in and who is out.

The process of in-group formation works in the following manner. *Insiders work harder than outsiders because they fear ejection from the group* (emphasis mine). (Storper, 2013, pp. 176-177)

Being in an in-group benefits the members as individuals, but it also benefits them as a group, too. There are reduced chances of failure, in part because the group is more likely to have hard-working and high performing members (Storper, keys, 177), and this increase the chance of any join-projects being successful, too.

Thus, by joining, high-ability people have a higher probability of undertaking successful projects so they are more likely to survive as members of the group. Members of the group will (conditional on their ability) have higher earnings than outsiders because they are matching with (on average) higher-quality people. Members of the group will also work harder than outsiders; the earnings differential creates an incentive to stay in the group, and the probability of staying in is increased by hard work. Finally, although initial access to the group is open to all, there may be an entry cost, perhaps in the form of time and effort to become known as deserving of belonging to the group. Even if this is the same for people of all abilities, it will have a greater deterrent effect for the less able because their income gain from being in the group is less. (Storper, 2013, p. 177)

So, there is a virtuous circle. In-groups form because they increase member effort and chance of success. But there are additional factors at work, what Storper called earlier, "Dark Matter." In this case, the degree of success is typically closely related to spatial proximity, literally being in the same room together.

Who gains and who loses from this process? If no group existed, all high-ability individuals would have the same utility, as would all low-ability individuals. The existence of the group creates a gap between insiders and outsiders, and this gap is larger for high-ability individuals than low-ability ones, and is greater when the effort is endogenous and entry costs shape the selection of individuals initially entering the group. Outsiders are the big losers, as refinement of group membership forces them to make worse matches. The gainers from the in-group are the high-ability insiders. Thus, face-to-face contact removes anonymity, and allows people to judge and be judged. If you have been observed to fail, then there is some

probability that you are branded an outsider and group members will no longer seek to match with you. The magnitude of this probability parameter is, in many activities, inherently spatial. In a faceless and anonymous world, in-groups cannot form. By removing anonymity, face-to-face contact raises the probability of good, step-by-step iterative judgments about the abilities of others. An in-group that forms to generate and share this information improves the quality of matches made by workers, also sharpens the incentives for individuals to succeed, and increases the work effort of group members. (Storper, 2013, pp. 177-178)

Finally, while success can, literally, be its own reward. Storper notes an

additional, value-added benefit that he terms "buzz." It is so pleasurable that, Storper

says, it is "super-addictive" (Storper, 2013, p. 180).

Face-to-face contact is an efficient technology of communication; a means of overcoming coordination and incentive problems in uncertain environments; a key element of the socialization that in turn allows people to be candidates for membership of in-groups and to stay in such groups; and a direct source of psychological motivation. The combined and super-additive effects of these features is buzz. These various internetwork, highly dynamic, and unplanned contact systems were alluded to by Jacobs (1969) in her intuition that urban diversity is central to certain kinds of economic creativity, because of the specific advantages of unplanned and haphazard internetwork contact.
      The examples of buzz are abundant. The design, entertainment, and advertising industries have strong crossover effects in their development of content, and this is why places such as New York, Los Angeles, London, and Paris concentrate them together (Pratt 2002; Scott 2005). Higher education, finance, and government are a powerful nexus of ideas and contact networks for the socialization of elites along with the coordination of their joint projects. Colocation is especially important to these processes because it provides a low-cost way for new ideas and talent to make their way into existing activities by facilitating access for newcomers as well as lowering the costs of evaluation on the part of those already in the relevant loops. New relationships are hence made easier, cheaper, and more effective than they would be without colocation. Buzz cities continue to have such force today because they are the places where, more than ever, critical problems of coordination in the modern economy are resolved through face-to-face contact. (Storper, 2013, pp. 180-181)

Cities that are known for globalization are, Storper says, "paradoxically" also

prime buzz-places, due to the rich talent pool and their interactions.

Paradoxically, buzz cities are often those we most closely associate with globalization because they are important nodes of highly developed international business and culture networks, with high levels of international travel-and-meeting

activity, and high concentrations of both high- and low-skilled immigrants. They frequently host many multinational enterprises. The highest levels of international business also require insertion into locally grounded government and political networks in order to function efficiently. The most globalized cities also seem to have the most localized buzz. (Storper, 2013, p. 181)

This same juxtaposition was noted in an interview with SFWC co-founder, Michael Larsen when he said that San Francisco was going to lead the way and be a part of the "Pacific Century" (Larsen, 2019).

How can a city develop buzz? This is a question that interests Storper and anticipated the question at the heart this study, namely, how does a creative writing event develop buzz. Storper has suggestions on how a city or region might develop buzz. Face-to-face is a critical component, but it must be preceded by considerable effort to bring in a critical mass of resources. This may be beyond the ability of any one entity to effect.

> In recent policy thinking about how to make cities successful, city leaders have been enamored of the notion that attracting skilled workers and enhancing their opportunities for creativity will make cities prosper, working backward from observing cities such as Hong Kong or London. I have extensively critiqued these accounts—in chapters 2–4—as having effectively reversed the order of causality: places grow and prosper because they get the firms and jobs that attract these kinds of people. And yet it can be seen that it is quite logical for certain people to have a strong preference for interaction through face-to-face contact, and want to locate themselves where the planned or serendipitous interactions will be more probable. To kick off this dynamic, however, a minimal threshold of colocation of firms must first occur, which in turn generates the critical mass of people that in turn raises the benefits of face-to-face contact. The chicken of the process is the spatially concentrated demand for skilled labor; the eggs are interaction, deal making, and learning-by-interacting. (Storper, 2013, pp. 181-182)

Summary

As noted in the problem statement, the combined circulation of the three top trade publications is in excess of 160,000 issues a month, and this is dwarfed by their combined web presence. These run into the millions of monthly page-viewings (Writers

Digest, 2019; The Writer, 2019). But despite this, most of their material is limited to brief

informational listings, in the manner of public service announcements, or breezy,

uncritical articles. These are typically surrounded by paid ads. While this material may

prove helpful for writers who want to know which events are in their region, or where

they might find an event that specialized in a particular genre, no other evaluative

assessments are to be found in these pages.

The Association for Writers & Writing Programs promotes best practices

through its publications and web pages (AWP, 2018). It has a list of guidelines that it

refers to as hallmarks, laying out criteria and a rubric for best practices for conference

organizers. It also has suggestions for conference-goers and presenters. The AWP is the

only national, professional organization devoted to this type of activity, but it does not

appear to have sponsored or conducted substantial scholarly research on the processes or

activities constitute the typical creative writing conference.

The Grounded-Theory Method was chosen for this study as an appropriate

tool to employ. Given the relative lack of information or scholarship on the subject of

creative writing conferences, and because the San Francisco Writer's Conference was

willing to open itself up to be closely examined, Grounded Theory seemed to be a

suitable methodology.

In the case of this study, the initial findings pointed towards the importance of

community, and the construct of spatial economics, particularly the work of Michael

Storper's framework of "buzz" offered a way into the data to find actionable insights into

revising or adapting a creative writing conference's best practices to enhance a sense of

community. Buzz, as subsequent chapters will explore, captures the significance of

individual relationships, but it goes further. It delves into the importance of face-to-face communications. Moreover, when this construct "moves outward" to integrate these one-on-one relationships with their spatial environment, spatial economics also postulates reasons for the significance of context, of "place." Specifically, this framework allows for discussions of why some places allow for unique products, including cultural "artistic" products. The last rounds of coding were done with this cognitive framework as a guide.

Storper's concept of "Buzz" offers a both a framework to view this study's data and key findings and to offer specific recommendations. The centrality of people/community speaks to three levels of analysis seen in the work of Storper and others. First, is the meaning and benefit to individuals that can come from gaining access to information that can only be conveyed face-to-face. Second is the group-dynamics that arise from continual face-to-face interactions that spur greater participation, more successful outcomes, as well as—unfortunately for some individuals—exclusion. Finally, there are the regional benefits of a vibrant cultural economy. All of these bear on the data and dynamics that are at work in the San Francisco Writers Conference.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the most important aspects of a creative writing conference as seen through the eyes of various participants of the 2019 San Francisco Writer's Conference, and to compare these practices to the standards proposed by the Association of Writers & Writing Programs.

The study was structured to survey all participant categories: organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers. The goal was to identify those practices that could be emulated, refined, and adopted by other creative writing conferences to good effect. This chapter reviews the rationale behind the study's design decisions.

For the most part, the sections that follow are presented in the chronological order in which the survey proceeded. This chapter covers the ethical considerations, the theoretical model guiding the design of data collection and analysis, choice of theoretical framework guiding the interpretation and discussion of the findings, the population sample, the creation of survey and interview instruments, the Institutional Review Board processes, the implementation of the on-line survey, data extraction and preparation, the follow-up interview logistics, expanding the data-gathering to video and publicly available print materials, the coding and analysis, and the determination of key findings.

Ethical Considerations

All research for this project was conducted in accordance with the policies and procedures set forth by the California State University, Chico, Institutional Review Board. Documentation of this approval can be found in Appendices B and C.

Specifically, all subjects selected for this study and subsequent interview(s) were adults who voluntarily participated. The secure, on-line survey they completed was approved by the IRB, as were the 10 interview questions and consent forms.

Survey responses were anonymous, and interview subjects were allowed to choose whether to be identified or remain anonymous, and of their time to cease participation at any point without negative consequences.

No members of any protected class were approached or participated.

All other documents or audio/visual materials downloaded and studied were freely available to the public, as were the non-profit tax statements used to establish the organization's budget.

The lead researcher has served as a volunteer at the SFWC, but has not received any financial consideration or payment for that work or this research study.

Theoretical Model Employed for Data
Collection and Analysis

This study employed a Grounded Theory methodology to gather data, code it, and analyze it to identify key categories and arrive at the study's findings. This method has proven effective in gathering field data for detailed qualitative analysis, and it seemed particularly well suited to study creative writing conferences. The SFWC allowed itself to be studied, and this made it possible to gather data directly from surveys and interviews.

Moreover, the data could be evaluated against the lead researcher's observations and experience within the organization.

This study was designed to include all classes of conference participants: organizers, paid attendees, volunteers, vendors, and presenters. These last two categories included a variety of writing-related professionals, such as agents, editors, writing-coaches, publicists, publishers and booksellers. No previous research had been conducted that attempted to draw on these multiple classes of participants.

The "position" taken by the lead researcher in this project was that of participant-observer. After several years of being a volunteer, in capacities that made him visible to the SFWC's participants and speakers, the lead researcher was able to be a "floating problem solver" during SFWC 19, tasked with a light duty-load that still allowed him to circulate survey information and answer questions about this research project.

Grounded Theory methods of data collection also require the researchers to reflect on their relationship with the object of study. In this case, the study's lead researcher was a participant-observer who had served as a volunteer at six previous SFWC events. This presented both opportunities and challenges that are discussed in a later chapter.

Initial data gathering began on October 1, 2018, using an online survey. Additional data streams were sought as the research progressed, and the project eventually included an interview with a co-founder of the event, a publicly available online recording of a presentation by the current leadership, public web pages, newsletters, non-profit filings, and conference handouts to study for key categories and

emergent themes. This was done through a constant comparative analysis and continual

coding of the data. This was an iterative process where questions and criteria drove the

initial research rather than hypothesis. Saldana explains this process in *The Coding*

Manual for Qualitative Research.

> How do you "average" 10 different but somewhat comparable codes to arrive at a category? There is no qualitative algorithm or formula that adds up the words and calculates their mean. But there are methods for synthesizing the collective, not to arrive at a reduced answer but to move toward consolidated meaning. That meaning may take the symbolic form of a category, theme, concept, or assertion, or set in motion a new line of investigation, interpretive thought, or the crystallization of a new theory. I blithely offer: 'Quantitative analysis calculates the mean. Qualitative analysis calculates meaning'. (Saldana, 2015, p. 10)

Survey data was initially pre-coded using the criteria derived from the AWP

hallmarks (AWP, 2018). The coding process was recursive and reflective, using memoing

and journaling to capture initial impressions and to move beyond any limiting pre-

conceptions inherent in the AWP's approach. During secondary coding, prior to

saturation, several categories emerged as potential key categories. These were people,

community, and the idea that "San Francisco is a special place." This last code was not

conflated with comments related to the specific venue of the conference. It also did not

emerge as a key category across all classes of participants, but it was a frequent part of

the leadership's narrative, and is therefore significant on that level.

There were two primary reasons that additional data-steams were included.

The first was due to concerns of over an initial low-participation rate in the survey,

through the end of 2018, and the second was to further explore categories that emerged

from the initial rounds of coding. Even when the survey response rate increased, the other

data remained a part of the project. This flexible approach to research is consistent with

common practices in Grounded Theory, adapting the research in response to the ongoing

data analysis and apparent and emerging categories. Mills describes this process in *Qualitative Data Analysis*.

> You construct this evidential trail gradually, getting an initial sense of the main factors, plotting the logical relationships tentatively, testing them against the yield from the next wave of data collection, and modifying and refining them into a new explanatory map, which then gets tested against new cases and instances. This is the classic procedure of analytic induction. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 287)

As data was gathered and analyzed, coded and categorized, the key category of community emerged, and a suitable cognitive framework was located to facilitate further analysis and discussion of the project's findings. This framework originated in the field of economics and is based on spatial economics or placed-based analysis, was developed in the late 1980s by a number of theorists, among them Dr. Michael Storper. Storper has continued to work in this specialized branch of urban development, and his seminal work offers a number of analytical tools, two of which were applied to this data. This analysis is discussed in the next section.

<div align="center">

Choice of Cognitive Framework for
Discussion and Recommendations

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As noted in the literature review, Michael Storper's spatial-economic theory of situationalism was chosen to analyze the key category that emerged, that of "community." Storper's concept of "Buzz" has three advantages for use in this study. First, a great deal of Storper's work focuses specifically on the artists and communities that have benefitted from cultural clusters. Second, his work offers explanatory tools that can be readily applied by researchers outside the field of economics. His explanation of codifiable and non-codifiable information and tacit knowledge, once understood, are easy to utilize. The premise of tacit knowledge, then, forms the basis for the third advantage:

"Buzz." Buzz can be deconstructed in such a way as to be applicable to creative writing conferences. This means that Buzz can be the basis of discussion and recommendations for this project and offer a way to unpack the findings embedded in the data and the key category of community.

Buzz is best understood as an extensive analysis of non-verbal communication that is best discerned in close proximity to others. Additional related concepts deal with how being face-to-face requires the investment of time and, often, money. These investments signal a commitment that engenders trust. This commitment can then lead to membership in an "in-group." Finally, to stay in the group, a member must continually show up prepared and not "free ride" (Storper, 2013, p. 169). Ultimately, Storper argues, this dynamic yield better outcomes for all.

Another attractive feature of Storper's approach is that it includes three levels of analysis: the individual, the group, and the region or locality.

The Population Sample

The San Francisco Writers Conference was chosen for several reasons. It is a mid-to-large sized conference, drawing about 300 paid attendees (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019c), 90 volunteers (Library, 2019), scores of presenters, and dozens of agents, editors, and publishers (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019d). Additionally, it is highly regarded in the community. It was listed as number three in a 2017 feature article, "The top 10 writing conferences in North America" (Mattson, 2017).

Another reason this conference was selected was because its organizers were willing to provide full-access to the lead researcher, who had volunteered at the event for the previous six years. While this was a sample of convenience, the researcher was

allowed to repeatedly solicit participation across all categories of participants. The leadership, presenters, and volunteers were available before, during, and after the event. Paid attendees and exhibitors were accessible during and after the event. This allowed the on-line survey link to be widely disseminated. Specifically, the event organizers provided email access to the volunteers, the top leadership, and the sessions' presenters. Organizers also allowed printed materials promoting the survey to be placed throughout the conference, and the event director, during the Saturday morning breakfast, encouraged all attendees to complete the survey. Response rate for all participants ran to 46 of the totals of all participants in all classes, approximately 300 paid attendees, 65 presenters, 20 agents, 22 editors, 17 exhibits, as well as 90 volunteers (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019c).

Creation of Survey and Interview Instruments

The initial thrust of this investigation began with the development of an online survey. Upon recommendation of the thesis chair, the survey was limited to five questions.

1. Why do you participate in the SFWC?

2. What do you do at the SFWC?

3. How long have you participated in the SFWC?

4. What are the best elements of the SFWC?

5. What, if anything, could be done to make the SFWC more rewarding or successful?

These questions allowed for respondents to describe their involvement with the SFWC and to express satisfaction or concerns about the various aspects and

operations of the event. The open-ended questions were a deliberate choice to allow themes to emerge without constraints from preconceptions on the part of the researcher.

Data collection began in October, and the response rate was low, initially. Only 12 respondents had completed the survey by November 2018. A follow-up, semi-structured interview was developed to allow for an alternative source of data, in keeping with the Grounded Theory methodology. The survey, while intended primarily for the leadership, was approved by IRB to be "snowballed" or forwarded to additional, potential respondents who were mentioned during the interview process.

1.   If you were a part of bringing your writing conference into being, please describe that process.

2.   What did you hope your conference would accomplish?

3.   What were the biggest obstacles you faced?

4.   How did you go about assembling the team that brought your conference into being or that helped you run an ongoing conference?

5.   What advice do you have for anyone who is tasked with running a writing conference and have it be a successful, sustainable, event?

6.   Please give a brief rundown on the processes and logistics of arranging a venue, volunteer pool, financial backing, faculty/presenters panel, and marketing to recruit potential participants.

7.   What is the most important pitfall to avoid?

8.   What is the best advice to attract sponsors and partners?

9.   What are the differences in running a brand-new conference from one that is up-and-running for several years?

10. What would you say to anyone hoping to launch a conference, retreat, or workshop aimed at helping writers?

Institutional Review Approval Process

Prior to launching data collection for the survey, this research project received approval from the California State University, Chico Institutional Review Board. The study was granted exempt-status, see Appendix B, as the population did not include any protected classes nor collect sensitive information that could be linked to any particular individual. The information gathered was stored on a secure password-protected server.

As noted above, a semi-structured interview was developed in November 2018 and approved in December 2018, see Appendix C. One one-on-one interview was conducted in February 2019 with the SFWC's co-founder, Michael Larsen. The interview protocol allowed for the subject to remain anonymous or be identified at his or her discretion. Mr. Larsen chose to be identified, and answered all 10 questions in detail, providing additional, anecdotal bits of history about the event that he and his wife, Elizabeth Pomeda, started in 2004. Other board members were unable to meet and talk at length, and several provided by email partial responses to the 10-question survey above.

Implementation of the On-line Survey, Data Extraction and Preparation

Initial research was done using on-line data collection for the convenience of both respondents and researchers. Data entry done by the respondents makes for reduced chance of error and provides for greater flexibility in when and how participants can respond. Electronic submissions also reduce direct costs, require less labor, and can accelerate the entire process of data collection and analysis.

The five-question survey was deployed on a secure server using Lime Survey software. This is a shareware product and was released using lead researcher's domain at www.http://robblightfoot.com/thesis/survey/. This was labeled: "The Core Elements of Outstanding Writing Conferences and Retreats." By using this link, potential participants were shown a web page containing the informed consent and indicated, by clicking the link, that they were at least 18 years of age.

The survey went live on October 1, 2018, and began receiving responses on October 3rd. It remained in place until March 16, 2019, approximately one month after the 2019 San Francisco Writer's Conference ended. Survey data was extracted each week to an Excel spreadsheet and ported into NVivo 12-Plus, where it was coded, examined, and annotated as described below. All data was kept in a password protected computer as per the IRB's authorization.

The survey link was initially shared by email with the SFWC leadership team, and subsequently the link was published in the SFWC newsletter in October of 2018. This newsletter is an opt-in publication that goes out to anyone who has expressed an interest in the SFWC, including previous and potential attendees. In January 2019, the lead researcher was allowed to speak briefly at the SFWC volunteers' orientation and he described the survey and its purpose. Shortly thereafter, the 90 volunteers were sent the above link via email.

Immediately before the conference, on February 13, 2019, the link was sent to those presenters and agents who had shared their email or Twitter accounts on the SFWC's public web page.

During the February 2019 SFWC, printed materials were distributed in each meeting room, dining areas, and hallways at the San Francisco Hyatt Regency Embarcadero, the event's physical location, with information about the research project and a "short link" participants could use to more easily access the survey. This link was bit.ly/SFWC-5QuickQuestions, and it automatically brought people to the original survey link above. Despite this effort to simplify participation, it was discovered shortly after this link was released that some potential respondents were unable to access the survey with the bit.ly link. This was because the link's letters were case-sensitive, and at least one person who had tried the link had used lower-case "Qs." Once this came to light, a second link was put into play that allowed both the upper and lower case versions of the link to launch the survey.

There is no way of knowing how many potential respondents may have attempted to take the survey, been turned away, and not tried again, during the several hours this problem went undetected. But in spite of this glitch, the data set that was obtained was adequate to produce recurring codes, saturated categories, and key themes. Forty-six respondents, while sufficient to generate findings using Grounded Theory methodology, reflect the perceptions of about one in ten conference participants.

Follow-up Interview

One of the tenants of the grounded theory method is a flexible approach to data gathered and how emerging themes can cause researchers to adjust their plans. This may mean that questions are altered or reshaped. In the case of this research project, initial data analysis hinted strongly at a strong, positive affect that respondents had towards the SFWC because they felt part of a safe and affirming community of writers.

This pointed the way to a deeper dive into the history and design of the event, questions that the founders and current leadership seem best able to answer. It also seemed a prudent supplemental strategy in case the survey's response rate remained low. In time, and with continued efforts to recruit different categories of constituents through different channels of communication, the survey response rate did increase to a point suitable to do the necessary analysis. But in the interim, the plan to reach out to the leadership proved useful by providing deeper insights into the history and primary goals of those who launched and those who are currently running the event, now in its 16th year.

Arranging the interviews was delayed somewhat because the amended IRB approval was postponed when the university closed an extra week because of the Camp Fire wildfire that devastated Butte County, destroying the city of Paradise. Once the initial shock of this disaster abated, the forms were processed. By this time, in December, most of the potential interview subjects were buried in the work required by the conference. Most decline a full interview—one person said the interview was "too much like an essay." Others said they would talk when they could, but eventually declined as well. Several leaders did answer a few questions, via email, from the 10-question list. All remained supportive of the research project.

The one person who did sit down and talk was SFWC co-founder Michael Larsen. He was willing to speak "on the record" and be identified. He also answered all 10 questions at length and with candor, even touching on two awkward topics: his being distanced from his beloved conference by a recent leadership change, and problems with containing conference expenses related to catering bills. While significant topics, neither

of these two matters emerged as key findings, and so have not been not treated at length in this report.

Expanding the Data-Gathering

As survey results continued to come in, and in light of Mr. Larsen's information, data gathering was expanded to include all the publicly available newsletters on the SFWC website (Santos, 2019), dating to 2007. Some 273 newsletters were downloaded, converted into PDFs, and ported into NVivo to examine for word frequency. With NVivo's word-frequency and coding tools, the 12-year span of newsletters provided a kind of longitudinal look-back at the organization to see if the dominant and recurring coding categories that were emerging from the continuous coding were present as the event developed. This was to answer a question that emerged during the coding process: Are the current, emerging codes consistent with the conference's earlier narratives?

Next, in a similar fashion the SFWCs current public web pages were captured, converted into PDFs (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), and ported to NVivo. This was to see to what extent the print "presence" aligned with what participants perceived as the event's core characteristics, values, and practices. Finally, after the conference ended, many of the presenters shared notes and handouts from their sessions (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019b). In all, some 62 documents were made publicly available, and the content of the website itself. Immediately after the 2019 conference ended, 62 additional PDF documents were publicly shared by presenters. These were reviewed to see how the faculty engaged by the SFWC reflects its core beliefs and practices.

In addition, the foregoing, two other publicly available sources were investigated. The first was a presentation, captured on video, where all five current board members were giving a "preview" of the upcoming SFWC 19 (Library, 2019). Each of the five current board members spoke for 5-10 minutes, explaining their part of the operation and why they thought the event was worth attending. The various board members spoke enthusiastically about the event's history, newest features, and intangible aspects that made it a convivial event. This video, in large part, answered many questions that the board members were too busy to answer via this study's 10-question survey. Consequently, the 44-minute video was transcribed, and coded alongside the survey and Michael Larsen's interview (Larsen, 2019).

The only other remaining source of data included here were public records of the SFWC's non-profit financial statements (ProPublica, 2017). These were accessed to provide accurate information about the approximate operating budget of the event when discussing the SFWCs size and complexity.

Two other sources of information are available but not included in this study, these are the two social media tools used by the SFWC: Twitter feed and Facebook. This material was includes more than 3200 Tweets, and more than 2,500 Facebook postings and comments, and was excluded from the present project out of concerns of time to adequately review these materials and space constraints in the report itself. These social media resources may be revisited in future research.

