

Manitoba Book Awards/
Les Prix du livre du Manitoba

2024 Feasibility Study Report

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This feasibility study was conducted by Kayla Calder at the request of the Manitoba Book Awards/Les Prix du livre du Manitoba coalition from March to June 2024.

Kayla is an Ottawa-based consultant whose clients include the Canadian Independent Booksellers Association, the League of Canadian Poets, the Giller Foundation, and the Book and Periodical Council, among others. She previously worked in communications, fund development, and operations with the Writers' Trust of Canada, the Toronto International Book Fair, and Women of Influence.

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Introduction

Program History

The Manitoba Book Awards/Les Prix du livre du Manitoba (MBA/PLM) has grown and changed immensely over its 30+ years in existence. The program was first introduced in 1988 with the McNally Robinson Book of the Year Award, which was presented by the Manitoba Writers' Guild (MWG). In its first decade, the program grew to encompass four additional awards, a standalone awards event, and short-lived program committee. In this time, the Association of Manitoba Book Publishers became involved and, by 1998, the awards were described as a co-production of the two organizations.

In its second decade, there were some discussions about spinning the awards off into its own organization, but none that came to fruition. In this time, five additional awards were created or added to the MBA/PLM portfolio. In this period, the MWG also experienced significant organizational challenges, which led to shifting responsibilities between the two organizations year-over-year.

In 2010, the MWG became the sole project lead with the AMBP in a supporting role. From 2010 to 2017, the MWG supported the development of three new awards. Challenges at the MWG continued to mount over this period, including staff turnover, a loss of provincial funding, and issues with the awards event. In 2017, the MWG announced it was no longer receiving operational funding which resulted in no paid staff for the program. In 2018, the Winnipeg International Writers' Festival (WIWF) and the Winnipeg Public Library (WPL) joined a working group with the MWG and AMBP, at which time the program transitioned into a coalition model. This coalition was intended to act as an interim solution until a new path for the program might emerge. This model was, and continues to be, co-led by the WIWF and AMBP, who worked diligently to streamline operations and maintain program impact through a turbulent time (including the COVID-19 pandemic).

In 2021, a restructure in provincial arts funding changed the situation dramatically. Prize and administration funding for three awards established by the Province was changed to a competition grant managed by the Manitoba Arts Council, with less available money. Despite the financial concerns and instability, the WIWF assumed responsibility for these three awards on a trial basis, with assistance from the AMBP and small grants from the new competitive program. An event production grant was also no longer available. This change exasperated the loss of dedicated coordination funds in 2017, when the MWG was no longer receiving operating funding and became volunteer-run.

Current Situation

These challenges have only compounded since 2021, with the AMBP and WIWF doing everything they can to continue managing the program. As of 2024, the program portfolio

includes more than a dozen annual and biennial awards, many of which are bilingual. Cash prizes, coordination, event production and more are supplemented by a handful of reliable funders and a very small pool of human resources. However, there are several awards for which sponsorship/funding does not include any funding for administration. In these cases, the administration cost is unwritten by the AMBP or the WIWF.

The program is very impactful for the community. These awards help build readership for books written and published in Manitoba, provide career development and motivation to writers, encourage book borrowing and sales, and create opportunities for the industry to come together and work collectively towards shared goals. The literary arts in Manitoba are stronger for the program's existence.

However, between a dearth of reliable resources and competing priorities, management of the program in its current form has become untenable.

Securing funding for program administration is an ongoing challenge, which is compounded by the loss of historical grants to support events and dedicated coordination. Despite the coalition's best efforts, the program struggles to meet its many objectives and high community expectations, in part because it is coordinated off the sides of otherwise full desks with no dedicated funds for additional personnel.

It is generally understood by creators, publishers, funders, sponsors, and partners that the program, in its current form, is unsustainable. And yet, there is a strong passion within the community to see it continue to exist and, in time, thrive.

