



**Quebec Writers' Federation Brief to Senate Standing Committee on Official Languages  
Presented by Elise Moser, President and Lori Schubert, Executive Director, QWF  
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The Quebec Writers' Federation – “QWF” – was created in 1998 from the merger of two existing community organizations (the Quebec Society for the Promotion of English-Language Literature and the Federation of English Writers of Quebec). Since then, our membership has grown steadily year by year and our programming has expanded exponentially. Our mandate is to promote and encourage English-language literary arts, including translation, within the province, and Quebec English writing in the rest of Canada and further afield. (The New York Times Book Review recently printed a letter from our executive director under the heading, “Recognizing Quebec,” pointing out that no fewer than three writers reviewed in their June 13<sup>th</sup> issue are English-speaking Quebecers.) Among our 600 members are established and emerging professional writers, as well as those who have an interest in writing and literary events for pleasure and personal fulfillment. Our members represent a wide diversity of ages, classes, and ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

QWF plays an increasingly prominent role as an arts presenter and professional and community educator, and is recognized as a respected representative of Quebec's English-language writers by all three levels of government. Our activities are diverse, and include, among others, the administration, on an annual basis, of

- six major literary awards and a community award
- approximately 28 writing workshops,
- eight professional writing mentorships,
- about twenty readings and spoken word performances, and
- five to seven community writing programs with at-risk adolescents and young single mothers.

Our partner the Atwater Library houses the QWF Book Collection, and the Montreal Children's Library, The QWF Children's Literature Collection. Together, these collections, donated by us, include adult and children's books by over 700 authors. We also publish and maintain a searchable online database of over 1200 English-language books by Quebec authors and their Francophone translators, and a respected online literary journal, *carte blanche*.

To maximize our ability to reach out to various communities in Montreal and across the province, we have sought out and maintained many partnerships, including with the Centre for Literacy of Quebec, various public libraries, bookstores, and universities, and cultural and community centres in the regions. QWF members were instrumental in founding Montreal's multilingual international literary festival, Blue Metropolis/Metropolis bleu, which we continue to support. We have also initiated multiple collaborations with our Francophone counterpart, l'Union des écrivaines et écrivains québécois. We

believe that the two linguistic communities of writers have more common interests than differences, and that cross-promoting our works is an important way for us to increase the audience for Quebec literature in both languages, strengthen our relationships with the community at large, and ensure a thriving literary culture that attracts and retains talented writers from around the world. We also work with Quebec's English-language publishing community.

At least two-thirds of our public funding goes right back into the community, mostly in the form of honoraria for writers; the jobs we provide help make it possible for these artists to write their poems, books, plays, and screenplays. Our workshops are open to all and offer opportunities for social integration, skills training, professional networking, and also the kind of personal enrichment that is less easily quantified but no less valuable than the obvious economic benefits. The arts make people better citizens.

We do all this, and more. Our resources are stretched so tight that we lack the capacity even to research new sources of funding. For example, we could use resources that would allow us to expand the geographical reach of our programming. One special example of this is our very important Writers in the Community program, which sends writers to work with marginalized teenagers and other populations at risk. We have had many more requests for this program than we have been able to fulfill, due to lack of funds. In particular, we have not been able to extend this program into the regions, where social and linguistic isolation and economic pressures on English-speaking communities can be severe. For example, we were forced to turn down a request from the Netagamou Community Learning Centre in Chevery, QC (Lower North Shore), in 2009; they were looking for writers to work with grades 4, 5 and 6, secondary school students, adults, and seniors—in other words, almost everyone in their community.

In addition, the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network proposed to partner with us in several communities outside Montreal for the secondary level. The Batshaw Youth and Family Centres have a facility in the Laurentians (Prévost) where they would love us to run workshops; they have been requesting this since 2007. CASA (the Committee for Anglophone Social Action) in the Gaspé also approached us in 2007. Each of these requests denied represents a community in need that we have been unable to serve – and lost employment opportunities for writers.

We would also like to be able to offer writing workshops to communities whose opportunities for self-expression are limited. The ability to understand one's history, develop one's identity, and express one's view of the world is crucial to the survival of communities; literature, whether fiction, non-fiction, memoir, or other forms, is an invaluable tool for doing all of that.

There is a clear precedent for federal funding for a provincial writers' association: our francophone counterpart in Ontario, l'Association des auteures et auteurs de l'Ontario français, has received significant grant financing of \$25,000 and over for at least the past three years. In fact, PCH grants accounted for 25% of their annual budget in 2009.

It is clear that with more support from the federal government, QWF could have an even wider impact than we already do—both on the English-speaking community in Quebec, and, with our partners, in the surrounding Francophone community.

Thank you for inviting us to speak with you.