Coding and Data Analysis

As has been noted above, coding of responses began almost immediately. Experienced Grounded Theory practitioners caution researchers to avoid pre-conceptions or rigid hypotheses when initial coding is undertaken as a best practice. It is important when using Grounded Theory methods to remain open and allow patterns and themes to emerge from the data.

> Grounded theory methods are referred to as inductive in that they are a process of building theory up from the data itself. Induction of theory is achieved through successive comparative analyses. The logic of abduction is also much more apparent in the recent literature about grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006; Reichertz, 2007; Richardson & Adams St Pierre, 2005). Abductive reasoning occurs at all stages of analysis, but particularly during the constant comparative analysis of categories to categories that leads to theoretical integration. When using abductive reasoning, the researcher 'has decided … no longer to adhere to the conventional view of things … Abduction is therefore a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of discovery' (Reichertz, 2007, p. 220). (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11)

To that end, this study began with questions and, as Birks and Mills recommends, no specific hypothesis (2015, p. 79).

NVivo 12-Plus was used to compile data and run qualitative-analysis. Later, as the study broadened out to include transcripts and PDFs, these, too, were included. NVivo allows different forms of data—Excel spreadsheets, pdfs, and even emails and social media files—to be combined, searched, and coded. For this project, NVivo was used in the earliest phases for straight word-frequency analysis in a recursive set of coding sessions where the survey data were examined repeatedly using different groupings chosen by adjusting filter settings in the software. Such changes in groupings typically reveal different words and phrases that may or may not be useful for coding. NVivo provides an interface that allows the researcher to look at these words in context,

66

and at that point the phrase may be selected for inclusion in a particular coding

category—or not—as the researcher sees fit. For this project, the initial "pass" on the data

was done with the grouping filters set to seek the frequency of exact-matches. These

exact-matches were viewed for coding as described above. Then, additional queries were

run using, in turn, stemmed words, synonyms, specializations, and finally generalizations.

These different groupings allowed the textual material to be revisited and repeatedly

coded from different perspectives. The effect was, initially, to broaden the range of

codes. These codes were then examined for over-arching categories that eliminated

obscuring, slight variations in language used by respondents. From this, codes were

combined into categories that allowed key themes to be discerned.

This process is described in greater detail, with specific references to this

study's data, further on. Initially, though, this study's data was cross-checked against

criteria drawn from the trade publications and the professional organization, AWP,

identified in the literature review. This was done to see if these criteria might emerge in

the coding. Criteria most often mentioned by the trade publications appear in Figure 1.

A. What makes the Conference unique:	B. Faculty:	C. Location:
D. Highlights:	E. If you go:	F. How many attend:
G. When:	H. Price:	I. For more information:

Figure 1. Criteria adapted from the Writer's Digest, "Conference Scene" column
(Vaughn, 2018, p. 66).

These criteria were considered as potential codes, as described in the

discussion section below. Also, the AWP's guidelines were considered during the coding

process, again, to see to the degree to which they are features that emerged in survey

responses. An edited version of this document is available in Appendix A, an adapted

version is offered in Figure 2. The AWP says that a major conference should:

1. Have high standards for their faculty - They should be knowledgeable, distinguished artists, what are accessible and willing to interact. Overall, the faculty should be diverse, have varied approaches, and aesthetic sensibilities. They should be supported and compensated.
2. Have a clearly-focused program - There should be a mission statement, emphasis of craft. Additional areas may be taught. There should be different modes and levels of teaching and participation, panels, workshops. A low ration of students to faculty, a schedule that is available well in advance.
3. Have strong leadership, adequate staffing, and professional management - Design/hiring/management done by single director assisted by working board. Director should be appropriately compensated in accordance with workload, corresponding to conference size. Ideally, director should be a writer.
4. Have clear selection criteria for participation, appropriate for the level of writers. If vetting occurs, it should be done with clear, transparent criteria, on reasonable deadlines, by competent evaluators, via a writing sample that demonstrates proficiency in a given genre.
5. Have effective infrastructure and necessary assets - Contracts should be legally binding and clearly spell out direct/in-kind compensation. Costs, dates, deadlines, and expenses for meals and transportation should be established and readily available. Policies on costs/deadlines/refunds must by prominently displayed. Use clear, transparent, and equitable complaint procedures. Evaluation processes should occur each year and be used to for self-evaluation and improvement. Advertising must be truthful and include only confirmed and contracted presenters. Scholarships should be fairly awarded with transparent procedures and criteria. Brochures should clearly communicate all the above. Take steps to ensure safe and clean housing and affordable meals. Clear information on what is and is not included in terms of amenities such as towels, bedding, electrical appliances and accessories. And to keep off-site events within a safe, walkable distance. Offer a venue for the book sales that include participants' works. Make college credit available, if possible.

Figure 2. Recommendations adapted from the AWP's guidelines (AWP, 2018). Full text available in Appendix A.

As data were collected, coded, re-examined, the process moved towards

identifying a key category and the findings implicit in that data. Birks and Mills notes

that coding should be done continuously, and that insights gained should affect how the research process moves forward.

> Part of the process of concurrent data collection and analysis is the constant comparison of incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories. This is termed constant comparative analysis and is a process that continues until a grounded theory is fully integrated. (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11)

In the case of this research project, the lead researcher sought additional data in the form of an interview, located a video produced by the current Board of Trustees, and downloaded hundreds of PDFs for further analysis. Eventually, a key category did emerge, one that was clearly at the forefront of what participants most valued and appreciated about the San Francisco Writer's Conference: An inclusive sense of community that is infused into almost every aspect of the operation.

Determination of Key Findings

To further explore and illuminate this finding, the next section will draw upon the work of Michael Storper, in both his initial, seminal work in the field of spatial geography (Storper, 1997), and in his recent book, the Keys to the City (Storper, 2013) where he lays out a variety of concepts to explain why some cities become centers for artistic production. In the case of this study, his ideas can shed light on how the findings may be applied—or not—to improve other creative writing conferences.

A portion of his work will be adapted to provide a structure for this study's final analysis, as laid out in Figure 3. (Note: Not all of his concepts are used in this study.)

As a result of the foregoing, Storper says, face-to-face communication offers unique advantages that tend to accrue to specific regions. Face-to-face communication

allows for the transmission of tacit knowledge, which is at the core of regional

advantages and forms the basis of spatial economics (Figure 4).

Valuable information not uniformly available - First, valuable specialized information is not uniformly available. There are costs to obtaining it, and there are also barriers to access—one's social and economic position defines whether as well as under what conditions, and sometimes at what cost, one can obtain information.
The principle of regional context—situationalism, social and economic networks underpin access to information along with knowing what information to look for (Granovetter 2005; Powell 1990). Since networks structure our string of opportunities and roles, our membership in them affects whom we become, and therefore how we frame preferences and choices.
Goals are strongly influenced by comparison and emulation. Status comparison affects virtually every dimension of preference formation.… (Appiah 2010). What we compare to and emulate is not an exercise in global maximizing but instead depends on our social and geographical positions in networks, our role in the division of labor, and what is honorable (Frank 2001; Fine 2006).

Figure 3. Why some regions have creative clusters, Storper's "situationalism" (Storper, 2013, p. 161).

Summary

Responses to the survey were initially slow. Approval was sought and

obtained to augment the survey by including interviews with the SFWC's leaders. This

approval process took several weeks. During this time, additional survey responses were

reviewed against previous data and continually recoded and revised. This phase of data-

gathering ended weeks later, and provided three distinct sources for analysis: the survey,

an interview with a SFWC co-founder, and a transcription of public presentation by the

SFWC's Board of Trustees. These data were hand-coded and analyzed. The key category

that emerged was that of "community." The final phase of data-gathering and analysis

used the word frequency tools and filters in NVivo 12 Plus. NVivo was used to explore

three additional SFWC data sets: newsletters dating back to 2007, the public web-

1. Non-codifiable, "unique "tacit information is hard to transmit across networks.
2, Face-to-Face allows depth of communication, speedy feedback, and better error-correcting on the fly.
3. The "urban phenomena" of bumping into someone allows for serendipity.
4. Co-presence reduces risk, improves transparency, reduces "moral hazard" of free-riding or manipulation in a relationship.
5. Since meeting face-to-face is more expensive, it represents a sunk cost that increases commitment to the relationship.
6. Informal networks help us vet people that are worth our time.
7. Some professions require membership in local organizations to say "in the loop" to keep up with current trends. This is especially true in the fashion and art worlds.
8. Potential partners need to know each other or have a broad, common background. This is achieved through socialization, face-to-face contact.
9. Face-to-face interactions give us a "buzz," an addictive psychological pleasure.
10. Attending a meeting involves actual costs of time to be prepared. People who show up at meetings not prepared tend to be excluded. To be included, people must work hard. This is mutually beneficial since it increases the chances of success.
11. Continual solid performance gets you into the "in group," and once there, you'll work even harder to stay in. This level of commitment tends to be a barrier to access to newcomers unless they are known to be solid performers or soon get to be.
12. High ability people in groups tend to be more likely to help the group be successful in joint projects.

Figure 4. Advantages of face-to-face interaction, condensed and adapted from Keys to the City (Storper, 2013, pp. 165-182).

presence on March 3, 2019, and presenter handouts from the conference's 2019 breakout

sessions. Results were consistent with findings from the hand-coded data. Words relate to

"community" appeared frequently. This final phase of analysis and additional data-sets

provided multiple perspectives of the SFWC: a retrospective view, their public face in

March 2019, and the instructional content of the 2019 conference presenters. In the next

chapter, these findings will be discussed using a conceptual framework provided by

Michael Storper. Storper is an economist who has done seminal work looking at how

cities foster creativity. His theoretical framework—Situationalism—gives both descriptive and explanatory tools. Those parts of his work most applicable to this research project relate to the individual and group dynamics that arise from face-to-face interactions. These will frame the discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction

This study's findings are presented in this chapter. First, the study's goals and

population are reviewed briefly. Initial research questions and rubrics are restated and

reviewed against the categories that emerged during analysis. The data collection

processes, its phases, and the decision to expand the research are discussed. The project

timeline is described in conjunction with the multiple stages of the various coding

processes that were employed, starting with pre-coding, proceeding through initial coding

and continuing through secondary coding until category saturation was reached. Figure 5

presents the top 10 categories that emerged from secondary and axillary coding. It is

offered in support of the selected of a key category, "community." Also Figures 6

through eight present word frequency bar graphs allowing comparison between data sets,

and illuminate emerging nodes of words, phrases, and concepts. Adverse events affecting

the study are noted. Summary and Findings of Results concludes this chapter.

Study Goals and Population

This research project was conducted to identify the best practices in a creative

writing conference and to replicate them elsewhere.

The object of study was the 2019 San Francisco Writer's Conference-SFWC.

All five categories of participants were approached: organizers, presenters/faculty/

industry professionals on hand, paid attendees, vendors, and volunteers. The best estimate

of the population, drawn from various sources, is approximately 300-350 paid attendees

(San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019c), 5 board members, 1 co-founder, 65

presenters (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), 20 agents, 22 editors, 17

exhibitors, and 90 volunteers (Library, 2019). Various means were used to gather data,

including a five-question, online survey that ran from October 1, 2018 to March 16, 2019.

In addition, data came from an in-depth interview with one of the co-founders of the

SFWC (Larsen, 2019), a publicly available, video-taped presentation by the current

SFWC promoting/explaining the conference (Library, 2019), and publicly available web-

based resources, including 12 years of SFWC newsletters (Santos, 2019), a scan of the

SFWC website made on March 3rd 2019 (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), and

62 pdf handouts from the 2019 presenters (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019b).

<div align="center">Initial Research Questions and Rubrics</div>

The genesis of this research project was the central question: What are the

best practices in creative writing conferences as seen from the viewpoints of all

categories of participants?

Initial research revealed that existing literature lacked peer-reviewed

scholarship in this area, and that trade magazines tended to publish material that viewed

the individual writer-as-potential consumer (Vaughn, 2018), and the sole professional

organization, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs-AWP, offered guidelines

aimed mostly at conference organizers (AWP, 2018) with some supplementary materials

to coach potential faculty on how to be effectively prepared (AWP, 2019d). Neither the

trade publications nor AWP looked at conferences from the perspective of all classes of

potential participants: organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers.

Despite this gap—which this study attempts to fill—the rubrics and guidelines from the trade publications and the AWP did give a background that informed the initial, pre-coding sessions where incoming data were scanned for potential codes and placed in nodes. The basic rubric provided by trade publications appeared previously as Figure 1.

As the coding progressed, the top three items, 1A "What Makes the Conference Unique," "1B "Faculty," and 1C "Location," did emerge as categories. The importance of place, while not the key category, did emerge in the early coding and journaling. The expertise of the faculty was a consideration that was coding both under codes for "people" and for "high quality conference." As the coding proceeded, the codes that spoke to the expertise of the presenters were subsumed in axillary coding into the larger category of "people." The "people" category also included presenters who were praised for their friendliness. It is worth noting that the eventual, key category of "community" is not clearly reflected in the trade publications rubric.

The AWP's hallmarks provided the other touch point for preliminary analysis. These guidelines were noted in the lead researcher's initial jottings and journals, a standard process in Grounded Theory investigations. The AWP's recommendations are noted previously in Figure 2, and the original, unabridged, guidelines, are available in Appendix A.

The top categories did include two of these best-practice standards noted by the AWP. The AWPs first recommendation—regarding the importance of *qualified* faculty, presenters, and industry professionals—frequently occurred in the remarks from survey respondents. The term "quality," in relation to the presenters, regularly occurred

in four survey responses to the question: "What are the best elements of the SFWC?"
Respondent number four answered: "The people, the quality of speakers/vendors/
information." This remark was echoed almost verbatim by respondents seven, thirteen,
and twenty-two. Furthermore, this code persisted as additional data were brought in from
an interview with the co-founder and a video presentation by the current SFWC board. It
was later included "talented people" and "learning" as a distinct code.

   The AWP also recommends a "low faculty-student ratio." This did emerge as
a category. In a videotaped board presentation (Library, 2019), these criteria were
directly addressed by the SFWC's operation manager. She noted that the SFWC had
worked to have a ratio of 5-to-1 attendees to faculty (Library, 2019). During secondary
coding, this code was grouped with "accessible presenters" as it spoke in part to that
aspect of the conference. However, the inclusion of this ratio-code in the accessibility
code has an additional caveat: respondents who spoke to accessibility often did so in a
context that included friendliness (respondents 24, 39, 40) and "warm and encouraging
environment for learning" (respondent 4). These additional characteristics go beyond
mere student-to-faculty ratios. It appears that while expertise counts, it is a necessary and
but insufficient condition to be an ideal presenter.

   No other items on the AWP's checklist emerged as the coding proceeded to
conclusion. What did become apparent, in terms of sheer frequency, were the categories
"friendly people," a "nonjudgmental/safe community," and "SF is a special place." These
codes are considered at length later in this chapter.

Data Collection Processes, Phases, and the
Decisions to Broaden Data Collection

After IRB approval, initial data collection began on October 1, 2018, via a five-question, web-based survey. Initial emailing was to the organizers, who allowed the survey link to be featured in the SFWC's October 2018 newsletter (Santos, 2018). Pre-coding began at this time, as the responses were reviewed and annotated. NVivo software was obtained to facilitate storage and coding and to allow for word-frequency and thematic analysis. This initial phase considered rubrics derived from trade publications and professional organization, the Association of Writers & Writing Conferences.

Survey responses were slow through the end of November, even though the survey had been mentioned in the SFWC newsletter. By the end of November 2018, only nine individuals had responded. At this point, plans were made to solicit more survey participation as the SFWC 2019 event grew nearer. At the same time, it was decided to broaden data collection efforts in the interim period to include interviews with key personnel. Approval was sought from California State University Chico's Institutional Review Board. However, a major wildfire in the region disrupted the University's operations and delayed approval of the revised IRB until December, by which time most of the interview targets lacked the time to engage in a face-to-face interview.

Although the five-member board was too busy to sit for an extensive interview, three did respond piecemeal to the survey, focusing on those areas that fell within their particular expertise. One of the five board members did not respond or comment to either the five-question survey or multiple requests or an interview. Another board member declined to be interviewed because the 10-questions were "too much like an essay" and certain questions seemed to be too intrusive into the organization's

business practices. Nevertheless, despite declining the interview, this board member remained supportive and cooperative, completing the five-question online survey and allowing the link to be circulated to her email list.

The emails from the board members who did respond were not coded directly into the data, but they were incorporated into the jotting and journaling and thereby assisted in the secondary and continuous coding processes.

During the month of January 2019, the lead researcher was able to attend the SFWC Volunteer orientation and speak to the assembled crowd, explaining the project. A follow-up email was sent to the SFWC volunteer email list that included a survey link. During January and through February 12, an additional 11 responses were received, mostly from the ranks of the SFWC's 90 volunteers.

In early February, 20 people had responded to the surveys. On February 13th, just prior to the SFWC, the presenters, exhibitors, agents and editors listed publicly on the SFWC website were sent the survey link via their hemail or Twitter address. During the next two days, two additional responses were received from individuals who identified themselves as presenters.

Finally, from the beginning until the conclusion of the 2019 conference (8:00 am Saturday February 16 to 4:00 pm on Sunday February 17), participation in the five question online survey was solicited through printed materials positioned near numerous drinking fountains and by the complimentary notepads and pens at the back of each of a dozen conference rooms. The literature also was distributed directly, via face-to-face interactions by the lead researcher with conference attendees. The web link on the printed matter was a "short link" version of the actual survey link. This was done to make it

easier for potential respondents to access the survey. However, during the morning of Sunday, February 17, an issue arose. The short link was case-sensitive, and one attendee reported to the lead researcher that she had been unable to access the survey. This problem was solved with the creation of a second short link that did not use capital letters. It is unknown how many potential respondents may have attempted—and not gone back to complete—the online survey.

The survey remained in place until March 16, 2019, approximately one month after the conclusion of the SFWC. During this time, an additional 14 participants completed the on-line survey, making for 46 completed responses in all.

A complete timeline can be seen in Appendix K.

This amount of survey data was deemed adequate for analysis in light of the advice given by Saldana to have at least 10-15. Other theorists recommend as many as 20-40 (Saldana, 2015, p. 55).

While the SFWC board members were unable to speak face-to-face, one prime interview subject was available and eager to talk about the event he helped create 15 years ago. Co-founder Michael Larsen agreed to sit for an on-the-record, semi-structured interview. He met with the lead researcher on February 17, 2019, in the "Top of the Mark" restaurant, atop the historic Mark Hopkins International, the venue that the SFWC had called home from 2006-2018. This interview was recorded, transcribed, and imported into NVivo for analysis and coding.

About the same time, a scan of the SFWC's webpage and Facebook presence revealed a publicly posted videotape of a SFWC board presentation to the Mechanic's Institute Library (Library, 2019). In this video, the five board members discussed the

history, philosophy, faculty, and unique value proposition of the SFWC. The presentation's title was: "SFWC 2019 Preview."

These three data sets: the survey—Appendices D through H, the Michael Larsen interview—Appendix I, and the Board Preview Video—Appendix J, were all hand-coded through an iterative process described below. The results of the top five categories are displayed in Figure 5.

In addition to the manual coding, additional data sets were examined using NVivo 12-Plus word frequency analysis. The publicly available SFWC newsletter archive was downloaded and imported into NVivo for study. This was done to identify, if possible, any themes that occurred longitudinally, across time, in the organization's narrative. Those results are shown in Figure 6. As a counterpoint, the organizations current web-presence, as of March 3, 2019, was downloaded and imported into NVivo for word frequency analysis. Those results are shown in Figure 7. An NVivo analysis was performed on 62 presenter handouts that had been publicly posted to see what word/themes were prominent in the curriculum of those who had been invited to present. Those results are available in Figure 8.

Coding Processes

Pre-coding was guided by the basic rubric provided in the three biggest trade publications, *The Writer*, the *Writer's Digest*, and *Poets & Writers* (see Figure 1). Pre-coding was augmented by considering the hallmarks provided by the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (see Figure 2). Early on, there were no clear categories emerging from the data due to low participation. But early in 2019, as more individuals responded, numerous potential categories emerged.

Initial coding was conducted with NVivo's auto coding tools, and then the data were reviewed and recoded manually in an iterative, recursive processes of secondary coding. During this time the categories of "community," "people," "safe," "friendly," and "San Francisco is special," all appeared repeatedly in the survey comments and so were coded as specific nodes/categories. Comments related to "community" included: "a cornucopia of opportunities to learn and connect" (respondent 30) and "I like the pace — that there were moments to connect with other participants" (respondent 33). Friendliness and feelings of being in a safe place were often noted, "a safe place to be myself" (respondent 3), and that the event is "warm and encouraging environment for learning—Nonjudgmental and kind people who tend to agree to present and help other writers, and share their success" (respondent 2). Another respondent said that they encountered "Just a stellar crew of like-minded, heart-centered individuals passionate about supporting writers" (respondent 13).

Continuous coding narrowed and condensed the codes and reduced the number of unrelated categories. Codes such as "safe," "warm" and "friendly people" were aggregated into key categories such as "people" and ultimately into "community," in the sense of a group that acting in a supporting, appropriate, and caring manner. The other key category that emerged was "San Francisco is special." Comments such as an attendee who comes for the content, but enjoys the event's location, too: "(it covers) the trends, including future trends and always offered an excellent presentation with great reviews from the attendees. She (the organizer) knows how to build a team and has a head for who can present and what writers need to know. And, my goodness, it's in San Francisco!!" (respondent 42).

The secondary coding process ended up making a distinction between the City of San Francisco as being appealing as a destination and a place to play or enjoy fine food, and the sense that the location—the venue of the Hyatt Regency-Embarcadero, was a great place to have the event because of how it supported logistics. The prior was coded into "SF is special," and the latter into venue. These categories were never merged.

Eventually, however, the categories of "friendly people" and "talented people" were nested under the broader category of "people." The phrase "the people" was a common response, occurring in 18 out of 46 responses as an exact-match so that seemed to be an appropriate category descriptor. The questions that most often drew this response were: Why do you participate in the SFWC?" and "What are the best features of the SFWC?" This response rate encompasses 39% of survey respondents. When coding is expanded to include the mention of people as "friends" or other near synonyms, 23 of 46—some 50%—value this aspect of the SFWC enough to mention during a brief survey.

Later rounds of coding looked at the conference fostered relationships, both personal and professional, that were highly regarded, and these were all coded to the category of "community." So, too, were references to networking and meeting people to form lasting professional relationships. Eventually, these codes were subsumed in the single category of community. A final review of the survey data set found that 40 of 46 responses mentioned the importance of the relationships that were created, sustained, or deepened at the conference, the degree to which respondents felt safe, motivated, and affirmed through contact with this crowd, and, specifically, that their engagement with the SFWC made them a part of a writing community. This is true for 87% of survey respondents.

The same can be said for analysis on the interview with Michael Larsen. During the conversation, Larsen made more than 40 references to the importance of community, making it clear that it was a characteristic—a feature—designed in from the start. Larsen says:

> Despite all technology and how it connects people, the reality is there's really no substitute for human contact, particularly in a field like writing which is very isolated. You're sitting at the computer a lot. And so, we really need community…. And that was the amazing thing that always happened every year, about which I don't feel I had anything to do, really. But 300 or 400 strangers can get together and form a community and help each other and talk to each other. You know I would help to introduce them to one another as they sat at the round table. And that's sort of got things started. It's one of the great things about the conference. I never saw that at another conference. But that's tremendously important. (Larsen, 2019)

Larsen and his wife, Elizabeth Pomeda, co-founded the SFWC in 2004. They were not certain it would be successful, but they thought it made sense to try because of San Francisco importance in the publishing industry:

> Well again, it's because it's the second largest writing and publishing center in our country. There're lots of writers and lots of publishing people. For example, there's an entire organization based on that fact, the Bay Area Publishers' Association. (Larsen, 2019)

Larsen speaks with apparent satisfaction at the "fun" he had running the conference, even when there were financial setbacks. Always, it's about getting people together. Even though it may take years for the connections to pay off in a commercial sense.

> Time could be 20, 15 years. It has happened. They have this connection and they feel like can call, and they should. So that's a good thing. That's one of the things a conference does. And it's particularly important with agents, or editors, either way because the you can approach directly. Or maybe you can if you make a connection with agents, you get to know a sense of who they are. And make a connection with someone that you (emotionally) connect with. Then that's a bond. And then maybe get along with. That's the way you get most people like me connect. And keep in mind that the [*costs of the*] conferences are deducted, the transportation deducting [*sic*] Hello! (Larsen, 2019)

83

A recurring theme in Larsen's narrative is getting people to be in close

proximity by gathering over food. He mentions how much people enjoy "dinners with

Harvey," and under his time as director, there were frequent luncheon gatherings. He

speaks like a bon vivant who is not overly concerned if a business meeting yields a big

immediate payoff. Here is how he described the meetings of the SFWC advisory board.

