



**Six Strong
Benefits of
Supporting
Your Local
Author
Community
in Your
Library**

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A SELF-e WHITE PAPER

As libraries' roles extend beyond book lending towards becoming community centers, they are embracing opportunities to give self-published authors the attention and resources they need to grow as local creatives who enrich the community. More poignant now than ever is the American Library Association's (ALA) stance that [libraries have a duty](#) to support "programs in the humanities and the arts that encourage people to think and talk about ethics and values, history, art, poetry and other cultures." Certainly, this qualifies as an enthusiastic call for programs related to the literary arts. Combine this direct call for programs for the arts with the ALA's [Libraries Transform](#) campaign—calling on libraries to strengthen community relationships—and libraries have a powerful impetus upon which to conduct programming for their local writing communities.

Given the fact that a disparity exists between the [rise in demand for self-published books](#) and the percentage of libraries that offer self-published ebooks — only 20%¹ — libraries have especial incentive based on contemporary market trends to incorporate programming that supports the writers in their areas. Even beyond helping writers achieve their publishing dreams — arguably, the most conspicuous and glamorous benefit to offering indie author programs — lie other less tangible, but no less vital, positive effects that serve both libraries and their communities. This white paper outlines six powerful benefits of libraries offering programs that support their indie authors:

- Encourages creativity.
- Increases foot traffic to the library for non-traditional purposes.
- Increases public investment in the library.
- Increases social capital.
- May lead to better social relations across diverse groups both inside and outside of the library.
- Establishes the library's role as a vital part of creative placemaking within the community.

This paper then demonstrates how, with the right tools and approaches, libraries can successfully emulate the ALA's calls to support the literary arts and strengthen community relationships.

¹ *Library Journal* Self-Published Book Survey Report

Reaffirm the library's value as a center for creativity and the arts.



Benefit 1

Having programs that support local authors encourages creativity.

When we think of creativity in the modern library, it is tempting to gravitate towards makerspaces. With many boasting 3-D printers, high-tech audio and visual recording equipment, sewing machines and more, the notion of creativity seems to revolve around products beyond the page.

Among so many new and stimulating pieces of technology, it can be easy to overlook one of the oldest technologies of humanity, one we use when we fashion literary creations: the pencil. Indeed, even that humble mechanism of creative writing has come a long way, so that now, writers employ fine-tipped pens, keyboards or even stylus pens for tablets. Regardless of what tool we use, the critical and creative processes that propel writing remain — as do their benefits.

As with any craft, practice makes perfect. And each time a person sits down to write, she flexes the creative muscles that drive words from ideative inception to lucid sentences on a page. That creativity is not isolated, because [learning rewires the brain](#), and permeates other intellectual processes. So when libraries choose to host programs like writing circles, the implications of such activities extend far beyond the ends of a round table. By being a meeting place for writing groups, a library encourages its community members to flex their creative muscles regularly, and to go forth into the community having fortified their creativity little by little, one session at a time.

Reaffirm the library's role as a dynamic community hub.



Benefit 2

Serving indie authors will increase foot traffic to the library for non-traditional purposes.

While most people's motivation to visit the library still revolves around traditional purposes like borrowing books and studying, [recent research](#) shows that how often people go to attend programs, classes or lectures has increased from 17% to 27% from 2015 to 2016. That increase is heartening, and libraries should feel compelled to continue building upon this momentum and strive for another 10-point increase from 2016 to 2017.

Offering more programs that feature local authors can sustain program attendance and increase foot traffic in the library. While this strategy may seem like it will only impact the author community, in actuality, it can unlock the potential to extend beyond writers. The key is to diversify programming such that it becomes more inclusive.

Libraries that offer programs that include a range of community members involved

in publishing — not just writers — create more opportunities to engage with their patrons. By hosting writers' events that include other elements of publishing, like research, design and marketing, libraries can appeal to a wider audience. In this way, writing and publishing transcend the tendency to be categorized as solitary activities, and instead become marked by collaboration among an array of local creatives.

Libraries should stress that publishing a book is a multifaceted project, provide programs for a variety of publication components and showcase books that are not only written by local authors, but designed, produced and marketed by community members. Libraries should also exemplify the value of these locally made books by encouraging patrons to read them and establishing further programs that connect patrons with local professionals involved in literature.



Benefit 3

Local author programs can increase public investment in the library.

Increased foot traffic is a fantastic way to demonstrate libraries' value in their communities. However, according to [research from the Online Computer Library Center](#) (OCLC), library visits are only marginally related to public library funding. More library visits, then, do not ensure more financial investment. Rather, as that same OCLC research states,

communities “who see the library as a 'transformational' force as opposed to an 'informational' source are more likely to increase taxes in its support.”