> I'm glad you mentioned the board, because that's really needs to be discussed.
> Again, there are boards and there are boards. There are strictly fund-raising boards,
> some boards really help influence how the conference is run. I just like bringing
> people together. So, I wanted people I felt could contribute ideas and suggestions.
> So, we had a board of, like, 14 people. And we'd get together for lunch maybe a
> couple times year. And Joyce actually used to pay for our lunch at the City Club
> here. And we had a good time and some ideas emerged from that--not a lot. But
> they made a significant difference in the conference. (Larsen, 2019)

It's clear that the SFWC exists because of Michael and his wife, Elizabeth.

This much is emblazoned on all the printed materials and web pages bearing the SFWC

brand. But what may be less obvious comes forth in the key findings of this survey,

namely, the sense of community that all classes of participants, from the leaders to the

volunteers, feel when they do their part to make the conference happen. Larsen attributed

this to luck, but other board members were quick to add it also requires a good deal of

hard work. Michael concluded the interview with these words:

> It's a lot of pieces. You know it's a lot of pieces, and luck is the biggest thing we
> have. The space, the hotel, the city of San Francisco, the people who've put it
> together, the willingness people in the business to talk for free, even best-selling
> authors. That's so lucky. It's like we set this table, and writers all have a feast. And
> you even get a community out of it, because all those pieces came together. I didn't
> know it would come together as well as it did, or have the impact (long pause).
> Now what's next? (Larsen, 2019)

The final data that was coded came from a 44-minute presentation made by

the current SFWC Board of Trustees in the fall of 2018. Each of the five board members

spoke for five to ten minutes on a video that was downloaded, transcribed, and ported

into NVivo. Initial analysis was completed by the software's auto coding features, using the nodes that had been developed through the above process. By this point in the research, the categories were mostly set, and the next round of hand-coding transcriptions did not yield any new codes or categories.

It was clear that the key category for this study, both in terms of being prevalent (e.g., saturated) early in the survey and significant in the percentage of respondents who mentioned it, was "community." One question that remained unanswered was whether this was still a top concern of the Board under their new leadership. An analysis of the board's presentation seems to answer that question in the affirmative. The transcribed presentation contains 106 references coded to the category "community" (Library, 2019).

Some of the narrative passages speak clearly to this point. Current director Laurie McClean urges those who are planning to attend the conference to take advantage of the event's inclusive culture:

> One of the ways that we select our presenters is to make sure that they are friendly and accessible. We don't want agents who want to give their sessions, and then go back to their hotel room. [*We want them*] in the lobby, and for them to know how to do this friendly atmosphere that we exude at this conference. [*You can*] go there knowing that people are going to be available to help you. And that's really important. (Library, 2019)

McLean goes further, echoing the ideas of Larsen, that meals are a great place to connect with people:

> And we also have a thing called "Dinner with Harvey" that's are one of our advisory board members. Harvey Pawl, he is very generous, and he takes people out to dinner … And he picks really cool, old-school San Francisco restaurants to go to. … But, anyway, it's a really fun thing and you'll get to know all these people at Dinner with Harvey, and a lot them from out-of-town do it. So, you'll meet people from out of town. We have people coming from New Zealand, Australia all over the place to (comment from another speaker) Canada? Yeah. Everywhere. Canada, how

could I forget Canada? (laughter from audience). So, don't forget to talk to attendees. If you're standing in line for lunch. If you're sitting down before the session starts. Just introduce yourself. (Library, 2019)

And while this sort of interaction can be fun in and of itself, McClean is quick to remind her audience that it can pay off down the road for an aspiring writer.

Again, kinda become one of your characters when you go to the conference, and put your energy out there. If you're exhausted, take a break. Maybe somebody else just taking a breather, too, and that one moment in time is going to be a big difference in your career. So that is the serendipity I'm talking about it. (Library, 2019)

Other board members spoke to the same point, too. Publicity director Barbara Santos spoke to the sense of community that the SFWC is working to develop. For her part, she says that being a writer in the Bay Area is more than just attending the SFWC. She makes it clear that she hopes to promote community—and success-even for those writers who are unable to attend the conference.

And not to hammer it to death, but how many of you do get the SFWC newsletter? (Not all of the audience is visible in the shot, but of those visible, several hands went up.) Good, because it's not just marketing vehicle for the event, it's to create the community all through the year. I want to hear from writers about other, good events: a signing, a book launch. I'd like to get all of that in there (the newsletter), so we've got a little on-line community going on all year long. And people really appreciate that. … I think Rich was telling you out in the hallway that when you finally do get to the conference, you might be sitting next to somebody at lunch and you say who you are, and you'll go: 'Oh, and I read about you in the newsletter!' And then instantly you just feel like you know each other. So, it's a really cool thing. It's free, and like Laurie said, just go to our Web site and you can opt in. You can just opt-in, and we don't sell the list. So, it's just our little community. (Library, 2019)

Santos, who has been involved with the SFWC since its inception, notes that the conference has always been about creating a sense of community:

So, it's always been that he (Michael Larsen) wanted it to be a friendly thing, and he always wanted it to be about networking and community. And I think with the tagline it's about 'community, commerce, and craft.' So, we try to have a little bit of everything, for everybody, at every level when you come to the conference. But one thing that did bug all of us, is that, because we've all been there pretty much

since the beginning, is that he (Michael) always said that it is 'the magic.' But, ooooh, it's a lot of hard work (laughs). But there is a lot of magic, and we're working hard on it, and we expect you to do hard work, too, before you come … go to our website, see who's going to be there, research them. See who you want to meet at the conference. (Library, 2019)

Santos then admonishes the attendees to do their homework and be prepared.

But the closing remarks are affirmative and inclusive.

Yeah, we've consistently brought the best of the publishing world to San Francisco. And we keep the caliber sky-high. But it's the friendliness of the event that people come away with, both the presenters and the attendees. Anyone who is a participant says it's the friendliness of this event that makes it different. And we always want to keep that. So, feel free to come up and talk to us and give us ideas. Email us, in advance or after, we have a survey, so you can give us that information as well. There are so many good reasons to come to a writers conference. A lot of our attendees are bona-fide authors already, and they come to just keep up with the networking, to find out what's new and exciting in the industry. (Library, 2019)

Volunteer coordinator Linda Lee did her part to explain the character and culture that organizers incorporate by the many operational choices they make. Again, this creative writing conference is community-oriented by design:

Our return rate of our volunteers is 80 percent. So, that tells you right there that we have people that have been with us from the beginning, and our core group, 80 percent of them return every year. And I have 90 volunteers, so that's quite a few people. Why? Because I make sure I take care of them. … So, it's just a huge thing, and also, the part of the reason that so many volunteers come back is that it truly is a community of people. And this conference is so.... the volunteers also get to talk to the agents and the authors and the editors. You know. When they're working, they're not allowed to, but they're free to talk to them in between sessions, or when there's socialization, the cocktail parties, and the various things They're free, and you're.... it's a very interactive thing. We don't make a separation. (Library, 2019)

In her concluding remarks, Lee explains why she returns each year to do one of the most difficult, and operationally essential, jobs of the conference:

And I always found the reason I love volunteering, and I've been in it for tech conferences, word press, is that when you are actually working at something, I've found that you're really feeling like you're a part of it instead on the outside looking in, when you take a service commitment or you're working as a volunteer, you feel

like you're--you do--you become a part of it. So, it's just amazing. So, I highly recommend volunteering. (Library, 2019)

The final person to speak Lissa Provost, is the newest member of the Board, but she is responsible for many refinements that are designed to grow the event, save it money, but still keep the friendly culture it is currently known for. Provost shares how she intends to do this, and her remarks bear on this study's original intent: to identify best practices and see how they might be emulated.

For the last ten years, we have sold out the conference every single year. This year, more of your friends can come. There's more room. That kind of makes people scared that maybe they'll get lost in the crowd. But we have maintained the highest ratio of presenters to attendees of any conference that we've heard of. We're keeping it under five-to-one. Five attendees to one presenter. So, if you think of that in terms of whether you'll get to talk to the agent you want to meet, whether you'll get to talk to this expert, or this best-seller, and whether you'll be able to ask your questions with a ratio of five-to-one…. You will be able to do that. And, as Laurie has said, we like presenters who are personable and who are known to be accessible. (Library, 2019)

While not the key category, one of the recurring responses was that writers come to the SFWC to meet an agent. This can be challenging, and the SFWC has experimented with innovations to open up opportunities in this area:

So, we invited more agents so that we can make more of these appointments available. The great thing about that is those agents are there for everything. So, if you are there, doing speed dating, there are more agents there. Because they came to do the appointments and so forth. And more agents mean more opportunities for you to sell your book. (Library, 2019)

Provost is tasked with making sure that the sessions occur smoothly, and she has worked hard to make sure that attendees enjoy a well-run, substantial event. As she wrapped up her pitch, encouraging the crowd to sign up and attend the conference, she talks about how emotionally satisfying the event can be for attendees.

I think we've made a really deliberate effort to get new presenters that we haven't heard before on a variety of subjects. Most of them are local to the San Francisco

88

publishing scene. We do have some coming out from New York from all along on the West Coast. But we really love what publishing is on the West Coast. This is where technology, digital hybrids, small press, print on demand, and all the next big things are happening here. So, we've very excited to have these presenters here. They're leading with their hearts. This is a really community-oriented center for publishing. (Library, 2019)

In the next section, Figures five through eight show visual representations of these findings.

Final, Post-Coding Analysis

The key category and most significant finding was the emergent theme of "community." This was mentioned overwhelmingly in a combined analysis of the survey responses in all five classes of participants: organizers, presenters, paid attendees, exhibitors, and volunteers. This finding persisted when combined with the other hand-coded data sets from the Michael Larsen interview (Larsen, 2019), and the Board Preview presentation (Library, 2019). These data are available as Appendices D through J.

Figure 5 displays the top five key categories from the three hand-coded data sets; The five-question on-line survey, the interview with Michael Larsen, and the transcript of the SFWC's board members making a public, preview prestation that described the conference.

Additional data sets from the SFWC's web pages as of March 3, 2019 (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019a), 12 years of SFWC newsletters from 2007-2019 (Santos, 2019), and presenter handouts (San Francisco Writers Conference, 2019b), were all downloaded and, as necessary converted into PDFs to be imported into NVivo for analysis. The goal was, once the key category

Figure 5. Top 5 code categories in SFWC analysis from three hand-coded data sets.

had emerged from the survey, the interview, and the Board Preview presentation

narratives, to see to what extent the theme of "community" appeared in other narratives.

Figure 6 shows the NVivo word frequency analysis of the top ten word/themes present on

the SFWC public web pages, excluding the presenter handouts and the newsletter

archives.

Figure 6 displays the ten most frequent themes found in the public web pages

of the sfwriters.org. This word frequency analysis was done using NVivo 12 plus.

NVivo analysis of this kind occurs through application of filters. In this case,

the pages were searched for synonymous terms and grouped in the word theme categories

displayed above. Note that it could still be argued that the word/theme "gathering" also

reflects on the sense of community so prevalent in the other data sets.

Figure 6. San Francisco Writers Conference website word frequency NVivo analysis.

Additional analysis was performed on other publicly available materials to see if the theme of community was evident in their contents. Figure 7 displays the results of an NVivo word frequency analysis performed on the SFWC newsletter archive. This collection of material included 273 newsletters spanning the time period between 2007 and February 2019.

The analysis of 12 years of newsletters offer a longitudinal look at the organization. The NVivo word frequency analysis for this data can be seen in Figure 7. It is worth noting that, in addition to their primary conference, the SFWC also has launched a smaller and shorter "Writing for Change" conference that is themed around the concept

Word Count - Newsletters 2007- Feb. 2019

Figure 7. NVivo analysis of 273 newsletters, from the public archive at sfwriters.org.

that writing can stimulate or inspire needed social, political, and environmental changes. In this context, the terms "acting" and "change" take on a communitarian tone.

Finally, Figure 8 yields insights into the mindset and attitudes of the SFWC's faculty. It displays the NVivo word frequency analysis of 62 pdfs containing instructional material made publicly available on the SFWC website. To avoid conflating data, this material was not included in any other analysis. Figure 8 displays the 10 most frequently occurring words of these publicly posted handouts, and gives us a glimpse into the SFWC's curriculum. This was done to see what narratives were present in those presenters. This seemed a worthwhile measure given the ease of access to this material and the presenter-perspective it offered. Moreover, it is obvious that the one of the primary reasons most attendees come to the San Francisco Writers Conference is to hear presentations rather than just ride the cable-cars. The results of this final word count can be seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8. NVivo analysis of 62 publicly accessible PDFs from presenters.

Again, the word/theme of "community is among the top 10. The workshops tend to focus on the craft of writing, so it is perhaps not surprising that the top elements would be related to writing, content, and information. It is unclear, without further, manual analysis, whether the word/themes of change, act, and active refer to stylistic improvements or to social change. At the SFWC, the former seems more likely than the latter.

<div align="center">Emergence of the Key Category</div>

Repeated rounds of coding saturated the potential categories arising from the survey, the Michael Larsen interview, and the Board Preview presentation. The key category of community was established. In the final round of textual analysis, NVivo 12-Plus was used to review the available newsletters to see of the SFWC has, historically,

expressed the idea of community as a core value. Similarly, the current website was used as a contemporary benchmark. Finally, 62 PDFs supplied during recent SFWC presentations were processed to see what concepts appeared most often in the most recent presentations and publicly available curriculum.

Because of the sheer mass of these materials, these latter data sets were not hand coded, rather NVivo was used to perform filtered queries to produce NVivo word frequency analysis.

In the newsletters, the word "community" and its cognate terms ranked third," appearing 17,281 times.

On the March 3rd website, "community" was ranked third, appearing 1,431 times.

And within the presenters' handouts, "community" was ranked 7th overall, appearing 1,903 times.

The following tables show that the theme of community is present across time, communicated in their current web presence, and a notable part of their presenters' curriculum.

The concept of community, and efforts to create it in both word and deed, is literally designed in and attended to at every turn and in all discernible aspects of the SFWC operations.

Summary of Findings

After four months of data gathering and recursive coding. The study's key category was determined to be "community." The top five categories are compared in Figure 5 above. The final analysis of survey results showed that 40 of 46 or 87%

respondents indicated that one of the top features of the San Francisco Writers Conference that they most valued was being a part of a safe, professional, and affirming writing "community." This well exceeds the threshold of 25% recommended by Saldana when declaring a key category to have reached significance.

> Harding (2013) openly acknowledges that his advice is subjective, yet he recommends that a code shared by approximately one-fourth of the study's respondents merits consideration in the analysis and a possible contribution to the research findings. (Saldana, 2015, p. 25)

After the "community" category emerged in the survey data as key category, it was then used to code an interview by SFWC Co-Founder Michael Larsen, and the results were consistent, more than 40 references to "community" were identified, and during the 88-minute interview Larsen stressed the importance of getting people together for the expressed purpose of creating a sense of community. From Larsen's remarks it is reasonable to conclude that creating a "community," was, essentially, a design feature of the SFWC from its founding more than a decade ago.

In the final round of hand-coding, the key categories from the survey were applied to a video transcript from a presentation by the SFWC Board of Trustees. In late fall, the five board members were recorded making a Preview Presentation to encourage attendance at the SFWC 2019. Recursive analysis of this script, including a final, manual review, aligned with the key findings from the earlier data. A total of 106 references coded to "community" were found in the 44-minute presentation, not including a follow-up question and answer period. Four of the five board members who spoke made clear references to their intent to develop and support a sense of community within the SFWC.

A final round of analysis, which did not involve coding or manual review of the texts, was conducted on three other data sets: 12 years' worth of newsletters, the

SFWC's web presence as of March 3, and 62 documents provided by faculty at the 2019 SFWC. All three data sets had, using an NVivo word frequency analysis, the concept of "community" ranking third on both the March 3, 2019 website and in the newsletters from 2007 to March 2019. The term "community ranked 7th in the presenters' handouts.

To conclude this section, the key finding of "community" is not an incidental or accidental feature of the SFWC. Rather, "community" is a core value of the SFWC. Co-Founder Michael Larsen sought to "get people together" and often did so by gathering people around a table at mealtime. The theme of "community" can be seen in the content that is presented at the SFWC, and current Board members remain intent on having a "friendly" event with amiable, accessible presenters and low student-faculty ratios. Perhaps most significantly for this study, 87% of respondents, drawn from all five types of participants—felt community was central to their experience.

In the final chapter of this study, the implications of these findings will be discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This section offers a discussion of the study's key category. Comments will be drawn from the data to illustrate points and clarify the research findings. Special attention will be paid to the concepts of "community" and "people," and how they might be used to inform ongoing improvements in a creative writing conference's best practices.

Summary of Research Questions

The central question that initiated this research project was broad, and open-ended: What are the core elements or best practices of a creative writing conference? A five-question survey was launched to seek data on this topic. Shortly thereafter, as the study expanded to include rubrics and recommendations from trade publications and the Association of Writers & Writing programs, the single professional organization devoted to promulgating best practices. This material was reviewed, and the initial analysis found it to be narrowly focused. Trade publications tended to present conference in formation in an uncritical, public-service announcement style aimed at the writer-at-consumer/paid attendee. The AWP on the other hand, had an extensive checklist aimed at conference organizers, and to a lesser degree conference faculty. Neither the trade publications nor the AWP attempted to view conferences from a broader perspective, which might include the views of volunteers, exhibitors, and presenters.

An examination of the AWP's extensive publications reveals a substantial and substantive body of literary scholarship, but no research dedicated to developing the

operations of creative writing conference. The AWP does encourage organizers to conduct self-studies (AWP, 2018), but beyond this simple admonition, there are no research guidelines, shared data/findings, or processes to re-examine and refine their guidelines of best practices.

After considering the above, this study's question was revised and became: Are these criteria/rubrics/guidelines the ones that all classes of conference-goers choose as the key features they most expect and appreciate?

Limitations

The limitations of this study include:

1. Despite effort to include substantial and diverse data streams, the core survey remains a sample of convenience, and this is a common criticism of the grounded theory method.

2. Research was not longitudinal, and the study's brief duration could mean that its results were atypical.

3. The SFWC's ability to get big-name participants at little or no cost may be a competitive advantage that can't be replicated elsewhere.

4. The dynamics described in situationalism and spatial economic theory may limit the applicability of this study's findings to other conferences.

5. The survey data came from those motivated to respond and willing to spend five-to-ten minutes on line, dealing with uncooperative software, to submit their surveys. This may have eliminated people who are averse to technology, and therefore skewed the results by age or education.

6. One of the survey links on the printed materials, while accurate, had both uppercase and lowercase letters. If a potential respondent attempted to type the link in all lower-case letters, it would not work. This was detected one day after it occurred, and corrected. It is unknown if any potential respondents may have been turned away and not sought to take the survey again.

This may have removed individuals with moderate motivation, and their views may have differed.

7. At least 15 people viewed the survey but declined to participate. There is no way to know if their reluctance was due to factors that might also lead them to hold differing views.

8. The online survey was reported at times to be sluggish and may have deterred participation from some potential respondents.

9. A leadership changed at the SFWC in 2018 that strained some professional relationships and may have made for a reluctance to participate in interviews.

10. Internal friction, in the wake of an awkward change in leadership, may have caused some reluctance to speak to certain matters related to the operation of the event.

11. According to non-profit filings, the event is working to get back on an even keel, financially. This may have caused some board members to shy away from being interviewed.

12. The lead researcher's ongoing participation as a volunteer provides both access and a pre-existing perceptual frame. It also means he was embedded in an organization in such a way that complicates straightforward reporting of disparaging or awkward information, such as their financial statements.

13. The bulk of the coding was done, in the last rounds of analysis, manually. But the final, automated, rounds of analysis were done with word frequency analysis. The noted emergence of themes based on word frequency would depend on the validity of the underlying vocabulary filters.

14. The Grounded-Theory method, despite its acceptance in the social sciences, is not credible to researchers with a positivist perspective.

Recommendations

All five classes of participants in the San Francisco Writer's Conference, in one way or another, express a desire to be connected to a writing community. For some, this means having a chance to make professional contacts, for others, it means being able to re-connect with friends that they have not seen in a year, or only meet online. For still others, it can mean being emotionally supported and not judged.

These findings are consistent with the cognitive framework of Michael Storper. Storper notes, in Keys to the City, that creative clusters thrive where they are able to form in-groups and share tacit knowledge (Storper, 2013, pp. 169, 176). It is clear that an important design feature of the SFWC is the attention to creating opportunities to create such communities, primarily though a supportive, non-judgmental environment, but also by virtue of a low ratio of attendees to presenters that created the potential for access outside of scheduled events. Moreover, the current SFWC Board of Trustees repeatedly expressed their criteria for selecting presenters, availability and affability.

One method that the SFWC employs to create this community is a sort of "Fellowship Over Food," a phrase coined by this researcher to describe not only the abundance of bon vivant style of socializing, but also the specific attention given to

making sure that no one dines alone. The "Dinners With Harvey" are often mentioned as a fun outing. Harvey Pawl is a long-time sponsor of the SFWC who is known for treating volunteers to dinner, at his own expense, at the close of the event. Given that this is an open offer for up to 90 volunteers, and up to 40-60 routinely accept, it is a significant contribution in light of the $40 a meal tab (Larsen, 2019). The SFWC also features many other galas, poetry readings, or meals during a keynote, that offer all classes of attendees to chat and make connections.

There are issues surrounding these meals. Some survey respondents complained that it was impossible to hear the keynote speaker. This problem might be addressed with improvements in the sound system. Another problem, hinted at by Larsen, is the burdensome cost of meals in San Francisco. Larsen said that the Mark Hopkins charged $63 for a bag lunch, and mentioned in passing that catering costs had been part of the challenge of keeping a balanced budget. These challenges have been met, in part, by the event's moving to a new venue with more affordable menu selections. One move, made in the name of getting attendees out of the hotel and into the vibrant, nearby neighborhoods, was called: "lunch on your own." It was billed as a way to take conversations into the street. This idea appears to have merit, but at least one survey respondent reported having problems making a personal connection and being able to take advantage of this time. It would be wise for the SFWC to continue to assess the impact of these meal-plan changes on the development of community among their attendees. It might also be helpful to employ professional financial management to identify other ways to economize without sacrificing the character of the event. The current SFWC Board of Trustees appears to be working hard on this, but there were also

a few comments about the event seeming to be requesting more money at every turn. It is possible that these issues will work themselves out not that the SFWC is in a venue where it can grow to accommodate another 100-200 people. This, if their fixed costs remain in check, would go a long way to reducing the risk of running a deficit.

Moving away from finances and back to the key category of "community," this section will conclude with advice, drawn from the data that is specific to classes of attendees. The recommendations are listed under headings specific to the intended recipients.

<u>Volunteers</u>

You are the face of the organization, be professional, but kind, patient, and even playful.

Be sure to honor your promise to be there when needed. Much depends upon you.

<u>Vendors</u>

Remember the cannon of ethics and to be honest about what you can really deliver, and at what cost.

Resist the urge to size up a person, and dismiss him or her, as non-prospect. Writers too financially strapped to attend a conference may still view exhibits, hoping to get ahead. In such situations, put service above self-interest.

<u>Presenters</u>

Get plenty of rest. Most attendees are there to see you, before, during and after your official session and would benefit from opportunities to interact with you beyond

the scheduled session. The primary reason registered and volunteer participant attend is to improve their craft and to network. Your expertise is essential to both.

Bring lots of handouts. Not every writer is tech-savvy.

Follow up on promises. Don't drop the ball.

Realize that not every agent can represent every aspiring writer, but they still can be helpful.

Slow down a bit. Growing takes time, and you have to bloom where you're planted.

Attendees

Be willing to take time off, even missing a session (they are recorded) to interact with an interesting person.

Know that a chance meeting may pay off much later on.

Support/community membership can come in many forms. Sometimes just finding a beta reader is a plus.

Being ready to have a meaningful interaction with a big shot *requires research*, and preparation. In the words of one SFWC board member: "Do your homework."

Be willing to give back, if you find that, suddenly, you are that big shot.

Organizers

Select participants that are affable.

Communicate to presenters the expectation that they be available at off hours.

Make sure the attendee-faculty ratio is low enough that the presenters are not swamped with "suitors."

Design unhurried meals in places that facilitate round-table discussions, AKA "the Harvey effect."

Be mindful that expensive add-ons were the number one source of frustration with the 2019 survey respondents.

Be mindful of not only conflict of interest, but of perceived conflicts.

Plan for leadership succession. Do not let a transition derail the operation of an event.

At some point, your event belongs to the world. It is sometimes painful when this happens, but wonderful, too.

Keep striving for inclusion and diversity. Even if you're doing a good job, you could be better.

Areas for Future Study

Some issues arose that did not emerge as key findings, but nevertheless are worth brief consideration as topics for future study As Saldana says, even a topic mentioned by only one respondent may be worth pursuing (Saldana, 2015).

Two such issues surfaced, but were on the periphery of this study. Because of time limitations, they could not be explored. The first was the topic of event growth and leadership succession. The SFWC has changed venues twice. The first time at about two years in, when it outgrew the Drake Hotel, then in 2019 when it left the Mark Hopkins International (Larsen, 2019). These changes correspond with the growth of the event in terms of the number of days and amount of curriculum offered. It remains to be seen if the increase in scale will change the event's culture, but an event the size and significance of the SFWC could well benefit from a leadership succession plan. A study to see how

growth has been managed at other creative writing conferences would be a worthwhile undertaking.

The other potential area of study was noted in looking at overlapping membership in different classes. Many volunteers, for example, initially started as paid attendees, but then moved over into the volunteer ranks. This, aside from being a significant cost-savings move, also seemed to signal a deeper commitment to the organization. Likewise, there were presenters who became volunteers, and at least one person who started as a volunteer, was able to get mentoring from Michael Larsen, and then grew into a film-maker and a presenter in her own right. It would be worth looking at how individuals have progressed through their volunteer experience. What sort of trajectory is typical? What are the factors that foster and promote increased participation and deepen engagement? The design of this study did not allow for that. Pursuing these questions, however, could produce actionable insights that may well have implications beyond the world of the SFWC or even creating writing conferences.

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APPENDIX A

AWP Hallmarks of a Successful Writers' Conference

Writers' Conferences & Centers (WC&C) recognizes the diversity among its affiliated workshops, festivals, conferences and colonies. For simplicity's sake, we will refer to all of these organizations as "conferences" for the rest of this document. The purpose of the professional association of these diverse groups is to uphold the highest standards possible. WC&C recognizes that each organization has a different strength and mission, and WC&C encourages innovation and variety in the programming of conferences. Among its member conferences, however, WC&C has recognized common elements of successful conferences.

These hallmarks represent a superior writers' conference that serves attendees expectations: to further their craft of writing, make them better readers, invigorate their own work by stimulating interaction with other writers and with teachers.

Ethics Statement

WC&C members agree to conduct their programs according to the highest personal and professional standards and to strive at all times to act with responsibility and good faith in their dealing with fellow members, program participants, faculty, and the public. WC&C reserves the right to terminate an existing member or to deny new membership to any organization or individual judged by the council to have failed to act within these parameters.

Writers' Conferences and Centers

The last 100 years have seen an evolution and proliferation in conferences designed for aspiring writers. From a handful of events in the early 1900s to more than 800 today in the U.S. alone, conferences appeal to a wide and diverse audience, providing a range of artistic experiences, approaches, and pedagogical goals. Programs are organized to educate aspiring writers in many specialties, including writing for children, religious writing, science fiction writing, and other genres. Unlike academic programs, conferences confer no degrees, although they may issue certificates or offer college credit. Admission to many events may or may not be dependent upon proof of ability or evidence of prior study.

Attendees at writers' conferences attend for a variety of reasons, including a desire to become published writers. Organizers of conferences often say the goals of their conferences include: teaching the craft of writing, introducing the world of publishing or other professional environments to writers, providing a supportive writing community, and generally deepening understanding and appreciation of literature
.
All conferences can benefit from their ongoing research, annual self-evaluation, and periodic independent assessment in its effort to offer the best education for writers and to make the best possible contribution to the advancement of an educated audience for contemporary writing. To assist conferences with self-evaluation or independent assessments, and to serve as a guideline for new conferences, the Association of Writers & Writing Programs' (AWP) Board of Trustees, with the assistance and guidance of representative members of WC&C, has established the following hallmarks of successful Writers' Conferences.

A High Standard for Conference Faculty

(Conference faculty may include writers in all genres, as well as editors, agents, publishers and other contributors to the literary arts community.)

- Whether the conference retains a recurring faculty, or new faculty is solicited each year, faculty is accomplished, active and knowledgeable in their area of specialty.

- Instructors of workshops and classes are experienced teachers and have distinguished themselves as artists who have published significant work in their genre.

- Conference faculty is accessible and participates in interactive events, in addition to lectures, workshops, or panel discussions.

- Faculty represents various genres of writing as well as a variety of approaches to their craft, based on aesthetic differences related to their ethnic, cultural, and other backgrounds.

- Faculty have clear understanding of their role(s) during conference, appropriate support (lodging, transportation, etc.), adequate preparation time and compensation for their work.

A Well-Focused Program

- Conference organizers have a mission statement guiding the purposes and goals of their conference.

- Conference programs center around the craft of writing and may offer venues for related topics such as publishing, the writing life, teaching writing, and others.

- Conference schedule offers varied modes and levels of participation (including, but not limited to, workshop/class enrollment; panel/lecture participation; readings and consultations).

- Workshops maintain a good faculty-to-student ratio, not to exceed 1-15; other classes should not exceed a 1-30 ratio.

- Complete conference schedule is available to participants well in advance of the conference.

Administrative Support

Whether attached to the program of a college or university, an independent arts organization, or a professional society, a conference benefits from strong leadership, adequate staffing, and professional management. Ideally, the functions of program design, faculty hiring, and over-all management will reside with a single conference director, assisted by a board and/or staff with an interest and experience in writing and/or publishing.

WC&C recognizes that many conferences are operated on a volunteer basis, but when possible, the director of the conference and his/her appropriate staff should have compensation appropriate to the workload, depending upon the tasks performed and the size of the conference.

The ideal conference director should meet the following requirements:

- The Conference Director should be an experienced administrator as well as have personal experience as a writer.

- The Conference Director maintains full involvement in the organization of the conference and takes an active role while it progresses.

- The Conference Director is supported by a staff and/or board, sufficiently large and qualified to plan and operate the conference. Volunteers may be used to round-out staff workloads when appropriate and when provided with adequate instruction and oversight.

Selection Criteria

There are conferences for all levels of writers. Conferences for beginning writers need not demand proof of ability or evidence of past study, but those conferences that support intermediate or advanced writers should meet the following criteria for choosing participants.

- Applications should be readily available with reasonable deadlines.

- Applicants should be selected based on a codified and reasonable set of selection criteria.

- Applications should be reviewed by qualified writing professionals knowledgeable in the genres/areas that they are reviewing.

- Qualified applicants should demonstrate proficiency in the genre/area of study through a writing sample.

- Applicants should have some experience in a classroom or workshop environment.

- Other criteria may be used when evaluating qualified applicants, including (but not limited to): proof of educational degrees, letters of recommendation, and/or applicant interviews.

Other Complementary Assets and Infrastructure

Contracts and procedures:

- Faculty contracts should be legally binding on both parties, clarifying conditions for voiding the contract. Guidelines for payment of faculty and presenters, including "in-kind" payment such as housing, meals, transportation, etc. should be established.

- A clearly stated list of costs and dates, registration deadlines, cancellations and refunds, if any, should be made available for participants.

- A procedure for dealing with complaints, liability issues, or other problems arising from disputes between conference faculty, participants or guests should be established.

- There should be a process for collecting annual evaluations from participants, faculty, and conference staff and reviewing this information preparatory to a biannual self-evaluation and review of programs and policies.

Conference promotion:

- Advertising is truthful, it lists only confirmed and contracted writers as faculty, and, if need be, it distinguishes between workshop teachers and the visiting readers or lecturers.

- A fair practice in advertising, awarding of scholarships, faculty contracts, and policy regarding guests.

- A clearly-written brochure listing all faculty with adequate descriptions of their roles at the conference.

- An open, clear policy spelling out the number and type of scholarships/fellowships available and providing access to any application forms required.

Amenities and other offerings:

- Reasonable options for safe, clean, and affordable housing and meals if participants are solicited from outside the immediate area.

- Conference facilities that keep participants within walking distance of all official events, or dedicated transportation to "off-site" events.

- A venue for the sale of books by faculty members, and, if appropriate, participants.

- College credit for participants and/or conference staff if possible.

- Clear information to attendees and faculty as to what is and is not provided for furnishings: towels, bedding, fans, electrical adapters, etc.

<div align="right">

— The AWP Board of Trustees
(Downloaded 3/18/2019)

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https://www.awpwriter.org/wcc/directors_handbook_hallmarks_of_a_successful_writers_conference

APPENDIX B

Institutional Review Board Approval for On Line Survey

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, CHICO
Chico, California 95929-0875
Office of Graduate Studies
Ph: 530-898-6880
Fax: 530-898-3342

September 19, 2018

Robb Lightfoot
1132 Marian Ave
Chico, CA 95928-6913

Dear Robb Lightfoot:

Protocol # 18461

As the Chair of the Campus Institutional Review Board, I have determined that your research proposal entitled "The Core Elements of Outstanding Writing Conferences And Retreats" is exempt from full committee review. This clearance allows you to proceed with your research.

I do ask that you notify our office should there be any further modifications to, or complications arising from or within, the study. In addition, should this project continue longer than the authorized date, you will need to apply for an extension from our office. When your data collection is complete, you will need to turn in the attached Post Data Collection Report for final approval. Students should be aware that failure to comply with any HSRS requirements will delay graduation. If you should have any questions regarding this clearance, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Sincerely,

John Mahoney, PhD., MA (Music)
Professor, Department of Biological Sciences
Director, University Honors Program
Chair, HSRC & IACUC & IBC
MLIB 171D
CSU, Chico 95929-0115
530.898.3276

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval for addition of interviews

HUMAN SUBJECTS IN REVIEW COMMITTEE

Amendment

Under Federal law relating to the protection of Human Subjects, this amendment is to be completed by the Principal Investigator if there are any changes to the original, approved application. Please return to HSRC Chair, c/o Sharon Cain, HSRC Assistant (530-898-3145), at IRB@csuchico.edu You may also submit this form electronically by using the "submit" button at the bottom of this form. Submitting a paper copy is not necessary.

Name: Robb Lightfoot   CSU Chico ID #: 007212895

Phone(s) and Email: 530-809-2160 home, 530-524-0423 cell, robb@robblightfoot.com

Faculty Advisor (If student): Dr. Laura McLaclin

Phone and Email Address: lmclaclin@csuchico.edu,

College/Department:

Title of Project:

Changes to Original Approved Application: To allow for follow-up interviews after an online survey. Interviews will be conducted on those who have voluntarily expressed a willingness to go beyond the four-qu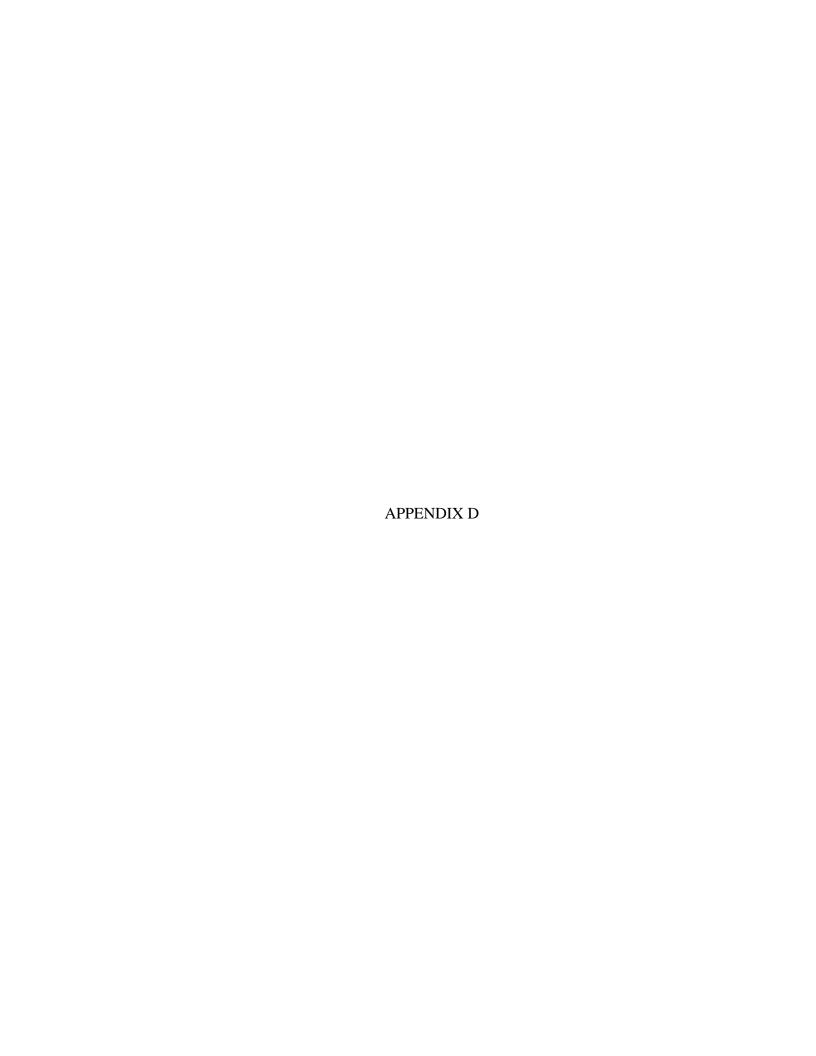estions posed in the initial survey. A guided, semi-structured questionnaire will be used. And up to 15 interviews subjects may be included based on their voluntary consent. Snowball recruitment will be employed, and interview subjects will be allowed to disclose their identities or remain anonymous without consequesces/penalty.

Signature: SmartFTP Client Digitally signed by SmartFTP Client Date: 2018.10.28 22:17:17 -07'00'   Current Date: 10/29/2018

Approved By: Mahoney, John Digitally signed by Mahoney, John Date: 2018.12.07 11:52:58 -08'00'   Date: 12/7/18
John Mahoney, Chair

Submit

APPENDIX D

Question 1: Why do you participate in the SFWC?

Because it helps me make connections in the industry and keeps me abreast of changes and trends in the publishing industry.
Volunteer Director, Presenter. I love doing it. I love to teach and interact with all the aspiring writers and other volunteers and presenters.
Participation is my way of supporting the craft as well as literacy. It also keeps me motivated as an author and helps me to grow in my abilities.
To meet people, see friends, make connections, learn new skills, stay up-to-date on latest information and trends in the industry.
Two reasons as a volunteer: 1) To give back to the writing community from which I have learned so much. 2) To network with others in the writing community. As a presenter: To provide a learning experience for the attendees that is fun and encouraging.
For the opportunity to meet other people in the field, at different stages in their journey. To gather more information about the process of writing, publishing, and book promotion. I participate as a volunteer because I get an inside look at how the whole program functions, I get to build more complex relationships with other attendees/volunteers/facilitators, and for financial reasons.
The SFWC is where I got my start as an author. It was instrumental in helping me understand the industry and kicking off my career. I want to give back and possibly help those who may just be starting out.
I participate to learn more about the craft and business of writing. As a volunteer I enjoy interacting with the other volunteers and feeling part of a writing community.
I'm hoping to find a publisher or rep.
A large, local (to me) gathering that includes topics on both the craft and business of writing.
As a presenter, it's a great way to give back. I like helping new writers and imparting the knowledge I've learned over the past two decades with them. I also find that conferences are a great way to network with other writers and get back to the basics. Conferences focus on the creative and artistic aspects of writing which often get lost when you're in the business of being a professional writer.
Learning more about the publishing industry, meeting other writers. Connecting in real life with people I know mostly online. Also, because I write writing-related books, it's valuable to connect with a conference filled with people who are my target readers. It's like market research.

The PEOPLE!

This is my 7th year attending the conference. I first discovered the conference in 2012 during a very difficult time in my life. I was actually homeless in San Francisco. I had a Masters degree but couldn't find work as I was being deemed "over-qualified". Trying to live off of savings in the Bay Area doesn't last long. I lost everything in 2011 and needed an outlet for my emotional pain. That outlet was writing. I wanted to learn how to publish a book and learned about the conference. I volunteered.

During the 2012 conference I was able to connect with Founder, Michael Larsen. He took me under his wing and mentored me on how to become an author. I've learned so much since.

To promote and develop my professional and writerly skills and to network.

I'm a freelance editor, so participating in SFWC gives me a chance to meet potential clients and network with other publishing professionals.

Increase readership
I have a really good time with old friends who I met there years ago
my agent told me to
The Craft talks

SFWC gives me an opportunity to learn more about the publishing industry as well as form valuable relationships with other writing professionals.

There are two principal reasons I participate in the conference as a volunteer with a third reason simmering on the back burner. The first reason is because I want to be of service to other writers; the second reason is to be connected to a larger writing community; and the third is to develop the resources to one day become a published author.

To meet prospective clients and network with the writing community.

I enjoy presenting at this event because it is well-organized & well-run by Laurie and her team. I also enjoy a good excuse to get out to the west coast and reconnect with people I have been seeing at the event for years and years.

Give back to the industry and community I have received much from.

It is a high-quality writers' conference that is also close to where I live and where volunteers are welcome
It is a great place to get motivated to write and also where I can listen to a great variety of presentations

To learn marketing tailored for authors and network.

My goal was to find a literary agent and to receive updates on the publishing industry. Because I am already an Indie author with two novels on Amazon, I wanted to know more about marketing my books online.

This was my second time at the conference. It's a great place for networking, learning about the craft, and speed dating the agents.

I was invited to sit on two panels about Children's Literature.

To learn about the publishing industry, to hone the craft and to meet agents.

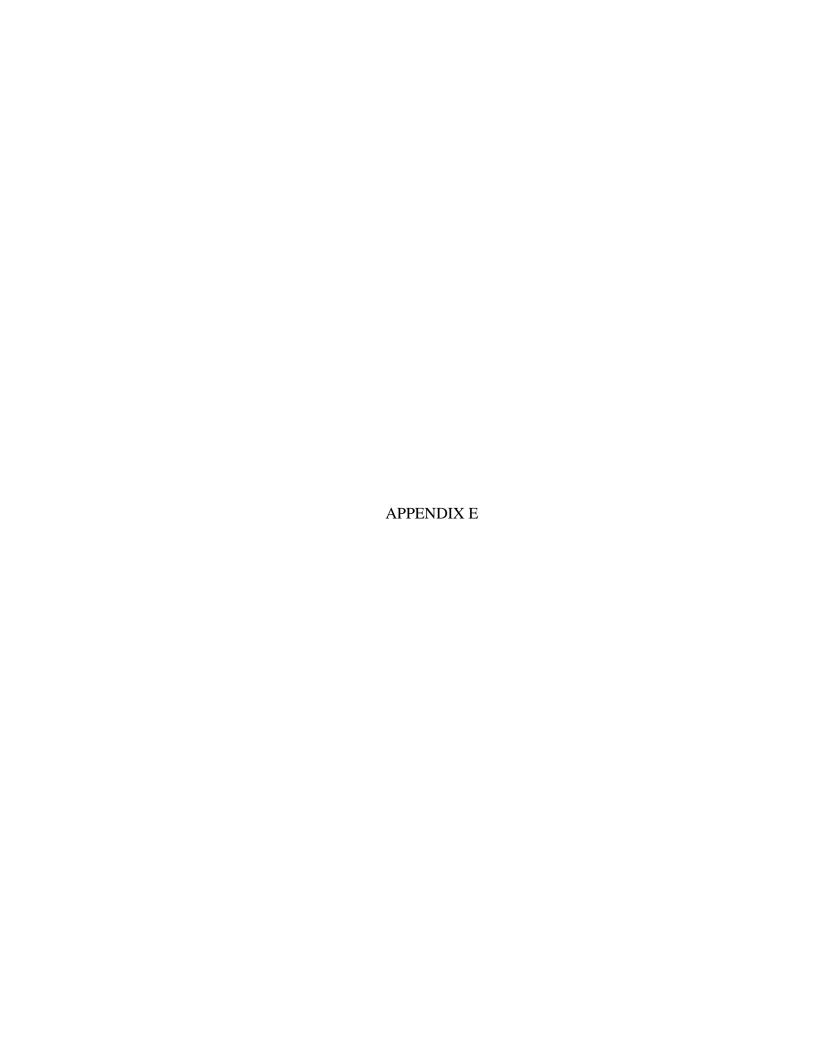| |
|---|
| I'm a presenter & love sharing my knowledge of poetry and publishing. When I'm not presenting, I like to attend panels given by agents, editors, and fiction authors. This allows me to expand my knowledge and benefit from new ideas. It's also a great place to network. I've met so many wonderful people at the SFWC. |
| Two principal reasons: 1) To gain knowledge about the craft of writing and the process of publishing fictions; 2) To meet agents, editors, and others who may have information useful to me as a writer. |
| As an attendee, I participated in SFWC to learn as much as I can about my industry and about my craft. My number-one goal is to be the best, most informed writer I can be, which means improving my skills, my network, and my understanding of the business of writing. SFWC does that for me in spades. |
| I was invited to present. I enjoy teaching people who are starting out and helping them out. I also wanted to network with people in the industry.

I was also an attendee for some panels. I wanted to learn some new things and get to know better the people in the industry. |
| to teach and network |
| To learn about the craft and the business of writing a novel and to meet other authors and pros. |
| The amazing community that can only be found in SF, a literary hub and center of publishing technology. |
| I'm a writer and had professional reasons. |
| I am the marketing director and have been part of the SFWC team since...well, even before the first event. I was co-director at the Maui Writers Conference and it was something I wanted to continue doing when I moved to the mainland. I met Mike and Elizabeth at the first MWC in 1993 or so. Writing events can change people's lives for the better...including my own. |
| To make connections both with other writers and with publishers and agents. By volunteering I benefit greatly from direct contact with the latter. |
| It's my local writing conference, and when I started as a presenter a couple of years ago I figured it would be a great way to network. To be clear: I've always been there as a presenter (but gathering resources/participating in pitch sessions/networking all the time). |
| Community service and giving back to the Bay Area literary community and writing at large. |
| I love the craft and business of writing. SFWC is local to my home, and as a volunteer I can attend many of the sessions in return for the work I do. At first, I volunteered at the conference to learn more about writing and publishing. Now that I've done it for a decade, I go mostly for the people--socializing and networking. |

As a literary agent in the book publishing industry, attending writers conferences keeps my face and name in front of writers, bestselling authors, exhibitors and editors. It also introduces me to prospective new clients/authors. But my participation in the San Francisco Writers Conference is about more than that. It's about sharing wisdom and inspiration with the publishing community. I am a huge believer in paying it forward and SFWC allows me to do that big time.

To learn, first and foremost. To be around other writers, which I find comforting. And to network, which I am singularly bad at doing, but I try.

SFWC is the premier conference on the west coast. It offers the most diverse program for beginning writers to the most prolific writers and seasoned best sellers. Every writer can learn something by attending this conference. And now Laurie McLean is lead director. Laurie was the first agent I booked when director of the Central Coast Writers Conference. I invited her back regularly not only because she was an agent, but she understood the industry, the trends, including future trends and always offered an excellent presentation with great reviews from the attendees. She knows how to build a team and has an head for who can present and what writers need to know. And, my goodness, it's in San Francisco!!

I love the energy I get from it. I don't do as much writing as I'd like to, but it always inspires me. Peter brought me in years ago as a volunteer and I love it.

I was a methamphetamine addict for 11 years. Even after getting clean in 2007, I had to overcome a criminal history and mental health challenges. The SFWC helps me use my story to advocate for and inspire others.

APPENDIX E

Question 2: What do you do at the SFWC?