Therefore, it is critical for libraries to use programming to establish themselves as places where communities come together to create and collaborate.

By making local books written and produced via library programs available

to patrons, libraries establish themselves as places that provide tools for patrons to transform into writers. Not only is this a more effective means to secure public funding than simply increasing foot traffic, research shows that, [“if libraries receive more public funds, more people use them.”](#) This creates a positive cycle wherein diverse, collaborative programming attracts more attendees, who in turn view the library as transformational. Having more individuals who view the library as transformative leads to more funding, which leads to more usage.

Given the implications that diverse indie book programs can have for funding, libraries should be motivated to provide tools and programs that project a transformational image to the public.

Reaffirm the library's value as a community center and gathering place for diverse populations.



Benefit 4

Having author-centric programs increases social capital.

In addition to being places for checking out materials, reading and studying, libraries also appeal to communities as [points of socialization](#). Libraries that offer a variety of author-centric programming capitalize on social connections made at each. Writing groups, open mic nights, author panels and workshops and writers' association meetings each focus on different aspects – writing exercises and critiques, literary performance, education and networking, respectively. But a key outcome of each event is that it strengthens social ties by connecting patrons with common interests.

Further promoting social capital-building is the fact that different groups of people visit libraries for different reasons. Low-income families are often attracted by internet access, which they may lack at home. College-educated individuals may come more frequently to search

for the next book to read. Families with children that prioritize learning more than one language are drawn to bilingual storytimes. Consequently, a single library can – and often does – easily become a meeting place for diverse community members.

Libraries should be inspired to amplify these different voices by bringing together all of their perspectives – [mainstream, alternative and otherwise](#) – through author-centric programs. Having patrons write together encourages interaction among groups of people, which serves as a gateway to social trust. What's more, libraries that facilitate patrons' writing together should feel compelled to create their own diverse community history, then showcase it for the rest of their patronage by sharing collected, locally written stories and poems.



Benefit 5

Having opportunities for local writers may lead to better social relations across diverse groups both inside and outside of the library.

Much [research](#) has been done demonstrating that when groups of people work together to achieve goals, they collaborate better. Despite the bulk of this research deriving from classroom and workplace environments, these findings may well also apply to collaboration among writing groups at libraries.

As with writing creatively as an individual, writing in a collaborative group requires practice. When libraries organize programs for communities to write, read and listen together, they are allowing their patrons to practice collaboration. Like creative writing, these effects' implications extend beyond the circles in which they are practiced.

In order to foster collaboration at a community-wide level, libraries should be a model of such collaboration, and provide opportunities for patrons to work towards goals together. Writing

programs embody this objective perfectly and are easily adjustable according to a library's circumstances. The goals that each writing group sets can accommodate the group's abilities and interests, so they can be as simple as, "write a poem about fear," to, "write the first draft of a novel in a month." No matter the outcome, people can feel proud of having achieved a goal with support and constructive criticism from their peers, and their experiences through trying times strengthen community bonds.

Reaffirm the library's role as a leader of local identity.



Benefit 6

Building strong literary communities in libraries establishes them as vital to an area's creative placemaking.

Beyond securing public funding for libraries, projecting a public image of being a creative, transformational space fulfills the ALA's proclamation that libraries have a duty to support the arts and humanities. Indeed, libraries are ideal venues to borne strong literary arts communities. Diverse local author programs bring together many different community components and serve to vivify and become synonymous with local identity. Local author programs do not only benefit those involved, then, but positively impact an entire community.

everyone involved in its local indie author community and by highlighting the products of local collaboration among those participants, libraries can promote a sense of local identity and develop stronger neighborhoods and cities. As part of their mission to support the arts and humanities, libraries should promote collaboration, creation and showcasing of their indie author communities.

As stated by the National Endowment for the Arts, successful creative placemaking is a powerful tool that "mobilizes public will," and, "builds partnerships across sectors, missions and levels of government."

In short, it unifies a community. By offering programs and services for



How SELF-e Serves Libraries Interested in Supporting Their Local Literary Communities

Library Journal and BiblioBoard's joint author discovery program SELF-e is a comprehensive solution that empowers libraries to support their local author communities. Beyond connecting authors to readers through libraries, it enables libraries to establish themselves as transformative spaces that encourage social fortitude and local identity-making. In addition to SELF-e's digital collections of local ebooks and the support it provides for author events at libraries, SELF-e's Pressbooks Public – the product of a partnership between SELF-e and Pressbooks – is user-friendly writing software that generates professional ebooks and print books that allows libraries to expand their offerings as creative centers for local writers.