I'm the Director of Operations and coordinate the poetry track.
Volunteer Director, Presenter.
I have handled almost every volunteer position.
Master Class Coordinator, general volunteer, pretty much what ever is needed.
Volunteer: Registration, work with the Independent Editors, Sessions, and Presenter Room Presenter: Practice Your Ptch: Cast Off Your Jitters
I volunteer. Past duties have mainly been facilitating the classes themselves, but I have helped with other aspects like greeting, bag stuffing, etc.
I lead the SFWC volunteers.
I volunteer. I've worked in the volunteer room and been a volunteer in the breakout sessions.
Go to talks on technique.
I've paid to attend on about 4 occasions. This year, I'll be volunteering.
I'm speaking on two screenwriting panels and participating in Ask a Pro.
I am presenting one session and a panelist on two others. I plan to attend several sessions. More importantly, I hope to meet in person with people I mostly see online.
Since 2012 I have held various roles at the SFWC. I started out as a volunteer and then began designing the program using some of my photographs for the cover design. I'm also an award winning photographer. I have also been invited to speak on different panels the last few years supporting self-published authors. This year I'm leading a new track on screenwriting and filmmaking on Saturday, February 16th. I recently launched my own production company and in addition to now having nine bestselling books on the market, I'm also a social impact filmmaker. I'm excited to pay it forward to those interested in screenwriting, adapting their books to film, or a career in film.
Host an informational table, attend sessions, present, network.
I usually do one-on-one consultations with authors, though in the past I'ver done presentations as well.
Speak / present hangout
I am teaching a Master Class on the Hero's Journey. I am also speaking on several panels along SFWC's new screenwriting track.
I do whatever is needed of me. Some days I'll do some tech work with Venkat but throughout the conference I make myself available as a floater. Last year I was the time keeper and announcer for the speed dating with agents. This year I'm the

writing contest coordinator— responsible for reading all the contest entries and passing along the top 30 to the judges. I'm also hosting the open mic night on Friday.
I am an agent and a presenter.
I teach a master class, do a one hour presentation, sit on panels and do one on one consultations.
I'm the educator in residence who presents and runs the concierge program with one-on-one consultations with attendees.
Volunteer Attend sessions as I can, mostly poetry right now, but also other topics, based on the title and the presenter
Attended sessions. Went to dinner with Harvey.
Attended all keynote addresses. Attended quite a few breakout sessions. Had one agent consultation. Tried speed dating, but left because of long lines and the time constraints. Went to dinner with Harvey one night. Enjoyed the cocktail gala and meeting other authors.
- Attended panels - Speed Dating - Networking
I was a speaker/panelist.
I go to the classes and listen. I buy meetings with agents.
I give workshops and speak on panels of the Poetry Track / Poetry Summit. In the past, we had workshops I gave on Teaching Poetry to Young Writers and Moving past Writer's Block. This year it was only panels. I would love to bring the workshops back. I also welcome one-on-one queries from poets and fiction authors. If someone wants to speak with me, I sit down with them, share my expertise, and answer their questions.
Attended most of the classes (seminars and panels) on writing fiction, e.g., character development, plot structure, etc. I also attended hands-on sessions, such as the pitch practice, free editor consult, agent speed dating, and ask a pro forum.
I am a traditionally published author with five books to my credit. I already have an agent, so I didn't come to pitch. Some people were a little confused about why I was there. But in the publishing industry, there is always so much to learn. I participated in a lot of craft panels and workshops. I talked to editors and publicists about my WIP so that I know I'm doing everything I can do to raise the quality of my writing as well as gather ideas for how to promote it. I met and talked to other writers. I explored the possibility of screen writing. I figured out the next steps for a manuscript I had set aside a year ago. I talked to an expert on public speaking about how I can do a better job in my school visits. I picked up a whole new batch of promotion ideas for my published books. And those are just the highlights!
I'm a presenter.
I taught a session, a master class, and was on 2 panels.
Participant

I present.
I knew much of the operation so was used as a floater to handle problems and fill in where needed. My last two years I helped run sound.
It comes down to I'm the schmoozer. I make things happen by bringing the right people together. But technically I do the SFWC marketing, advertising, event coordination, hotel contracts, liaison with presenters and attendees, public relations, SFWC Newsletter, sponsorships, SFWC-MIL Classes.
Volunteer in whatever capacity they need me to - usually recording sessions (audio team) and also assisting at the presenters' gathering. I attend as many sessions as my volunteer schedule allows me to. I also read my poetry at the open mic session and enjoy the presentations of other poets.
I present in the poetry track, mostly. Have also presented in the general track on revision. Attend the Friday night gala/reading. In the past, attended pitch to an agent session. Attend other helpful sessions. Have lunch with a friend and former editor.
I have been a regular speaker and the conference's Educator-in-Residence since 2007
I volunteer, and I attend sessions when I'm off duty. My volunteer work has included acting as workshop host, supporting the tech and A/V crew, being a utility person (helping wherever needed), and managing the conference app.
I am the conference director now, but for 13 years I was on the conference management team, running the writing contest and doing sundry other things that needed doing, and also was an agent doing speed dating, meet the agent panels, etc. I still speak on panels and work at Speed Dating at the conference, but that activity is tailing down as I become more involved in running the conference as the top dog.
I'm game to do whatever needs done. Given a choice, I'd prefer to hang out in the Middle Grade sessions and the pitch-a-thon, because those tend to have the greatest personal reward for me. But I'm not particular. I have yet to attend a session in which I didn't learn something.
I have attended master classes and been a volunteer. This year I am a general volunteer but also Lead for Agent Speed Dating.
I'm a floater. I don't like making introductions, and I like being free to float around and help wherever needed.
Tech crew. Make attendees/presenters feel welcome, thinking positive, putting their best selves forward.

APPENDIX F

How long have you participated at the SFWC?

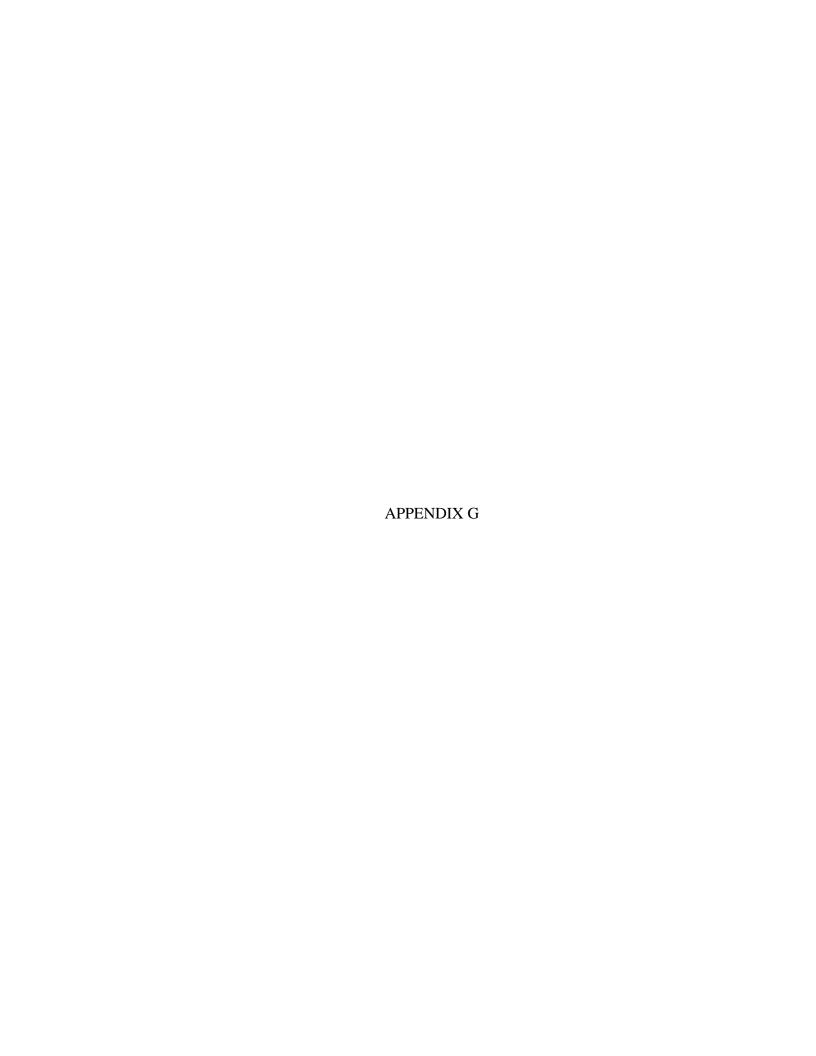| |
|---|
| 6 years |
| 14 years |
| 9 years |
| I believe 9 years now |
| Volunteer: 9-10 years
Presenter: 3 years |
| This is my third year: the first year I only attended the Monday classes (as an attendee), last year I volunteered on all five days, and this year I will be volunteering Sat-Mon. |
| Six years. |
| This will be my fifth year as a volunteer. |
| My first conference was about 6 years ago - I think I've been 4 times (attendee) + once (volunteer) |
| This will be my first year as a presenter this conference, but I routinely speak and give workshops at conferences in other cities. |
| Two years ago I attended to learn more about publishing in general and meet other writers. Last year I did not attend.

This year I am presenting in the nonfiction track; my objective is still to speak with other writers and to get visibility for my writing-related books. |
| This is my 7th year

2012 Volunteer
2013 Volunteer
2014 Volunteer, Program cover design
2015 Presenter, Exhibitor, Program cover design
2016 Presenter, Exhibitor, Program cover design
2017 Presenter, Exhibitor, Program cover design
2019 Book to Film Track Coordinator, Presenter, Exhibitor |
| 4 years |
| 3 years |
| 2005 (paid to attend)
2006-2009 volunteer
2010-2014, 2016, 2018, 2019 (present) |
| This is my second year at SFWC, my first year as a presenter. |
| Three years. |
| This year will be my fourth year. |
| 8 years or so? |
| 12 years |
| I believe this is my 6th year, always as volunteer |

First
My first and last year.
2 Years
This was my first year participating.
I have gone to 2 or 3.
Four years.
This is my first time at the SFWC, and because I do not live in California, I probably will not attend again (or at least, not soon)
This is my first time! I have always wanted to attend SFWC because I've heard how good it is. I live in Virginia and I typically attend conferences that are closer to me. But this year I won a scholarship which made it possible for me to make the trek to California. I was thrilled! What a terrific experience.
Just this last conference (4 days)
this was my 2nd time attending as a presenter and my second time there period.
This was my first year
Since the beginning.
Ten years.
16 plus years
Almost every year since 2007
4 years, I think.
2007 with a few years off for book touring.
I have been a volunteer for ten straight years.
Since 2005, so 13 years.
Five years, I think? Five or six. They start to blur together.
4th time to attend; 3 time as volunteer.
Can't remember! 6 years?
11 years

APPENDIX G

What are the best elements of the SFWC?

The people. We have a dynamic group of speakers, editors, agents, volunteers, and attendees that support the organization and each other because they care about the future of the industry and want to cultivate the west coast writing community to bring better books to market.
The people. The classes. The warm and encouraging environment for learning. Non judgemental and kind people who tend to agree to present and help other writers, and share their success.
Variety of topics and skill level. I'm not a poet but love poetry night. Meeting women Authors like Bella Andre and Susan Wiggs changed my perspective. A safe place to be myself and not be shamed or hated on because of my religious or political beliefs. It's about the writing.
The people, the quality of speakers/vendors/information.
The camaraderie of interacting with so many writers, presenters, editors, agents, and other writing professionals in one place. Networking and meeting new people. Helping writers achieve their goals. Learning from presenters at the sessions.
The classes are extremely helpful. While I mainly attended classes having to do with promotion (due to where I'm at in my career and due to scheduling, beyond my control), the prose & poetry classes are AMAZING and have helped remind me why I like doing what I do.
The intimacy, the quality presenters, the dedication to the attendees.
Listening to the presentations and getting valuable information on the nuts and bolts of the publishing business. Having the opportunity to meet and talk to agents and editors. Meeting other writers, and being part of a writing community. Listening and watching the keynote speakers.
Immersing myself in writing.
A good mix of sessions, lots to choose from, opportunities to learn about the craft of writing as well as business / marketing considerations. A self-publishing track. Generally well organized, although hopeful this year will be even better (fewer paper-based activities & more technology used for signups, feedback etc).
I haven't attended yet, so I don't know. In general, I like that they offer workshops and panels in different aspects of writing-- various genres and in various formats.
The size of the conference makes it easy to connect with people. I appreciate the different tracks, and the mingling of traditional and self- or independent publishing.

The PEOPLE really make the conference. Just a stellar crew of like-minded, heart-centered individuals passionate about supporting writers. The location. Is there really a more beautiful city? I love SF. The quality of publishing industry professionals who present each year and the amazing amount of knowledge they each bring with them.
Networking sessions, community dinners etc.
I really like the people involved. The conference is pretty well run and both the staff and volunteers are helpful and organized. Mary Knippel does a great job of organizing the independent editors.
Craft courses and camaraderie
The ability to meet and connect with various people across publishing, from experienced agents and editors to fellow writers.
There's so much, from gathering useful Intel to making connections with professionals and other writers. I think the conference is also very inspirational for many people. I see writers come away from it with a renewed sense of purpose and motivation.
The panel discussions with authors and editors.
The organization of the event, location & good vibes
The sense of possibility, of books being born.
The variety of topics and of presenters The top quality of the presenters The variety of participants Nicest organizers Great organization Organizers treat volunteer kindly (not in order of importance: these are all important to me)
Updates from experts in the industry. Very well run conference, but unfortunately, a few quirks that were costly for me, friendly participants. Dinners with Harvey were a good way to meet some participants.
- People are friendly and helpful
Connections you make with other writers, and hearing about their experiences with writing craft, etc.
One on one time with agents, information from editors on panels and writing classes, although that can be confusing. A lot of the info contradicts. For example, sometimes it's popular to express a character's feelings with sentences like "My stomach wretches." (From "Divergent") and then another class will tell you to show the feeling with an action instead, like "she threw a book a the wall." I'm still not sure how I'm supposed to show feelings of characters.
I think the whole program is excellent. Everything I have already mentioned are among the best elements of the SFWC.

Wide selection of classes to attend (although some classes of interest to me were scheduled concurrently), many opportunities to network, and relatively easy access to presenters. Most of the presenters were prepared with organized, practical information on their specific topics. The agent speed dating was surprisingly effective (I thought it would be a logistical nightmare). I also appreciated the opportunity to get feedback on my own writing, specifically, at the pitch practice and the free editor consultation.
I think the best element of SFWC is the fact that there are so many elements! Each track was top notch. I got a lot out of the free consultations with editors and promotion experts. I also got a lot from the Ask a Pro tables. There were so many different things going on all the time! Whatever your conference goals are, you'll have a cornucopia of opportunities to learn and connect. Published and agented authors, don't think this conference isn't for you. Even after you're published, you still need to grow, learn, meet new people, improve yourself as a writer, and keep up with the evolving landscape of publishing. You can do all that and more at SFWC.
Some good presenters. Meeting editors and agents.
networking; helping new writers
The approachability of the presenters was amazing. The Fiction track was particularly good in terms of content for writers. I liked the pace - that there were moments to connect with other participants and presenters (ie lunch on our own, ask a pro, find your tribe at breakfast). I love the 40 marketing tips in 40 minutes, the opportunity to speed date agents.
Meeting my colleagues, seeing old friends, catching up. Learning craft and marketing and publishing techniques.
The informal conversations and sessions on craft.
Helping new writers become authors. Meeting iconic bestselling authors and other interesting people. Learning from the best in the business.
The number of talented people there, the manner in which it is possible to connect directly with people from the publishing side of things (speed dating etc). The scholarships they offer. The connections that are made.
The camaraderie in the poetry track is great.
Community, Education, Enthusiasm, Possibility
It's hard to pick just one element that is "best." The conference is superbly run, in my opinion. Attendees are given a broad range of topics from experts who by and large do a good job of presenting. There is a healthy mix of craft and business, but it is a conference focused on the business side of publishing. The people and the energy are really inspiring every year, and I think it's because the conference is run so well.
The friendliness of the staff and volunteers. The broad view of the craft of writing, the business of publishing, and the opportunities for networking. The chance to meet and talk to all types of people in publishing--from newbie writers to experienced editors and agents. Speed Dating for Agents. Practice Your Pitch. Keynote speeches. One-on-One Agent Conversations. Ask a Pro. Five Session Tracks: Nonfiction, Fiction, Childrens/YA, Self-Pub/Tech, Marketing/Biz
For me, it's the teaching. Followed by the immersion. Just being in the same place with so many other writers, as well as agents and publishers. It's encouraging and exciting.

If a writer is on the verge of publishing, it is a must to attend, make sure his/her manuscript or at least 3 chapters are ready, attend the Pitch Practice Sessions and then attend Sunday's Agent Speed Dating. If the project is ready and worthy and the author is prepped and presents appropriately, he/she will land the chance for a closer look by an agent. That is worth the price of admission if not the bonus for the price of admission. It is the golden ticket opportunity.
The speakers and volunteers.
C.S. Lakin, Kristen Lamb and Mary Rakow—very good instructors and offered useful advice in their "Down the Rabbit Hole" class. Really enjoyed the keynote speaker Jane Friedman who really gave the audience valuable info on how to get going and make a career as a writer. I enjoyed the "Speed dating" Thought Ransom Stephens class on "Getting Inside reader's brain", was excellent. He injected a lighthearted delivery that works well. Perhaps some of the other classes can benefit from this type of delivery (Not taking oneself overly serious). Overall the SFWC convention was very good with speakers that really do care and wish to help others. I hope my input will prove to be helpful.
The diversity.

APPENDIX H

What, if anything, could be done to make the SFWC more rewarding or successful?

It's a constant struggle to keep the conference affordable given the location. Though most attendees say it's worth every penny after they come. Getting that word out more effectively would help us because increasing the number of attendees will help us keep costs down.
This is a hard one for me to answer, since this year we are finally getting the chance to do many of the things we have discussed and wanted to do for years. We needed more space and more man power and we have that now.
I really loved the sword enactment. Never thought about how inaccurate fight and period scenes we're before. More visual stuff to write about. How about a wandering book character like Huck Finn or historical author like Mark Twain or H.G.Wells? More writing contests. Session journals maybe.
To eventually get published and/or start a new/rewarding career. A little more organization (although this is always improving).
While the keynote speakers vary each year, some of the session presenters have been there year after year. Perhaps mixing in some new presenters with some of the "old hats" would bring a spark to the conference.
I know there are a lot of logistics that go into these events, so meetings like the orientation are important but I wasn't sure that was the best use of our time. It seems like a lot of that can get covered in an email. In general, making the communications with the volunteers smoother-- via email so it's always available-- and making sure everyone who is in charge is on the same page prior to speaking would be helpful.
My biggest concern with the conference in the past has been the lack of space. I think the move to the Hyatt will solve this issue.
It will be interesting this year (2019) to see how the SFWC does at the new venue; The Hyatt Regency. I also like that the breakout sessions are one hour instead of 45 minutes.
I'll tell you afterward!
Less emphasis on pitching to agents. Or, more honesty on the "funnel" of how many people pitch, how many sign with an agent based on that, how many then get publishing deals and how many books are published. Oh, and how many even earn back their advance :) :) Better "matching" to enable attendees to find their tribe. Factors could be by stage of career, genre, traditional vs indie, and what they're looking for from the conference (eg a writing group, beta readers, marketing cohort, business mastermind...) A little less repetition of speakers. It seems like certain names & faces show up year after year to promote their own businesses.

Some attendee-led meetups would be cool, and/or more "fringe" events like morning walks. Plus a better way to connect with other attendees, not just based on whom you're lucky enough to run into in the hallway.
Not sure yet.
I haven't been there enough to have ideas for its improvement!
The only suggestion I would make is to change the date. I'm always working on Valentine's Day. Maybe the week before would be better?
I'd like to see more craft sessions that are included in the price, rather than in addition. I would appreciate more single speaker events rather than panel discussions because I think you learn more that way.
I often offer to do presentations or want to sign up to teach paid classes but my interest usually gets lost in the shuffle from year to year.
I dunno I'm tempted to say that it would be better if attendees were vetted, but then I probably wouldn't go because I hate that elitist shit. On the other hand, maybe if it were cheaper for published authors or something like that, to increase attendance of professionals and make it more like a "conference" in the academic or professional sense. As it is, it's more of a beginning writers event.
As I am answering this before attending SFWC 2019, I don't have any current suggestions.
I'd like to see some kind of writing salon — an environment set up specifically for writing throughout the conference during downtime.
More craft classes.
I wonder about a business book track at some point or a bit more emphasis on non-fiction potentially expanding the reach of the event.
Increased attempts at diversity of the attendee pool.
None
Diversity
The array of literary agents available for agent consultations and speed dating was very limited in my genre. My novel is literary, with several layers of complexity. The one agent Lisa Abellera I spoke to at speed dating interrupted me to tell me she doesn't take projects with violence against women. (there was a stalker who was trying to rape my heroine's daughter, but my MC kills him.) Big mistake getting in her line. Because I had selected two agents for speed dating who were not present, including Monica Odom and Amelia Appel, the only two agents left in my genre then had 20 people in line, so I gave up. Speed Dating was a complete waste of my time and my dollars. In the future, I would recommend at least four minute sessions. I need a good two minutes to 'splain my concept, but when an agent interrupts me mid-way to issue her "views" about works that contain violence, I was simply sunk. By that time, the remaining two lines for literary fiction were too long for me to stand in. Re: the many "paid" events. This conference charges quite a lot to enter, and I understand SF is an expensive city. But it seems that some events I wanted to attend or take part in cost even more. There was a constant message to "give us more money" for this or that. (silent auction, scholarships, sponsorships, master classes, etc.)

Bottom line: Because I was seeking literary representation, this conference did not deliver for me. I think the number and variety of literary agents was limited because of the sponsorship/oversight by Fuse Literary. Not that Laurie McLean didn't do a great job. She did a great job! But if you are a NY lit agent, would you travel to a conference sponsored/overseen by another literary agency? I don't think so.

It was a great experience.
More agents for speed dating

None.

It's a nice idea to have us explore for free lunches but I was alone for all those free time meals because I didn't make friends that fast.

I like the move to the Hyatt. To improve for presenters and volunteers, having hot water and tea available in the meeting rooms would be a huge improvement. It may seem like a small thing, but when you're talking all day, it can make a huge difference. More varieties of tea in the volunteer lounge & better food would also be wonderful. We can't always take care of our comfort needs when speaking on so many panels. Cold water with ice doesn't help when my throat is dry. Pizza would be a great idea. Also juice. Veggies to dip in ranch dressing would be wonderful. The workshops, structure, speakers, etc., are all good. It's the tiny comfort things that could make it much nicer.

There were a few logistical problems, such as 1) finding my seat among the tables for advance luncheon requests (needed better signage or alphabetical seating), 2) finding the right clipboard to sign up for a free editor consultation (there was a stampede to the table and there was no signage to identify which "line" was for a certain editor), and 3) most of the panel moderators were attentive and helpful without interfering with the presentations/discussion of the panelists...however, there was one moderator who inserted herself into each panel she moderated to a degree that not only irritated the audience but was obviously annoying the panelists. I suggest that the organizers have eyes and ears in the rooms that are instructed to bring a problem like this to the attention of someone who can take appropriate action.

This is the hardest question to answer! There are so many elements to SFWC, I would hesitate to add any more. The only thing I can think of is this: Have a volunteer dedicated to mentoring first-time SFWC attendees. At the James River Writers Conference, which is the conference I attend every year in Virginia, this is my volunteer role each year. There is a "this is my first time" box on the online registration form. The conference organizers periodically send me email lists of the first time attendees and I send out emails about twice a month, starting about three months preceding the conference. Each email addresses a topic like how to write a good pitch, conference etiquette, networking tips, etc. I invite them to email me with any questions they have. This helps the conference organizers by deflecting a good portion of the easily-resolved questions to me, leaving the more tricky questions for the organizers. The morning of the first day of the conference, we have a brief meeting for all the first-timers so that (1) I can give them a pep talk to ease the jitters and (2) the first-timers can meet and support each other throughout the conference. We've done this for three years now and we're getting good feedback.

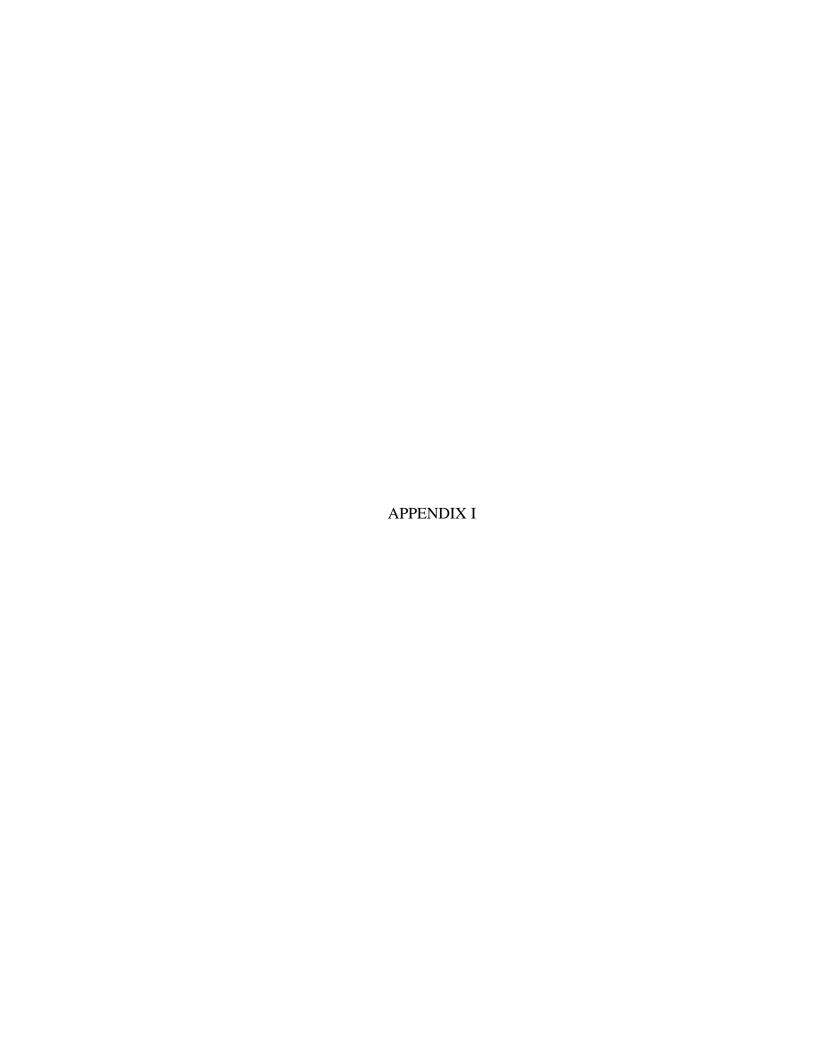| |
|---|
| It was impossible to hear the keynotes during the meals. Lunch break should be a time for socializing with other writers & presenters. Tables should be organized by type of writing. It was hard to find people who wrote the same genre. A better designed program. It was hard to follow the program. The schedule wasn't user friendly at all. |
| It'd be nice for new speakers to have a volunteer contact to help orient them. |
| I can't think of antyhgin. |
| More networking - even if it's just in the bar with some of the presenters there (not pitching them, just hanging out) |
| More of the above. More emphasis on craft and more opportunities for informal conversation. |
| I hope you uncover that after reading the responses to this survey. Like any nonprofit, we could always use an influx of money and sponsors to let us grow. We have more ideas than cash to make them happen. |
| More scholarships |
| The conference is so focused on THE HUSTLE. The craft offerings in the general track are generally very weak. It's a conference focused entirely on publishing/networking and not on the actual writing. I find this pretty disappointing, but on the other hand, I get that that's the focus so I suck it up. I'm also not clear why poetry is so demarcated from prose, as though the two have nothing in common. Prose writers can and should learn from poets, and vice versa, and I think it's a bummer that that's not recognized. |
| Greater overall commitment to being as realistic as possible with attendees in addition to nurturing their dreams. |
| I think some more focus on craft might be nice. There's a lot on the publishing industry, which is what attendees primarily come for. The venue also has been both a benefit (beautiful setting) and a limitation (logistically complex). Being more centrally located in San Francisco would make it easier for more local people to come for just a few sessions. |
| One of our biggest goals is to make it better each and every year, so I think we're doing this already. |
| 1) I think there's an opportunity to insert a few more mid-level classes on craft. I see plenty of sessions that are a gold mine for beginners, and plenty of sessions about process-oriented topics like how to choose an agent or start a blog. But I don't see a great many sessions for intermediate writers like myself, folks who have the fundamentals down and have shopped a manuscript or two, but whose writing still needs that last 20% of polish to help us break through. Perhaps live editor sessions, sort of like pitch-a-thons, but in which editors edit submitted pages? Or sessions on how to go into deep POV, with before-and-after examples (I saw John Olson give a great talk on this years ago at another conference and it's always stuck with me). At any rate, I would love to look at the schedule and see more options for non-beginners. 2) It might also do to mix up the roster of presenters and agents more from one year to the next. I realize that's tricky because so many people are long-time friends, but I think it would prevent previous years' attendees from any feelings of "I saw all these |

people last year, why should I pay to see them again?"   3) By the way, I think the switch to a new venue is a great move, both figuratively and literally.
This question needs to be asked after 2019 and Laurie and her team have worked their magic.
Can't think of anything, but I'm happy that our venue has changed. I think it will be a great venue.....
Would like to see more of the fiction classes repeated so as not to miss them when taking another class. Conversely the keynote speech (although very interesting) by Jose Vargas was too politicized and polarizing. The podium at a writer's convention shouldn't ever be a "Bully pulpit" to criticize any political party or to push illegal immigration. (Kind of ridiculous when you think about it) There are platforms to do that and this wasn't the time nor place. What about structured workshops that are divided by genre, i.e. Historical fiction, romance, and so on where the participants can share information about what works and what doesn't in successful writing careers? I enjoyed the "Speed dating", however due to the volume of attendees one isn't able to visit more than 4 of the agents (long lines generally). Could there be a better way to get this done so one can visit with all potential agents? On breakout #13, unfortunately the speaker appeared to be ill prepared.
Make more inclusive of the formerly incarcerated.

APPENDIX I

Michael Larsen Interview Transcript

Michael Larsen Interview 2-17-19 – Full interview less digressions

ROBB: I'm going to ask 10 questions, but, please, feel free to talk about anything you want to talk about.

MICHAEL: We'll just see where the conversation takes us

ROBB: OK. So, the first question is if you can give me an overview of the history of the conference?

MICHAEL: Well. Elizabeth and I moved to San Francisco in 1972. And we had the idea of a conference for a long time because it wasn't one here. That was then and remains, I think, the second largest center for publishing in the country after New York. A distant second. but second still. And the community only gotten stronger more vibrant. It continues to be so, and the conference is a sign of that. So, this is a place for a conference. We felt then and still do get the programming aspect of it is the easy part. It's those districts about which we had no experience. And it seemed like a formidable obstacle. But one of the agents was a woman who helped us get hotel, got us to the Sir Francis Drake, which is where we went to the first two years to meet our group. And it was successful from the very beginning. It sold out every year. There were just too many people there, at the Sir Francis Drake. And it started out, and the reason I was there was that it was really a labor of love. Nobody got paid. Elizabeth and I started getting, I think it was, $1, 500 a month, each. Then sometime she stopped getting paid because she was less active. Then, my salary was a thousand dollars a month. Writers' conferences are not a path to wealth. So, in any case, we labored a couple of weeks a year, and it was always successful. And the people I knew, Barnaby Conrad, Jack Canfield, came to speak. And we had programs on that. And there was this combination of breakouts and encounters. And people came. We didn't know. We couldn't prove it would happen, but it did. And I guess being near the BART helped; you could walk up Powell Street. That was a good idea. But it also attracted people from other places, too. San Francisco is a great place to visit. I think the fact that it's a holiday weekend is a good thing. So, people they can save money and they don't have a day off and they can spend time visiting.

WAITER: (Waiter arrives and chats briefly).

ROBB: OK. So, you're saying the holiday weekend was helpful?

MICHAEL: Well I assume it was. For one thing, the day we give people the extra day so they had lots of time to get away. But actually, the conference has always done something on Friday. In fact, it actually started it started on Thursday actually, it

seems to me, with four days. It never really started on Friday. It seems to me that this year it's Wednesday. Isn't it? Yes, that's right.

ROBB: Yes, and there's master classes after that.

MICHAEL: Right. Right. And then tomorrow (Monday), too. I seem to remember master classes. And those were kind of fundraising things. We were inspired--by the way I've written about this stuff in programs and for the newsletter--so you can access the back issues.

ROBB: OK. Thank you. I may have missed some of them.

MICHAEL: Well OK. Now, it just occurred to me that Mark is the first tag line of the conference, building bridges to a better tomorrow, with the Golden Gate Bridge and whatnot. I really hoped that it would be a celebration of craft, commerce, and community. And that's the tagline itself.

ROBB: Yeah. That's what impressed me when I heard you speak in Redding and why I wanted to get involved. It was both optimistic and realistic, and I will tell you, too, in the surveys I've seen, that people like the sense of community they experience at the conference.

MICHAEL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. There's no question about it, and you know what? Despite all technology and how it connects people, the reality is there's really no substitute for human contact, particularly in a field like writing which is very isolated. You're sitting at the computer a lot. And so, we really need community. Both because of a sense of isolation that it creates and also because of the challenge of getting published, of getting feedback. One of the biggest continuing challenges is getting feedback and finding a community of readers. It takes a cadre--both finding a writing group while you're writing and then getting a beta reader-tester after you're finished, whether it is a proposal or a manuscript. And those are crucial pieces. So, I'm like you because I always ask if you have a fiction reader here and a non-fiction reader over there, and get a volunteer to coordinate and just spontaneously do it. In fact, I'm in a writing group that came out of the Writing for Change Conference, a fabulous group. Holy cow.

ROBB: I've heard of them.

MICHAEL: Yeah. Somebody comes in from Fresno, somebody comes in from Healdsburg. We get have a meeting like every six weeks. It's just a wonderful group.

ROBB: Wow.

MICHAEL: There are a lot of problems with writer's groups. They don't always work. They become too social, and people don't get the feedback they need. Yeah. We're not here to talk about writing groups, but they are a piece crucial but it's that spirit of community. And that was the amazing thing that always happened every year, about which I don't feel I had anything to do. really. But 300 or 400

147

strangers can get together and form a community and help each other and talk to each other. You know I would help to introduce them to one another as they sat at the round table. And that's sort of got things started. It's one of the great things about the conference. I never saw that at another conference. But that's tremendously important. And the segue to my opening talk, that the most important thing that they may come away from the conference with is the person next to you, sitting beside you. So that's really important. You make long-term relationship. The remarkable example is that one year, there was one attendee and one volunteer and they met and a year later they got married you know.

ROBB: (Laughing) So, you've got to watch out for that. (2nd question) So what were some of the really big obstacles you had to overcome to get this going? You mentioned that once you had the idea, you had to find someone to help you with the logistics.

MICHAEL: You just pick somebody. She was initially a partner. We had problems with her, and she didn't stay with us

ROBB: While it did work out, what were your headaches?

MICHAEL: Well... it always worked. Volunteers are a significant thing. That why we were lucky to have Linda (Lee). Because she is a fabulous volunteer coordinator. Getting people--you need a lot of them--more than 70 of them. And so, you need people who are serious about being volunteers. Ones who come to go to the events, who are responsible do their duties, you know. There was a volunteer get together a couple days or a couple weeks before, maybe one or two weeks. Because we want them to work as much as possible and get as much as they can. And some of them started writing groups in themselves, and they come from all over to the people who volunteer to them stay the hotel, you know. As far as I can tell, the had a good time. And we used to have a follow up lunch with them --just a few people in the area --just to get feedback and ideas for next year. And that was very. enjoyable I love bringing people together, and this is a great example of that. When they learn they can't learn and have a good time, and they do.

ROBB: How did you find your team? It sounds like you had a lot of good people in the room.

MICHAEL: Well, not a lot. But we were inspired by two couples. And one was Barnaby and Mary Conrad who started the Santa Barbara Writers Conference. We (Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomeda) started going there in like the late 70s early 80s. And then also the Maui Writers' Conference, John and Janet Tullius. And we were there from the first year for like 10 years. And Barbara and Richard were both involved with a conference from the beginning, she was doing publicity and Richard was doing other things there. So, we knew them for a decade, and as it happens--just totally lucky --and we were very lucky. The pieces came

148

together in a way we could not have predicted. They moved to the Bay Area to be near their kids. They've got a couple of different kids, and they've got grandkids in the Bay Area, in the East Bay. So, they were there, and Richard took care of registration and Barbara took care of publicity and did the newsletter. And we all helped. actually, with registration things, also. And so those two are the most important two. Once we had Linda doing the volunteers that was squared away. But it took a while to weed out people, and there's never been a problem getting volunteers because they like it enough to want to come back. And there's people who have been here 10 years. So that's all good. Have I done justice to that?

ROBB: Oh, yeah. Honestly, my goal is to be helpful. One of my goals is to have a small conference, somewhere, for humor writers. That's sort of a different thing, and there's all kind of problems because of the different size and venue, and I don't want to get into that for this interview. But let's refocus

ROBB: No, let's consider somewhere large, which is considered a desirable destination.

MICHAEL: What about Chico?

ROBB: San Francisco is considered to be a desirable destination, and that's part of my research design. The dynamic here is that there's a lot of talent. A culture that's vibrant. Let's consider somewhere more like this. Someplace like Seattle or Portland. What advice would you offer someone who wanted to start a conference? What advice would you give someone who wanted to start a conference like the SFWC? And I will tell you something really funny. Because I read a book on how to start a film festival, because the first chapter of the book is that "you don't want to do this! "

MICHAEL: (Michael guffaws). We, again, Robb, you have to be clear about why you're doing it. You don't do it because you want to make money. You don't get the money.

ROBB: Right.

MICHAEL: You do because you enjoy doing it right. I always found a tremendously exhilarating because the same miracle happened every yea. People would come in and have a great time. Hello! What accounts for that? (smiles) So I was with Joyce Turley --and this spontaneously evolved--to do flowers and give scholarships. well, that's something you may like to put in and there's Harvey Pawl who does his dinner thing. Amazing! Just meeting people so it inspires a lot of positive energy. So, what I can say is, have a clear vision of what you want. As agents, Elizabeth and I were agents for more than 40 years, so studied a lot of conferences, we went to a lot of conferences. And so, we had a sense of what they were like, how they were different. And they were all different in different ways. They had different ways of doing things. They had their own groups that put them together. So, having a clear vision of what we want to achieve and

149

	then having a group of people that are hopefully are to as dedicated making it happen as you are. Also, it's a labor of love for them as well. So, it's can't be about a sense of gains instead it's got to be about giving rather than getting.
ROBB:	OK. And one of the next questions is a bit complicated, but it's about the people. And it's about assembling them.
WAITER:	(Waiter returns to talk about the menu. Michael and he joke, and then we order some cheese and wine.
ROBB:	It's hard to know what all questions to ask in our limited time. I realize, the more I look at this, there are many moving parts. There're the financial aspects... There're the venue aspects. There's getting the talent aspects. There's getting the volunteers. So how did you assemble your team? Did they approach you? Or did you reach out to them
MICHAEL:	Well, it didn't take all that many people to get started. Kathy Antrim was there from the beginning, she was on the board. She's a writer. Robert Richard. We had one or two volunteer coordinators that didn't really work out. It is kind of hit and miss. So, it's not like you can expect to line up the perfect team right away. I mean there is a rhythm to the conference, and the further out from it the less that there is to do. And the closer you get to it, the more there is to do. And there comes a point maybe in February that you're on conference time, so things have to happen and you don't think about time anymore. And whatever has to be done gets done. But the people kind of have the freedom to do that.
ROBB:	I don't want to change the topic here, but I've come to see some things from attending other conferences. For example, I went to Reno. They've got a sweet little boutique conference in Reno. It's small.
MICHAEL:	Yeah, I've been there. I've spoken there
ROBB:	And they have a different set of problems. What I've seen, and I've talked to the organizer about this, is that they struggle to offer an honorarium that can attract people and still stay within budget. because you know what I worked for because they struggle to offer free tickets. So part of the business model for San Francisco is that you often don't have to pay people to fly in and rent a room and all that. That's a big plus
MICHAEL:	Yes. Well again, it's because it's the second largest writing and publishing center in our country. There's lots of writers and lots of publishing people. For example, there's an entire organization based on that fact, the Bay Area Publishers' Association. So, I mean that's all good.
ROBB:	That's what I mean. So, you don't have to worry about compensation

MICHAEL: We've never paid anybody. But again, keep in mind that access to the conference for three to four days, and meals, and a party for the presenters. They had a pretty good time

ROBB: Yes, and I think it's a great gift, on behalf of the talent, to make these presentations. Some of these people could earn hellacious speaker's fees?

MICHAEL: Ahhh... (hesitates, thinking.) Well, yes. It's a labor of love. Surely for best-selling authors.

ROBB: But just to be clear. You never paid any of the keynotes?

MICHAEL: No, but again, if they're coming from elsewhere. They get to stay at the Mark.

ROBB: So, that's not a travel expense?

MICHAEL: No, no, no. No now that there's one of the ways in which we're lucky that's in San Francisco. I mean if we were in Provo Utah.

ROBB: Well, if it were in Reno. That's one of the things they have to contend with. There's economy of scale

MICHAEL: Yeah, but they (TMCC in Reno) But they have a $500 honorarium. So, I got to go up and stay at the Nugget when I'd speak

ROBB: That's what I mean.

MICHAEL: Yeah, but you couldn't ask for someone to go there for free. It doesn't make any sense, even if just covered for expenses alone.

ROBB: OK. Now, on the next question, is there anything in particular that is a huge mistake to avoid? Something that an organizer should be on guard against? It's the old "had I known then what I know now" you wouldn't have done?

MICHAEL: (He laughs and shakes his head). Well I gave Laurie the power to fire me, and she did. (Laughs more.) What can I say to that? Ah...

ROBB: I know. And one of the people I spoke with, who talked to me in confidence, would like to see you back, involved with the conference. More than that, I can't really say in this interview.

MICHAEL: Yeah, Barbara and Richard want to get together at the end of the month, and we'll see what they have to say.

ROBB: I know this is an awkward subject, and I appreciate your candor and generosity in still talking openly--and affectionately--about the conference and allowing my thesis research to go forward. But I have been impressed with your work, and I wanted to document it as part of my research. And I'm not trying to woo you to represent me. (Laughs)

MICHAEL: (Laughs) I'm retired, but I'd be happy to help you with your humor conference. I think it's a great idea.

ROBB: Well thank you, and pivoting on that. What advice would you offer on attracting quality people? And I mean even volunteers or anyone associated with an event, even at the board level?

MICHAEL: I'm glad you mentioned the board, because that's really needs to be discussed. Again. There are boards and there are boards. There are strictly fundraising boards, some boards really help influence how the conference is run. I just like being people together. So, I wanted people I felt could contribute ideas and suggestions. So, we had a board of, like, 14 people. And we'd get together for lunch maybe a couple times year. And Joyce actually used to pay for our lunch at the City Club here. And we had a good time and some ideas emerged from that--not a lot. But they made a significant difference in the conference. But Harvey was a member, and Joyce, but we were always open to more members if there were people we felt could contribute good ideas and who wanted to get together for lunch a few times a year but it did work. Laurie disbanded the board. There was no real bottom-line benefit, and she does not have the same feeling about community that I do. So, there are different kinds of boards, but that's a valid question. I think it's good to have a board, but to have a clear vision of what you'd like from the board. It's unlikely to get a board to go and get money for you here, that doesn't seem.... here in San Francisco. Maybe there is a person who could do that, but that's just not me. And you have to be clear about what you expect from the board. So how do you like people's different aspects of writing or publishing would be something for this. We like to have a bookseller, but they are very very busy but we just had different aspects of publishing. There was an author, North Korean authors. It's just people bring different perspectives--and that's really important that's really important. Now more than ever. You know one of America's greatest traits is its greatest challenges and that is diversity. So, California is a state of the future. The people speak more than 200 languages in the state. This state is the United Nations, and that's amazing. And you know the history of Western civilization is going to the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and now the Pacific. You know the civic this is a Pacific century. And so, California is perfectly positioned to take advantage of this. San Francisco and LA. Despite the challenges facing cities face and the state faces. So, board. So, what did you think about that? Did it teach you what you wanted to know, and what you need, and how they can help you? Let me clear about this, and that thing I gave you (Michael emailed me a book to beta-read), that there really is a variety of bookselling and publishing, agenting, editing, publicity, all are the labors of love. Book lovers that are passionate about books they love want to share their excitement about them. And even at the Booksellers Convention, where there used to as many as 30,000 people, but there was still a sense of community. It was a book community. It is a tiny piece of the economy. So, but still there is this sense of community. That's really

important. So, I don't know if there is anything else I can tell you about boards. If somebody can find boards that can you go out and get money for you, that's wonderful. Only, I'm not sure that Chico is the place to do the conference.

ROBB: No.

MICHAEL: No. You could do it there, but there's the whole transportation bit. I can imagine for example Sacramento might be better yet.

ROBB: I know. Others have suggested that, too.

MICHAEL: I still think San Francisco would be better, but that's further away from you. But we've got better airplanes. There are more non-stops and stops to choose from. The easier you make it for people to get here, the better.

ROBB: You may have answered the next question already, but let me put it out there. Once you have a program up and running, and you can see that it is going to go on, year to year. How is it different to prepare for or run the conference, then? How does the game change for you?

MICHAEL: Well, you just keep trying to make it better. You learn from your mistakes, there's always mistakes, just not major ones. But things you could do better. Sometimes, it's the programming. Like, this year they're having a screenwriter's study. We'll there's always a screenwriter's thing. That's all good. But, how can you be more helpful? Also, it's fascinating. The publishing business is fascinating and the best business to be in because it is a labor of love. You learn whom to get with. So, it's also changing quickly a lot more than ever and faster than ever. So, you know, you're in this flow and things are never the same anymore. Book publishing has changed more in the last 10 years that it has the previous 100. So, keeping up with that, changes and taste, ways to use technology, ways to communicate. That's a perpetual challenge. For example, promotions are huge thing of writers.

ROBB: Oh, yeah.

MICHAEL: They think they can't do it, and yet they have to. And I believe that writers to be successful today that writers have to do more, and know more than ever. That they have to be able to write and promote their book. You know, there's more ways and more places to reach readers faster and more easily than ever for free. Hello. That's the power of kings! And that's amazing. But writers, again, are introverts. They want to just write. I get that, but that's the way it used to be. So that's one of the ways in which technology's transforming the industry. Now it's just crucial to build communities, a community of fans, and all communities you need. You can't be without those. The readers, the booksellers, the media, all the people you need. But, obviously, the most important is fans. No more important change has come from the industry. It's been turned upside down. It's not the big houses, the big publishers, the big booksellers, making books

work. It's readers. It's always been ultimately the very word of mouth. Now it's the word of mouse. It's Goodreads and all the social media, and new ones keep emerging. There's Pinterest and Instagram, and that's all good. They're all opportunities. So that's a challenge. So, writers have to be community voters. I mean that's not an option if you want to be successful. There're more ways to go about writing than ever. One of the challenges today that is that literary writers make less than commercial writers. So, if you want to go about writing literary fiction, you have to expect to make less money, and if you want to go about writing poetry, you have to expect to make no money. So that's just a given and what you have to live with. But if that's what you want to do, then you do that. Because anybody can get published for free. So, the democratization of writing and publishing is amazing. You can write a book and it will give it to I-Universe, not that I recommend it, but they'll publish it for free. You just buy a copy when you need it. Anybody can write anything and get it published.

ROBB: You spoke on some of these points when you came up to Redding a few years ago, and I appreciated both the message of hope and the hard-truths of the money that isn't to be made. (Laughs) It's a great joy.

MICHAEL: Well everything I do is really goal-based. The heart of the book is three sentences about goals. Find out what your literary and publishing goals are--two different things. Find out what it takes to achieve it. Then do it. Now, if you're happy writing for no money--and some people are--then you've got no problem. You can write anything. In fact, if you're a small publisher, that's far easier. In fact, most writers are going to self-publish. That's a huge thing. And the self-publishing track should be there. That's really important. It's just being clear about where you want to go and what it takes to get there. There are more models, more books to use as models and more authors to use as models. It's all out there. It's a great industry in that way. It's all online, and you can see it. You can meet people. You can go to literary events, especially here in the Bay Area.

ROBB: The last formal question I have to ask you. If someone wanted to start a conference like the one you've launched, what advice would you give them?

MICHAEL: Well, obviously the more experience that the person starting has in writing and publishing the better. We did have decades of connections, and friends in the business. We knew lots of editors, but even so, when offering a New York editor a trip to San Francisco, particularly in February. Not that hard a thing. Sometimes they'd even bring spouses with them, they're staying at a four-star hotel. That's usually not a difficult sell. So, at the same time they are using four days of work and coming to get writers to take back. And that's another aspect of, you know, the emotional relationships in community. We once got a letter because somebody because they'd seen us as agents, because they'd seen us speak 40 years ago. Hello. Now, you know, it's not the speaking, obviously. Making contact with somebody whether you do it like speed dating with and

agent or editor. You can call on them whenever you're read. You can say I met you at the conference. So that's a permanent contact. Time could be 20, 15 years. It's happened. They have this connection and they feel like can call, and they should. So that's a good thing. That's one of the things a conference does. and it's particularly important with agents, or editor s, either way because the you can approach directly. Or maybe you can if you make a connection with agents, you get to know a sense of who they are. And make a connection with someone that you (emotionally) connect with. Then' that's a bond. And then maybe get along with. That's the way you get most people like me connect. And keep in mind that the conferences are deducted, the transportation deducting Hello.

ROBB: Thank you, Michael, for taking the time to meet with me. Before I let you go, one thing I learned as a reporter to ask is this: Is there anything I should have asked you about this topic but that I overlooked?

MICHAEL: Just give people way as many possible ways to connect. Obviously, speed dating is one way, or panels with the editors is another way. And connecting with each other I think the dinners is. another way, and there's opening reception, that's another way. Something we never did but would like to do is to have a list. And if people wanted to be on the list, they could, and connect with other attendees. with basic information, phone number, what they're writing, and what they need--if they want to be in a writing group. So, everybody.... there's Facebook page for the conference. Right.... So,

ROBB: Right....

MICHAEL: So, there is that. I don't know what they're using in the way of apps, or anything. But there is that. But there's more ways to connect with writers and people at the conference.

ROBB: The conference tried using an app a couple of years ago, but from what I hear it was costly the event and not a lot of people bothered to use it

MICHAEL: And yeah there's one that they weren't thrilled with all kinds of apps that there's something to get better. But what you want to do is to have a vision of what you want to do when you're a getting a team together so they can help you do it. And what I said about editors is also true about the conference. hat it's a working marriage, with personal and professional aspects to it. So. You have to relate to these people personally, because you're going to be spending a lot of time together. But you also have to work, professional, well together.

ROBB: Thank you, Michael. We've covered the set questions. Are you up for some personal questions about being an agent?

MICHAEL: Sure.