How SELF-e encourages creativity

Because SELF-e's built-in publishing software Pressbooks Public is similar to Wordpress, it allows writers to draft directly into it. This software can be

used during writing groups in lieu of traditional pencil and paper while maintaining the integrity of writing as a generative, creative exercise. This tool's ability to format and publish text with the click of a button can incentivize both new and seasoned writers to write, since the possibility of a professional, tangible product awaits.

How SELF-e increases foot traffic to the library for non-traditional purposes

In order to increase foot traffic to the library for reasons other than the most frequently cited, such as checking out books, reading and studying, libraries can host SELF-e events that intermingle local authors with other professionals in the community that could be involved in publication. Self-publishing a book – whether in print or ebook format – is a multifaceted production that extends beyond writing it. Including editors, marketers, designers, artists, researchers, historians and more



automatically broadens the scope of public interest and is a good way to bring more people in to attend events.

How SELF-e increases public investment in the library

SELF-e supports libraries as transformational spaces, serving everyone from patrons who write infrequently to new writers to readers. Using Pressbooks Public, patrons who do not write often can become people who write regularly, and new writers can turn their manuscripts into polished ebooks and print-on-demand books. SELF-e's community engagement aspect can help local authors become more established in their communities and beyond by allowing local readers to discover new indie literature and by supporting SELF-e Select authors who participate in its Ambassador program. Finally, SELF-e can turn patrons into more engaged readers by supporting library events that connect them with authors. No matter how libraries benefit from SELF-e's many paths to making the library a transformational space, establishing a reputation as being transformative increases the likelihood

of receiving public funding.

How SELF-e increases social capital

Since libraries appeal to diverse groups of people, librarians can encourage them to come together for writing events, during which participants can use either traditional writing utensils or Pressbooks Public. Regardless of the instruments used, the underlying message of a writing group that encourages a variety of patrons to attend is that each person's story is important enough to be written. Using Pressbooks Public for these writing exercises may engage participants who have less experience with writing, since they can choose to easily self-publish their story at the end of the event.

Librarians who organize a diverse writing group that uses Pressbooks Public can also choose to combine each participant's story into a collective anthology. The collaborative element should make all contributors feel proud of telling their stories. As the group refines their writing, peer review exposes writers to others' experiences.



The group can further take ownership of their anthology by making collective decisions about the order of stories and formatting.

Librarians can then choose to submit the anthology to SELF-e, giving patrons of that library and others in the state, province or region a way to enjoy local histories on BiblioBoard's mobile library app, which allows ebooks to be read by an unlimited number of patrons any time, anywhere.

How SELF-e leads to better social relations across diverse groups in and beyond libraries

Just as a diverse writing group increases social capital, it can also result in better collaboration among community members with different backgrounds. Because people who achieve goals together collaborate better, librarians can structure a diverse writing group such that it revolves around a common goal. Goal possibilities are infinite and can be tailored to fit the group, so that groups interested in writing as a creative exercise or as a means to publication can benefit from sessions that entail

writing a poem, freewriting for 30 minutes, editing, writing 100 words, revising five pages and beyond.

For groups with indie authors who are looking to share their work locally, a common goal could be to submit their ebooks to SELF-e and take advantage of SELF-e's support to collaborate with libraries for events geared towards patrons, such as readings and workshops.

For groups of indie authors who are interested in gaining international recognition or acclaim, a common goal could be to have the ebooks they have submitted to SELF-e chosen as a SELF-e Select book, so they can be read by patrons at participating libraries internationally. Additionally, SELF-e Select authors are eligible to become SELF-e Ambassadors and receive support from SELF-e to attend literary events both inside and outside of libraries.

Regardless of writers' goals, SELF-e's writing software Pressbooks Public, its book discovery platform and its Ambassador program can support



writing goals at any stage or of any kind.

How SELF-e establishes the library as vital to an area's creative placemaking

Libraries are ideal venues to develop strong literary communities, and they have the potential to unify an array of public and private sectors to vivify and define local identity. Because SELF-e can support many kinds of literary events — which can feature not just writers, but also artists, marketers, historians and others involved in publishing — libraries can easily highlight how books are literary products of local collaboration among a variety of local participants. Thus, the library can promote a sense of local identity and build stronger neighborhoods and cities.

About SELF-e

Connecting Indie Books, Libraries and Readers

Libraries are driving a new era of ebook discovery for indie authors and small presses. SELF-e helps develop robust local writing communities and keeps libraries at the center of the indie book movement.

With SELF-e and Pressbooks Public, libraries can support their local author communities from the first words they type to worldwide circulation, all while feeling

confident in *Library Journal's* ability to identify the best indie books through their trusted curation process.

With SELF-e's statewide collections, international SELF-e Select genre-based collections, the SELF-e Ambassador program and ongoing contests, there are many ways for libraries to help authors achieve recognition in their local communities and beyond.

We love hearing from you!

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