COMMENTARY: I asked Michael a number of questions about being an agent, and the conversation drifted into the wildfires that ravaged our nearby town, Paradise. Eventually, we drifted back into talking about writing conferences. Michael was interested in my plans do stage a humor conference.

MICHAEL: One possibility (of starting a humor conference), is if you made it made it an offshoot of the same system. So, if you to use the whole structure and set up and just do something you know some of the time of the year somewhere and see whatever happens. There's a lot of conferences in the summer, but yours is very specific. The challenge is that summer is prime time. One of the benefits of this time of year is that the rates are relatively low because there is not that much going on. But it's different in summer, it's going to be more and more in the city, particularly since Oakland just expanded. So, I don't know what's happening with hotel rates. That's the setting. Maybe the college, but there's issues. The problem with the Mark is that it wasn't near BART. And there's nothing around it. Other than that, it was fantastic it was too expensive. A t one point, we were $75, 000 in debt. Which, personally, I was able to cover.

COMMENTARY: (The water returns with more food and we talk with him a bit.)

MICHAEL: But you want to have a place that people enjoy coming to. You know another option in San Francisco, which is less expensive, would be Oakland. There may be more writers in Berkeley now than there are in the city.

ROBB: Where would that be (in Oakland)?

MICHAEL: Well this is a very specific one at the Nonprofit Center, Preservation Park right off the 980, the freeway, and Victorians they've put together. They've been used in conferences and one of those buildings they can easily hold like 100 people. Now the whole thing is a big room, I don't know about break outs. So, you want to go see that.

KARIN: What about Sacramento?

ROBB: I don't know. I'd have to study that?

MICHAEL: Oh, there's tons of places. Another possibility is aligning himself with a college.

KARIN: What he's finding is that humor is not really respected in the academia.

MICHAEL: Sure, that makes sense. Well that's right that's not point. The point is that you're interested in doing it. Do you know Ernie Witham? He teachers at Santa Barbara. Very, very nice guy. He teaches at Santa Barbara, and he could be one of your teachers. Has a humor class, self-published a number of books. (pauses briefly to eat). His writing, it's a joy to read.

COMMENTARY: Waiter returns, interrupting Michael.

MICHAEL: Do you have a vision. Did you like to see happen at the conference?

156

ROBB: I look at this conference (the SFWC), and it has expanded my ideas. I see teaching, but also performing. I think the scholarships are important. Building the sort of community you have. I want to have a gathering of people who are serious about this, even if they are beginners, and supported by realistic professionals who know their stuff and can be helpful without being harsh.

MICHAEL: Any stand up?

ROBB: Yeah, probably. But I like the control that writing gives, too

MICHAEL: Well, you have to have open mikes like.

ROBB: Yeah. I think it would be fun.

MICHAEL: Stand-up, how you get into stand-up. Wow it's just that it's like you can do films and people come on. You could do films, and have the movie people come. Video. That should be a part of it, video.

ROBB: Yeah. Short films. I was up at 3:00 in the morning, and there were some interesting 7-minute short films.

MICHAEL: Hello. And so that's why I sent you something. I sent you a little short film or something. Oh. Amazing, amazing. A father and two kids, and the quality of the photography... the clarity of it, and also just the sheer design of it, the composition of the frames....

ROBB: I guess what it is that I have some ideas, but I'm going to have to open it up for others to participate, and it will expand beyond my initial conception. You know, it's something that

MICHAEL: Also, there's a cartoon museum here in town. Did you know that?

ROBB: I did not know that.

MICHAEL: South of Market, somewhere out there.

MICHAEL: Maybe that's w here it is. Well I don't know. It might be a place to have a reception or something.

ROBB: That's a good idea.

MICHAEL: Cartoons should be part of it. And that's one of the things about looking out there. Because you ask what are the opportunities for humorists? There's YouTube, there's podcasts. There're cartoons. There's video. There're more ways to make people laugh than ever, and it's less expensive to do these things now!

ROBB: Yeah. One of the things that has inspired me is a publication called The Funny Times. They are a monthly with a circulation of about 70, 000, and I think they could help me vet talent.

157

MICHAEL: What are they doing?

ROBB: They've been around for, like, 30 years. But they only recently got on the web, and I don't think they've figured out how to put their older material on line yet. You know how this is--I don't think they bought the rights they need. He has five regular contributors, and then another five or so that vary from month to month.

MICHAEL: Where do they publish?

ROBB: Ohio.

MICHAEL: Where in Ohio?

ROBB: I'm not sure, I'll have to look that up.

MICHAEL: Maybe that's an alliance for you. That alone could make it happen.

ROBB: I have about 10 years of this publication, and I want to go back through it and approach those I like. What happens is that some of these people publish a story or two and disappear. That's what's happened to me. But I could put together thematic stuff and then get in marketed to niche outlets. Hard to do.

MICHAEL: and disappear. That's what's happened to me. But I could put together thematic stuff and then get in marketed to niche outlets. Hard to do. Distribution is a challenge, but interesting idea.

ROBB: and disappear. That's what's happened to me. But I could put together thematic stuff and then get in marketed to niche outlets. Hard to do. Distribution is a challenge, but interesting idea. Waiter returned with more food and wine. We ate more.

MICHAEL: Maybe you should partner with them, and it could be the Funny Times Humor Conference

COMMENTARY: The waiter returned, and we ate more.

MICHAEL: The sheer variety of all the opportunities to be funny is staggering, and all the media you can be funny in. So, it is more opportunities than ever. Plus, there's more access to an. audience Now comedy, YouTube, and podcasting stars are starting to get contracts. Robb, and you could be doing Moths. It's that building a community. And also related to that is creating a brand.

COMMENTARY: Michael engages the waiter again.

MICHAEL: There's also the question of X-rated humor.

ROBB: Yeah. I'm not really a censor, but I'm also not up for that, completely. I'm shooting for family-friendly.

MICHAEL: Well., it should just be a G-rated humor conference, and that should be Yeah clear from the outset.

COMMENTARY: More conversation about the food itself.

COMMENTARY: Michael asks about the new venue.

ROBB: Things went smoothly (at the SFWC19 at the Hyatt), and people seemed to appreciate the extra space. They seemed to feel that it was logistically easier. They had some challenges with tables and set up, but they were resolved right away. I think it went OK, and from what I hear, it was necessary for the event to grow.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I can imagine that the screenwriting track alone could add a 100 people.

ROBB: I've been looking at all the cost surrounding a conference, and one thing I've wondered is how you set a price point. What is the overhead, and to what extent you absorb things for scholarships? I don't know how to set prices

MICHAEL: I don't either. Managing money, handling money, that's not something I handled. I don't know how we set the first price. I don't even remember how much it was. But was based on...

ROBB: Based on what?

MICHAEL: Well, you start with the hotel, but they gave us that separately, so it wasn't that. The food and the beverage, that's a big thing.

ROBB: I remember talking with you a few years ago about the cost of catering and trying to contain the expenses. You were expressing the challenge of dealing with food expenses at the Mark.

MICHAEL: That's huge. A sack lunch was $63. That's kind of the fundamental conflict between the four-star hotel and writers. That's how you get in debt $75,000. You do that with 350 people; it's not good sense. The reality is this is a paradox, that this is worth far more than we can possibly charge for it. I've been to conferences that were two or three thousand dollars. But if you ask people to pay $1,000, they won't attend. So, you've got this conflict, and it's something you just live with. San Francisco is an expensive city. So, it's a big challenge. I think that the last I heard, it was 75 percent of the people come from the Bay Area. So that's either a draw or (unintelligible). And one of the things for years was that it (the Mark Hopkins Hotel) wasn't next to BART. Now that's changed (with the move to the Hyatt Regency) and it's going to be huge. It'll be open to the whole Bay Area

ROBB: Yeah. We came from out of the area, and we had to spend $150 on valet parking plus the rooms. But we have family that lives in East Bay, and they told us we should just stay with them and take BART to the Embarcadero, right next to the new venue. It will save us a bunch.

159

MICHAEL: But that's the point. Most of the attendees are from the Bay Area. It's the speakers that fly in. Well, the venue is very important. There is a crucial piece. To find some place that people enjoy. With colleges... the thing about community colleges is that, and it can be a nice venue, by the way, but it has an institutional feel. The thing about it is that the Mark is fabulous.... There are lots of places in town to have conferences, the question is the cost. On Market and 5th, San Francisco State University has rooms, classes, and also UC Berkeley's extension is there. So, UC Berkeley could be another organizing factor, you could get into working with UC Berkeley. So, there is consideration of how that affects income. But you get cache and access to their mailing list which is plus. So, there is UC Berkeley, Laney College in Oakland... I don't know about that so much. But one thing about starting small, I don't know. Is that the way you see it?

ROBB: Probably. I'm not sure how I'd scale up.

MICHAEL: Well, you start with one day and then go to two. You open with a one-day conference on Saturday. But you're thinking about them having a having a place that people want come is important

SPEAKER: Yeah, and I've been reading where some conferences make sure that the spouses are not bored while the conference is going on.

ROBB: Again, in San Francisco, you don't have to worry about that. But there are conferences that have spouse programs right at the convention center. One had a photographic track where people could get out and take pictures. Another year it was a meditation thing, they had a meditation room that was always open, and anyone could come. It would be nice to have events that are open to everyone, maybe it's a reception that doesn't cost a lot. But, again, it's a matter of what people want and are willing to pay.

MICHAEL: (Michael looks at his watch.) Oh, what's your timeline tonight?

KARIN: We're driving to Davis, just to get out of the City.

ROBB: That's still an hour.

ROBB: I know. It's hard to wrap it up. You're so interesting to talk with, and you've so generous to share your time with us. You're great company. I guess we need to get going. But I'll send you a copy of the interview in a few days. It will take me some time to get it transcribed. I'm a bit swamped right now, but soon I'll be done with the paper and retire. I don't know what I'll do with myself, then. (laughs)

MICHAEL: Well, I think the best thing you can do is start a humor conference.

ROBB: It's tempting.

MICHAEL: It's something you want to do, and there's' a need for it, and this may be the best place in the country to do it. People will drive from the north, the south and the east. And this non-profit thing in Oakland is not far from Chinatown. If you want, we could go over there and look at it sometime. It's near Preservation Park.

ROBB: I may just take you up on that.

MICHAEL: It's one big Victorian. It's one big room. I don't know anything about cost.

ROBB: Thanks for the suggestion. Maybe I can look it up next time we're in the City. And we'll have to get together again. I must say, it's been wonderful having this interview with you, here in the Mark, where the conference really blossomed into a huge success. I'll be sure to send you a writeup of this. It's really awe-inspiring to hear you tell the story of all that went into making the (SF Writers) conference happen. You're interview just reminds me all over again.

MICHAEL: Yes, whatever, I may add something to it (the transcript). It's a lot of pieces. You know it's a lot of pieces, and luck is the biggest thing we have. The space, the hotel, the city of San Francisco, the people who've put it together, the willingness people in the business to talk for free, even best-selling authors. That's so lucky. It's like we set this table, and writers all have a feast. And you even get a community out of it, b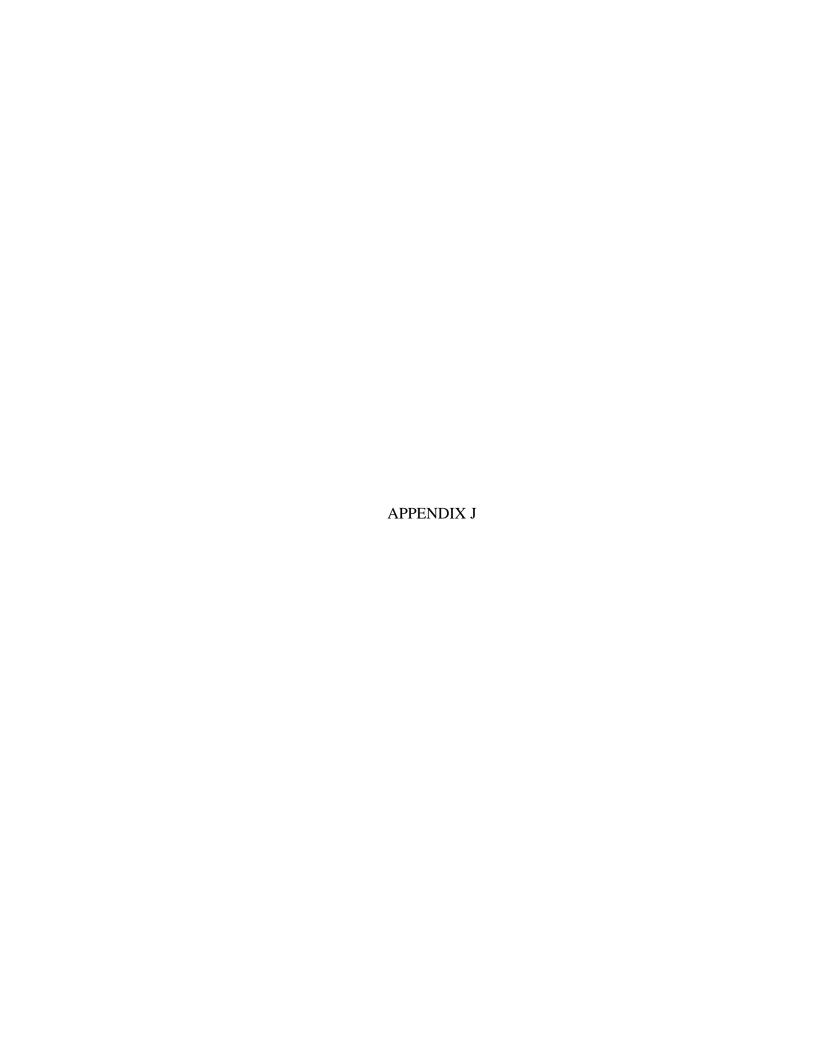ecause all those pieces came together. I didn't know it would come together as well as it did, or have the impact. (long pause). So, what's next?

ROBB: I think we'll wish you well, and hit the road

MICHAEL: Fine. Would you be able to give me a lift home?

ROBB: It would be our pleasure. (I pay the bill and depart.)

APPENDIX J

San Francisco Writers Conference – 2019 Preview by Board of Directors, transcript

SFWC - Preview Panel

LAURIE: (Video starts after panel discussion has already begun) Listen to a pitch is, what kind of feedback I'm going to give you? We'd like it to be good feedback, it's not the pitch itself. So, there's that option as well. But if you don't actively pitch your project while you are there, you are losing out. I mean, we collected professionals from all over the country, and they're all going to be in San Francisco at the Hyatt Regency at your disposal. One of the ways that we select our presenters is to make sure that they are friendly and accessible. We don't want agents who want to give their sessions, and then go back to their hotel room. (We want them) in the lobby, and for them to know how to do this friendly atmosphere that we exude at this conference. (You can) go there knowing that people are going to be available to help you. And that's really important. Talk to bestselling authors. You rarely have more than a few seconds of their time during the book signing. But if you sit next to one of them at lunch, or, you're in the elevator with them, or you walk to the lobby with them, after their talk, and you know what questions you want to ask them. You might get the benefit of a great answer from them. They were once in the same situation that you are now. So, then again, they are at your disposal, and they want to help you. It's amazing to me how accessible and friendly best-selling authors are, most of them. At least the ones we pick. Talk to agents and editors. I know its fearsome this idea that your kind of on your own here, you've been in your house, you've been in libraries, whatever. But you've pretty much been working solo. Maybe in your pajamas, you know, pretty comfortable, getting this book ready. Now that you've got to show it to somebody who is a professional, and agents and editors are intimidating. They kind of have this little shell around them and they really want to help you. But they can't have every one of you be their client. That's kind of the push-pull feeling that you get. But just treat it like a conversation with another person. I like to say think of your agent like your plumber. Do a bit of research on them ahead of time. You would never hire a plumber to fix your sink if that plumber had never fixed a sink before. You want a plumber that knows how to fix sinks. Apply the same reasoning to agents and editors. You want an agent that represents the kind of work that you write. That's the first thing. So, do your research. But then, while you're there, get over your fear and your shyness, and put yourself out there. Put away your introversion. You can always go back to being introverted Tuesday. But on Thursday through Monday, put yourself out there. Talk to other attendees. This is something that is much easier. But it's often forgotten and maybe even mis labelled as not very valuable. But you never know if the person you end up

sitting next to you is going to be a future bestseller. And you could be friends with them, and maybe even become critique partners or beta readers. You're now in their circle, and when their book hits the best-seller list, guess what? They can give you a blurb for your book. They can help you find an agent. They can do a lot of things for you, and it may be flippant to say, that maybe *you're* the bestselling author with someone sitting next to you. You're the future best-selling author. So, do talk to attendees. And we also have a thing called "Dinner with Harvey" that's are one of our advisory board members. Harvey Pawl, he is very generous, and he takes people out to dinner--all the presenters and volunteers--or I guess just the presenters, get to go for free. So that incentivizes that at the conference, and Harvey pays for them. But attendees pay whatever it costs, usually around 40 dollars. And he picks really cool, old-school San Francisco restaurants to go to. So, for $40, I think, you get the main course, a salad, dessert, and you have to pay for your own drinks. But, anyway, it's a really fun thing and you'll get to know all these people at Dinner with Harvey, and a lot them from out-of-town do it. So, you'll meet people from out of town. We have people coming from New Zealand, Australia all over the place to (commend from another speaker) Canada? Yeah. Everywhere. Canada, how could I forget Canada? (laughter from audience). So, don't forget to talk to attendees. If you're standing in line for lunch. If you're sitting down before the session starts. Just introduce yourself. Again, kinda become one of your characters when you go to the conference, and put your energy out there. If you're exhausted, take a break. Maybe somebody else just taking a breather, too, and that one moment in time is going to be a big difference in your career. So that is the serendipity I'm talking about it. If you're staying at the hotel. It's OK to go to your room and just chill out for an hour and miss a session. Go buy the CD of the session or the downloadable MP3 if you miss a session. I think they're like $5 or something ridiculously cheap. Squeeze all you can out of the conference. Download the schedule in advance. It's up on our website right now on the home page. Make a plan. Research, look up the presenters on the presenter page. As soon as you get the program, when you register, mark it up all the breakout sessions you want to attend, and make a list of the presenters that you want to meet. If you don't meet them all, that's OK. But at least you have a goal, and you're moving towards achieving it. That's really important. I can't stress that enough. We also have things called master classes. I alluded to this in the beginning, that there's the main conference, but you might also identify, once you're at the conference, that, wow, I really need help in this area. And so, we have 12 master classes, four on Thursday night and four Monday morning, and four Monday afternoons. These are three-hour classes, and they go in-depth about certain subjects. All these are described on our web-site as well. Take advantage of the extras. Most of these are free. We have a networking and nightcaps event on Thursday evening. All these events are at the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero, by the way, I think the networking nightcaps event will have representatives from a lot of the local writers' groups. So, you'll get to meet people from the California Writers

Club, and the Women's National Book Association, and the Mechanic's Institute. It's very informal and very casual. And you just chat up people that you meet. We also have the practice-your-pitch session that's sponsored by the Tri-Valley Writers Group. That is a way for you to sit down in a circle, with a bunch of peers, and pitch each other. Then you give each other comments on how you can improve your pitch. Again, very casual, non-threatening, easy to do. Friday night, we've got an open mic and meet up. It starts out with 40 marketing tips in 40 minutes It's going to be non-stop firehose-throwing marketing at you. I hope somebody writes them down. I'm going to forget them by about number 20, but that's going to happen Friday night. And then will be followed by an open mic where you can go up and read your pitch. And you can read an excerpt from your work in progress, or your book that is done. On Saturday night, we have a gala which has, you know, your typical and drinks, and music. And Lissa has found a... and Lissa is a poet, by the way, and Lissa is in charge of the Poetry Summit, which is a separate but tangential thing we're doing this year. And she has found an all-poet band called "Copus, " and they're going to be providing the music for the gala on Saturday. Followed by the poetry and the jazz party which is so quintessential San Francisco, I can't even stand it! You can mingle and enjoy being in the presence of other writers. Because my favorite thing to say is that been that my husband totally supports my career. But when I come running downstairs, and I'm totally gloating about this manuscript from one of my clients I just read. It's like: "Honey, that's wonderful, but can you move a just a little bit a to the left? I can't see the TV. I'm listening, but I can't quite see the game. " You know, that's how I feel about people who aren't writers. They just don't get it. Whereas, writers can sit down and talk to each other for two hours and not even think that any time went by at all. So, take advantage of those extras. Number 10, is if an agent or editor, or even an attendee, asks to see your work, and you agree, make sure you email it within a month of the conference. As an agent, I ask for a lot of things, probably an average of about a hundred very San Francisco Writers Conference. I maybe get five to ten. And don't let whether people just get sidetracked or they're afraid or it's just not good enough in their minds, so sure to polish it a bit more benefiting from the lessons you've learned at the conference. But don't ignore the request because you're too embarrassed to send anything. That's really important. So, remember that it's up to the conference remember that I said that here today and follow it. And a bonus tip.... Ask ask ask! You can tap our team of volunteers. They are not only friendly, they also are knowledgeable. So, we can help you solve your problem and be on your way very quickly. Don't stew in your hotel room, or when you are commuting back home, saying: "Ah.... I wish I knew this is taking place!" You know, just ask us. Those are my 10 tips. I went a little bit long. (Laughs) I'll get better at that. (Laughs) Now, if you didn't write those down, or you missed one, or whatever. I am happy to email them to you. My email addresses is Laurie@sfwriters.org Oh. Oh, I'm wrong. OK. Forget that. That's if you want to send me something. So, don't use that one. But my other title is

director@sfwriters.org. (Inaudible comment from another speaker). OK. I'll put them up on the website. OK. I just want to go quickly through the add-on events that I was alluding to that are there. Most of them are included in... all of them are included in the conference but some of them you have to pay extra get or some of them are free. So, I'll identify them. We have master classes ranging in price to ninety-nine dollars to $129. You do not have to go to the conference to go to these master classes. So, if $850 seems like too much money to you, take a master class. It will give you the whole feeling of the conference, taking in a master class. Take two. Agent conversations.... and that's only available if you're part of the conference. Those are $100, and 50% goes the charity work that we do, because we are a non-profit and we do charity work throughout the year. Speed dating is $75, and practice-your-pitch workshops are free. All those--the agent conversations, and speed dating, and pitch workshops--are only available to conference attendees. But the Networking with Local Nightcaps Party and Local Writing Groups is free. The Gala party if you're an attendee is free, if you're a guest it's sixty-five dollars. Poetry and Jazz Party is free. The editor and pro marketing consultations are free. If you're a member, otherwise, they are not available. Concierge coaching consultations with Kevin Smokler and Nina Amir are available to you to conference attendees and that's $75. The ask-a-pro is free, and we have about, I don't know, about 30 or 40 professionals that sit at tables and you could ask them any question. We have photography walks with Melanie Rijkers. That's free. Every morning, and once at lunch, she will show you out all-around San Francisco for an hour to appreciate the sunrise and maybe think about creativity in a different way. Speaking of that, there's also the early bird creative visualization session that is open to the public with Nina Amir, that's free. And that's at the Hyatt Regency. The Friday evening meet-up and open mic readings are free and open to the public. Dinner with Harvey, as I have mentioned, is about $40. All the exhibitors are free. Barbara do you want to talk about it when you do your bit in a little bit? Also, we're going to be doing something new this year. We're going to be doing podcasting interviews. So, those will eventually will be up on our website. It'll say blog-pod and our blog post and our podcast are up there. So, we're going to do them every other week for a year. So, out of one conference, we're we have three experienced podcasters, and they're going to be interviewing the presenters. So that'll be interesting. But that's enough for me to think. (pants for humorous effect) I am going to turn it over to Barbara (Santos), and she is going to talk about actually... no... I'm going to turn it over to Richard (Santos). He's going to talk about breezing through registration for a couple of minutes, and then we'll turn it over to you, Barb.

RICHARD: Good morning everyone. I'm Richard. As far as registration goes, I want to add something. It's something that Laurie said about agent conversations. And they are.... They are not on the website, excuse me. Once you register as an attendee, you get a confirmation page. There is a whole page of explanation of

what the agent conversations are what the concierge program is, and the is links to sign up for that. It's not on the website itself. I just wanted to make that clear so you're not looking for it. When you get registered, you'll know where it is. The registration process to really pretty simple, and it's on the Web site. It's the first tab the first tab on our navigation bar that says "registration... " And under the dropdown, it says "2019 registration," and the masterclasses and the Poetry Summit, and all of that. It's part of the registration for the conference, and attendees have the choice of adding speed dating at that time, if you want. It isn't necessary that you, do. You can be added on-site if you feel, later… If you feel more comfortable about doing that. Come to me, and we'll do it, as long as you do that before Sunday. (Pause while a question--inaudible--is asked from the audience. Richard then speaks again.) Speed dating. (Another inaudible response from the audience). Which is another I wanted to add to. (Laughs) Under the conference drop-down, speed-dating is an option to look at. So, that takes you to the speed-dating page which gives you a really good idea of what speed dating is, how it works, and in about a paragraph down, there is another thing that says more about speed-dating and agent information at the bottom of that it takes you to another page. At the bottom of that page lists all the participating agents who are doing speed-dating, and the type of the genre that they represent, what they're looking for. That should help you in making choices of who you want to see. (Inaudible question). If you have any problems I'm always at my little desk. You can always come see me. That's pretty much all I've got, and if you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

LAURIE: OK. And now Barb Santos.

BARBARA: OK. My turn. If you do you want to get in touch with Richard before they event, I have business cards that are dual, because we do live together. So, all the information is the same (laughs). Yeah, you can pick up one of those. And in the back, there's a flyer that adds information about the event on one side, and all of our freebies and low-cost stuff on the back. So that's information you can pick up, if you didn't get one on the way in. (Question from audience, inaudible). It's on the website, too. Free and open to the public, yeah. So, I'm Barbara Santos, Marketing and Communications Director for the event. And not to hammer it to death, but how many of you do get the SFWC newsletter? (Not all of the audience is visible in the shot, but of those visible, several hands went up.) Good, because it's not just marketing vehicle for the event, it's to create the community all through the year. I want to hear from writers about other, good events: a signing, a book launch. I'd like to get all of that in there (the newsletter), so we've got a little online community going on all year long. And people really appreciate that. I think Rich was telling you out in the hallway that when you finally do get to the conference, you might be sitting next to somebody at lunch and you say who you are, and you'll go: "Oh, and I read about you in the newsletter! " And then instantly you just feel like you know each other. So, it's a really cool thing. It's free, and like Laurie said, just go to our

Web site and you can opt in. You can just opt-in, and we don't sell the list. So, it's just our little community. OK. Laurie touched on a lot of this, but man we've got a lot going on! (laughs) But some of the free and low-cost stuff will be in our exhibit hall. It's going to be open to the public. So even if you have friends that aren't going to get to the conference, you can maybe even meet-up there and great (inaudible) self-publishing options, different associations for writers things like that will all have booths. I know there's going to be at least one really good give-away but I'm not going to say anything because we're still working on that. Do stop by our exhibit hall, it will be open during the most of the hours of the conference. The inspiration, the creativity visioning things, those are all really cool things. And, again, that's on our list. You can get information about that which is on the Web site or pick up a flyer. Let's see, the Poetry Summit is our big thing. Now, I'm going to save that for Lissa (Provost) because that is her brainchild. What I really like to talk about, which is my area of expertise, is the history of the whole darn thing. Very short. I'm so proud to be with this event. We've been working, Richard and I, on writers conferences since the Maui Writers Conference, that's almost 30 years. And it, let me tell you, it takes a village to put on one of these things. It takes creativity, hard work, organization, and a lot of money. You can't even image how much money goes into this thing. So, we've got a fabulous team. But it just wouldn't happen... I keep going back to Richard and I met Mike Larsen, who is the founder, the cofounder, with Elizabeth Pomada, at the very first conference in Maui, it and it took probably 15 years before we came back over to the mainland because our kids were having grandkids, of course. And we reconnected connected with him (Michael) about doing a conference here. So, it's always been that he (Michael) wanted it to be a friendly thing, and he always wanted it to be about networking and community. And I think with the tagline it's about community, commerce, and craft. So, we try to have a little bit of everything, for everybody, at every level when you come to the conference. But one thing that did bug all of us, is that, because we've all been there pretty much since the beginning, is that he (Michael) always said that it is "the magic.' But, ooooh, it's a lot of hard work (laughs). But there is a lot of magic, and we're working hard on it, and we expect you to do hard work, too, before you come. Otherwise, you're not getting the full benefit. I think Laurie touched on that. Go to our website, see who's going to be there, research them. See who you want to meet at the conference, and just throwing it out there. That's when the magic happens because you want to talk to. OK. I'd like to say. The San Francisco Writer's Conference is an event that helps writers become successfully published authors. This is not a learn-how-to-write, although we have a lot of sessions that will help you be a better writer. We're more about the marketing and publishing side of it. That's what I would say. (Inaudible comment from another person.) Yeah, we've consistently brought the best of the publishing world to San Francisco. And we keep the caliber sky-high. But it's the friendliness of the event that people come away with, both the presenters and the attendees. Anyone who is a participant says

it's the friendliness of this event that makes it different. And we always want to keep that. So, feel free to come up and talk to us and give us ideas. Email us, in advance or after, we have a survey, so you can give us that information as well. There are so many good reasons to come to a writers conference. A lot of our attendees are bona-fide authors already, and they come to just keep up with the networking, to find out what's new and exciting in the industry. And then it's, like Laurie said, we've got people who come just to put "the end" on their manuscript, or who haven't even started to write. We get people with an idea, but that haven't even started writing. There's something for everybody. So, in summation, this is a safe place to explore what a writing career means to you. You will hear from best-selling authors, pitch to agents, and during this weekend, you'll begin to understand what it means to be a professional writer. You'll feel that you've become a part of a tribe. Hope to see you all at the conference, thanks. (Applause).

RICHARD: I'm back. There's one thing I forgot to add, and why I asked you if you are all MIL (Mechanic's Institute Library) members already, when you sign up, when you register for this conference, because you are a MIL member, you'll get speed-dating for free. (Inaudible comment from another person) Right, so if you're not already an MIL member, please do that. That should be an incentive.

LINDA: Hi. I'm Linda, and I'm in in charge of the volunteers. I have been doing this for 15 years, and I took over the volunteers in 2007, was just a regular volunteer before. And I also have worked with the Midsummer Mozart Festival for seven years until they stopped running that. I was the volunteer coordinator, and our return rate of our volunteers is 80 percent. So, that tells you right there that we have people that have been with us from the beginning, and our core group, 80 percent of them return every year. And I have 90 volunteers, so that's quite a few people. Why? Because I make sure I take care of them. If you volunteer, we require a two-day commitment from you. And if you are there for the four days, you can freely go to the sessions on the days you are not working. Also, I only have you usually covering or doing something that takes four hours. You're not working all day, either. I'll put you in sessions, to be the room person, for that, or you'll help with lunches. I mean, there's just so many things that use volunteers for. But you do need to be available the entire day that you're committed to so that, you know, if you say that Thursday and Friday you would have Saturday and Sunday to attend and sit in all the sessions. So, it's just a huge thing, and also, the part of the reason that so many volunteers come back is that it truly is a community of people. And this conference is so.... the volunteers also get to talk to the agents and the authors and the editors. You know. When they're working, they're not allowed to, but they're free to talk to them in between sessions, or when there's socialization, the cocktail parties, and the. various things They're free, and you're.... it's a very interactive thing. We don't make a separation. OK. The volunteers go in the work room, and stay in there, and it's great. And a lot of the authors, come into the volunteer room

and sit in there and hang out with us, because we always have food and coffee in there. So, they would just drop in over the years, they literally... we expected them to come in there, they hang out with us. And it's such a great relaxing way to not being intimidated. And I always found the reason I love volunteering, and I've been in it for tech conferences, word press, is that when you are actually working at something, I've found that you're really feeling like you're a part of it instead on the outside looking in, when you take a service. commitment or you're working as a volunteer, you feel like you're--you do--you become a part of it. So, it's just amazing. So, I highly recommend volunteering. We're closed this year, because in 20 days I've filled up to my max which was 90 people. And I open it, it's the same every year. December 15th, the form goes live. On the volunteer Web site, and there's different links and places for that. And also, being a volunteer, and then we close it as soon as we hit 90. This year it was only 20 days, the other times, its' been a month. But if you wanted to be a new volunteer, just get there early and make sure to sign up. That's all you need to do. And also, we have a volunteer directory on the volunteer web site that has pictures and a little profile of all of you. Even we also have a page in the program that features your name, if there is the link to your web site, and a one-line a bio. So, you're actually in our program as a volunteer, which is amazing. So, it's a great opportunity, and the volunteers just love it. Thanks. (laughs)

LISSA: Hi. I'm Lissa Provost, Operations Manager, and also the Poetry Summit coordinator for the conference. I started out as a volunteer only six years ago. I guess I'm kind of the newbie on the board. (laughter) And I just finished the first draft of my first science fiction novel, which is still sitting on a shelf at home (laughs). But I really connected with the poetry track and the people in the poetry track. In addition to the writing, I like math and spreadsheets. And I got it a... "I know I can do this for less (sensibility and mind-set)." I've been a stay-at-home-mom for 20 years now. And you know, in California, you know, that means your budget is tight. It's all about making money go a long way. That's what I do. I look at attendee feedback forms, the hotel bills, the neighborhood resources. And I am out to make sure that you're getting the most spectacular opportunities for your money when you come to the San Francisco Writers Conference. I thought it was really expensive the first time I came. Before I got there, I did not take very long before for me to figure out that this is the best deal in the industry. Like, you get so much for your money. And every year our team is adding new things. We're not saying: "Oh, we didn't say we did great this year, let's do it again next year the same." We say: "What did we do great this year? And what can we do better next year? What can we add?" The conference used to be three days. It really is four days now with because we've added so many things. And it was only, maybe four years ago, that it really went to four days. First and most obvious, we've moved to a bigger venue. This year, we have room to expand. We feel like we've all breathing a little easier. With

the move to the Hyatt because all these years we've been cramped in the small space and not allowed to breathe, either. In addition, we have room for a 30 percent increase in attendees. So, we can max out. For the last ten years, we have sold out the conference every single year. This year, more of your friends can come. There's more room. That kind of makes people scared that maybe they'll get lost in the crowd. But we have maintained the highest ratio of presenters to attendees of any conference that we've heard of. We're keeping it under five-to-one. Five attendees to one presenter. So, if you think of that in terms of whether you'll get to talk to the agent you want to meet, whether you'll get to talk to this expert, or this best-seller, and whether you'll be able to ask your questions with a ratio of five-to-one…. You will be able to do that. And, as Laurie has said, we like presenters who are personable and who are known to be accessible. And speaking of the industry professionals, we will have more agents this year than ever before. We have our largest list of agents this year. Last year, we made private, one-on-one consultations available. They're an add-on for attendees of the conference. They sold out immediately. Like in an hour. The agents loved them. The attendees loved them. So, we invited more agents so that we can make more of these appointments available. The great thing about that is those agents are there for everything. So, if you are there, doing speed dating, there are more agents there. Because they came to do the appointments and so forth. And more agents mean more opportunities for you to sell your book. Two years ago, we had a booth at the end of speed dating. And people were coming out of it like a video booth. You know, the feedback was that: "Some of the agents asked for my story! You know. They said to fix this one little thing and to send it to them." Or, you know, they (the attendees) would get feedback you don't get it when you get sent out a query letter. And then the last person who came out one of the agents, and she was so excited. I wish I could show you the clip right now, she said: "I'm so excited about it. I think I've got, like, 25 people sending me books, and I'm so excited about it. " She was just super, super-excited. Uhm, (pauses) I've lost her name (laughs). I'll figure it out. We said it... (Unintelligible comment from another person) No. She did that the opening session at the conference a few years ago and I was sitting in, and she said that the writers conferences--Katheraine Sands (Sarah Jane Freymann Agency, NY) -- she said that writing conferences are: "like Costco for agents. We're here to shop for the next bestseller." But they want you to come and bring your books (unintelligible comments, laughter). It's the intellectual shopping cart in your head. So, we've not only added more agents, we've added more presenters. I think we've made a really deliberate effort to get new presenters that we haven't heard before on a variety of subjects. Most of them are local to the San Francisco publishing scene. We do have some coming out from New York from all along on the West Coast. But we really love what publishing is on the West Coast. This is where technology, digital hybrids, small press, print on demand, and all the next big things are happening here. So, we've very excited to have these presenters here. They're leading with their

171

hearts. This is a really community-oriented center for publishing. I think we're all focused not on--well, obviously everybody wants (laughs) to make money with their books. But they're focused on, really, what changes can we make in the world how can we change the world with our writing. And that carries through in everything. So, it's very exciting to be part of its community of writers, and all of our presenters come on a volunteer basis. It sounds like our conference is kind of expensive, but five to one presenter ratio doesn't happen when you're paying your speakers big fees. All of these speakers come, and they volunteer their time, including Catherine Coulter. Normally, we do have a small stipend for our keynoters, and she said: "Nope. Make that a scholarship. " So, these are the best people in the industry. They are really passionate about helping the next wave of writers get published. Community is really huge for us. We've added the Nightcaps & Networking event, which is free and open to the public, on a Thursday night in our area with the exhibitors, the exhibit hall. Last year when we had that, I met up with a group of people. I met about five new people. So, it was really fun, and after that event, we've stayed connected. So, those connections are really important. We also are having another meet-up this year on Friday night, and … (turns to Laurie) Is that also open to the public? ("Yes," Laurie answers). OK. That is also open to the public, Friday night, from six to ten, I believe. The actual schedule is on the website, I believe. Double-check my times. Then we'll have cookies and coffee. And there's going to be a quick 40 marketing tips in 40 minutes. Then there's going to be the open mic. And we're going to have genre signs on all the tables, so you can find people that are at the conference that are writing in the same genre as you. So, you can maybe form writers group that you can be connected with online later, Or, you never know who is living close to you that comes. And we have added pub quiz to breakfast on Saturday morning with Andy Jones, who just wrote a book last year about pub quizzes (comment, unintelligible, and laughter). He normally does... he does a regular pub quiz in Davis. He also hosts the poetry and technology hour on the radio station up there. So, he is one of our presenters and he is just doing this add-on to get everybody up and going. We do light breakfasts at the conference. This is breakfast three-days, that we have opted to do a light breakfast instead of the heavy one, one day. But again, thinking of the budget for you guys. So, breakfast is served for an hour, coffee for two (hours), and water everywhere. I do the F&B-the food and beverage order. I put a lot of thought into making it really good for you guys. So, I really hope you love it. But I also suggest you put a granola bar and an apple in your backpack for the conference. They say that your brain uses 30 percent of the calories you consume, and it will demand and more at the conference (laughter). Saturday is also the day of the stand-alone poetry summit, which is my baby. We condensed the poetry track that we did to get one or two people--with as many as 10--coming to the overall conference, just for poetry, because most poets are not going to make a lot of money out of your poetry. So, it doesn't feel like a good balance, and we understand that. So, we've taken all these fabulous... we

can get fabulous speakers and only have a few people come for poetry. So, we thought: "How can we get more people? " And we are bringing it into a one-day conference within the conference. So, we have four poetry publishers coming from small presses. Zeitgeist. I can't list them all... Blue Light Press. Great Weatherford Media... (laughs). I can't remember the fourth one. San Francisco's poet laureate, Kim Shuck, will be one of our speakers. Also, and they will be there to give you like an intensive one-day starting out with craft, editing, three and a half hours of a Q&A about publishing. So, all of your questions about publishing poetry will be answered. And then, after that, marketing, and community, and all the ways to get poetry out into the community. And we are making out a one-day event for $195, or it's included. So, if you go to the main confidence, you can go to the main conference and get poetry as part of that. Or, you can come just for the poetry day. So, you can come in the morning on BART spend the day, attend all of these poetry sessions and leave with the tools and information you need to get your poetry published. And, we're editing. You will want to stay to the end of the day. And included in poetry and the main conference is the Networking Gala, or the cocktail networking party in the evening on Saturday. So, you'll be able to network with everybody at the main conference, even if you just aim for the poetry. And then open to the public in the evening is a poetry and jazz event. So, we have the all-poet band, Copus, is going to perform for us. All of our poetry speakers will be doing a little featured reading of their work, and then we're going to have an open mic for anybody who has come to read their poetry. (Comment from another board member, unintelligible). Yes, including Kim Shuck in the evening. So, it's going to be phenomenal. I'm still excited, and it's kind of the cool after after-party of the networking party. So, it's in the same room as they're kind of finishing up the networking and cocktail party that we settle down and do poetry there. So, if you've never been invited to the cool after-party, you can be one of the cool people invited to the after-party of the poetry and jazz. It's so much fun. Saturday, one of the other changes we've made, we've a no-host lunch break on Saturday because we've moved down to the Hyatt. There is a lot of amazing things in the neighborhood to do. But the Mark was beautiful, the views were beautiful, but it was hard to go anywhere. If you wanted to eat, it was really hard to go anywhere in the City if you wanted to see something that was really San Francisco. And we do have people coming from New Zealand and Australia, and they want to see San Francisco while they are here. So, we have, this 90-minute lunch break. But you're right there. There's the Ferry Building across the street. There is the street car museum across the park the other way. Every weekend, there is the artistry fair happening right outside. Last time I went down there you can get jewelry made out of pendants and handcrafted leather. Journals. Cool stuff. (Responding to a comment from another board member). The Farmers Market, yeah. And you can go out onto California and you can take a car up to the Mark, Grace Cathedral, and Huntington Park. So, we're giving people the opportunity to get out of the hotel a little bit. Because when we look

at the schedule you will see that it is morning-to-night things to do. And by that point it's the halfway point in the schedule. You'll probably have made some new friends. It's a good time to get out, talk to them. Like Laurie said, talk with the other attendees. Process what you have learned. That's the one thing we hear from attendees at the end of the conference is like: "I have so much the process that my head feels like it's going to explode. " So, this is like a half-way break. Process some of what you've been learning. Take a breather. Do something that does not in the hotel. Go out and do something. When you look at the schedule, you'll see 14 breakout sessions. Fourteen opportunities to go to a breakout session That's besides the keynotes, all the networking events, besides all the other things. Fourteen opportunities to take a class. And underneath each of those there's at least five class options. (Up to eight, a panelist says) Yeah, up to eight. So, it's a lot to choose, and a lot to take in. And if there's two at the same time that you really want to go to, you can do one and get recorded, we record all of them.

LAURIE: Lissa, I just had a new thing happened yesterday. I talked to our AV guy, and he's going to give every attendee one free recording of a session download.

LISSA: Excellent. Excellent. And on occasion, because I've taken over the organizing, we don't have too much, but on occasion we have a room that's too full and people want to get into it. So, that's really great, because then you can... if the room's too full and you can't get in, then you can still get that session. Go to another one for that time, after that and get the recording. We're also doing other things to break up sort of that intense constant learning the photography walks in the morning, creative visualization with Nina Amir. And Nina and Kevin Smokler are going to be doing concierge appointments

LISSA: (Comment to Lissa, unintelligible). They're about sold out? OK. Kevin used to do this, an then he took two years off to go promote his book.

LAURIE: And when we say community, these guys are doing this and all the money that they earn is going to support the scholarship program for high-school students and marginalized voices it and things like that. We chose seven writers last year.

LISSA: So, what that is, is maybe this your first conference, and you're taking everything in, and then you kind of don't know what to do with it. That's what they can help you with (Kevin and Nina). They can talk with you about where you are in the process. Help you figure out what class if you're not sure what classes you should be going to or what you need to do next. They're very good at it. But Nina is an author-coach. That's what she does. She just helps people know what to do next in their writing career.

LAURIE: But it's kind of game plan, a personalized game plan for the conference.

LISSA: And Kevin is a coffee-lover, so he can tell you where tell you where to get the best coffee in the neighborhood. I know a few people will need that

information. So, on Sunday morning, and we have speed-dating and I would say about half of our conference attendees get diverted because they're ready to sell their book. They want to be doing the speed-dating with an agent. So, have made the decision this year to schedule more of the writing craft sessions on Sunday mornings. There are fewer attendees in the breakouts, so it's a more intimate session, and so if you are going for craft, you will have some time to sort of dial down and that more, connected, sort of presentation and learning time.
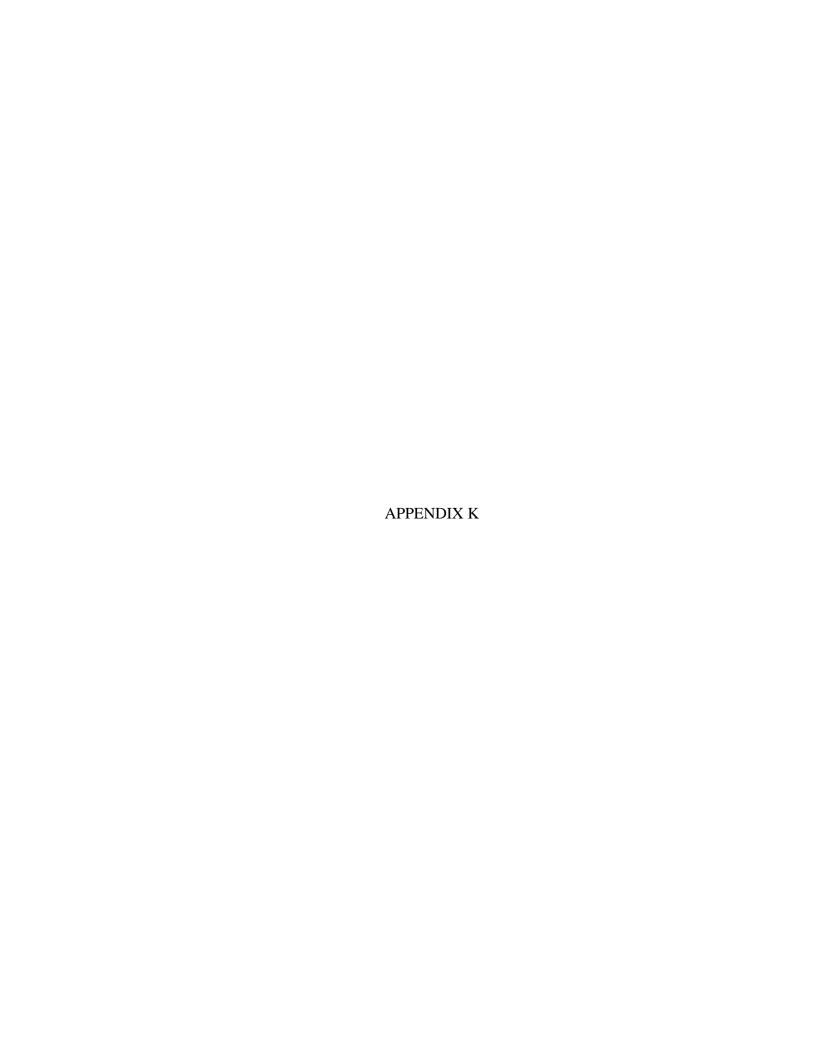
LAURIE: Maybe I should say that what speed-dating, is. It is kind of like speed-dating, what you think it is in your personal, but this is with the agent. So, to get one hour in a room with all the agents. You stand in line and then pitch that for 3 minutes, and they you, yes, no, work on this, it's intense, but it's really kind of fun.

LISSA: And, then, lastly, it's not new for us to have masterclasses, but we have ta new masterclass coordinator this year. And when all of us in our board meetings saw her list of master classes, our jaws dropped. We have some amazing masterclasses. It's going to be hard to choose. It really will be hard to choose. So, even if you can't come to the conference, you can take the masterclass. Focus on what and where you're at in your process. If you are coming to the conference, and think you're going to go home on Monday, it's a HOLIDAY. Stick around, take advantage of, (laughs). Take a couple of master classes. By the time you get to the end of the conference, you're going to know, really, what you need to work on. Even if you're, you know, wherever you are in the process of development there's always something we need to work on. And you can sign up for them. There's usually some room to sign up at the end of the conference for Monday. Then go home later in the evening. You get to sleep all week, anywhere (laughs). You can sign up now for the masterclasses. But you can only meet with all of these amazing people that are coming to the conference on President's Day weekend. So, it is a really amazing opportunity.

LAURIE: OK. Let's open it up for questions. We've given you a ton of information, I'm sure some of it was not as clear as it could have been, but then, that's my fault. (Laurie starts a Q & A than lasts for about 25 minutes.)

APPENDIX K

Project Timeline

September 19, 2018 - Initial project IRB approval was sought and obtained.

October 1, 2018 - Five-question survey goes live on a secure server. Survey link mailed to leadership.

October 3, 2018 - First survey response received, pre-coding begins.

October 5, 2018 - Survey link included in SFWC newsletter.

October 29, 2018 - Due to low responses, an amended IRB was filed to include depth interviews.

December 12, 2018 - Revised IRB approved

January 20, 2019 - Survey participation encouraged at SFWC Volunteer Orientation.

January 24, 2019 - Link emailed to SFWC volunteer email list.

February 13, 2019 - Link emailed/Tweeted to SFWC presenters, exhibitors, agents, editors.

February 16, 2019 - Volunteered/distributed survey materials at SFWC 19.

February 17, 2019 - Non-case sensitive survey bi.tly short link added.

February 17, 2019 - Interviewed Michael Larsen at the Top of the Mark

February 20, 2019 - Survey responses reach 40, upper end of required minimum for analysis

February 21, 2019 - "Community" determined to be the study's key category

March 1, 2019 - Download/View/Transcribe SFWC Board Preview Presentation videotape

March 3, 2019 - Captured - SFWC Newsletters, SFWRITERS.ORG web pages, Presenter handouts

March 10th - Finished coding, determined key category of "community."

March 16, 2019 - Survey closed at 46 respondents