Feasibility Study

In November 2023, after applying for a grant from The Winnipeg Foundation, the coalition put the program on hiatus. It was publicly announced that the 2023-24 awards cycle would be used as restructuring period.

In early 2024, the MBA/PLM coalition contracted me to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study that aims to answer this question: What is to be done with a program that is deeply wanted but operating in a landscape that doesn't support its existence?

By commissioning this study, the coalition would gain access to important feedback from its community members, expanded insights from key stakeholders, a clear understanding of the landscape in which it operates, and informed and unbiased opinions from an experienced industry professional. The study also creates an opportunity for the community to deepen its knowledge of the program's historical and current challenges. Most importantly, this study will allow the coalition to make informed decisions about the program's future and develop a realistic plan for the coming years.

Approach

The feasibility study took place over four months. It was broken out into four phases: Info Gathering, Community Survey, Consultations, and Scenario Mapping. Through the process, I met regularly with the coalition co-leads to collaborate on key initiatives and provide status updates. Bolstered by a well-rounded overview of the landscape, including the viability of potential new approaches, I prepared my recommendations and report.

1. Info Gathering

In early March, I reviewed program details including its history, financials, and workflow. Following that, we conducted a comparative review of similar programs, gathering information about human resources, operating budgets, and funding models. Due to time constraints, research was focused on other provincial and territorial awards programs (vs. national programs, genre-specific awards programs). Comparators included the Alberta Book Publishing Awards, the Atlantic Book Awards, the BC and Yukon Book Prizes, the QWF Literary Awards, the Saskatchewan Book Awards, the Trillium Book Awards, and more.

2. Community Survey

In consultation with the coalition co-leads, I developed a community needs assessment survey to collect feedback on impact and priority outcomes, as well as community demographics to help us understand if there are any priorities, challenges, or opportunities relevant to specific communities that should be taken into consideration during this process. It was available in both English and French. The survey was launched in mid-April and promoted through coalition members as well as other industry partners. We received 212 responses from publishers, writers, funders, and readers. 197 responses were in English and 15 were in French.

3. Consultations

In May, I led 10 engagement sessions, many in person, to gather additional insights and in-depth feedback. Some were dedicated discussions with individuals or small groups while others were larger group sessions. Consultations occurred with coalition members, Manitoba publishers, local authors, funders, and industry partners.

4. Scenario Mapping

After analyzing our findings, I developed four possible scenarios for the awards. These scenarios, along with findings from each phase, were shared with the coalition co-leads for consideration. I then facilitated a discussion with the coalition co-leads using a “What Would Have to Be True” framework to test each scenario’s validity and sustainability.

Key Findings

Each phase of this process was organized around the same key subjects: administration, program impact, and program funding. By seeking answers to similar questions from multiple sources, I was able to collect a broad range of perspectives and identify where there is cohesion or division.

A summary of key findings is below. Detailed findings can be found in the appendices.

Administration & Structure

The awards program is distinctive in its current coalition structure. Though comparable programs are occasionally administered by coalitions, administration is generally through a standalone organization that has been incorporated either as a not-for-profit or registered charity. These organizations are governed by a separate board of directors (including representation from relevant organizations) and may have dedicated staff support.

With the MBA/PLM, the majority of work falls on the two coalition co-leads, the AMBP and the WIWF, who share the workload as well as a staff person who oversees the program over an average of 12 hours/week. Each organization has its unique mandate and constituents, which makes it difficult to identify a single strategic priority for the program. Likewise, the authority for decision-making is hampered by the nature of the coalition model. For example, should one or both co-leads wish to streamline the program to align with the resources available, they would be required to petition other coalition members who, in turn, may have to petition their members or constituents.

Despite these challenges, the coalition has worked diligently to run the program using the resources available, implementing efficiencies to streamline both direct costs and labour. Nonetheless, the workload vastly outpaces available financial and human resources.

Of the comparable programs reviewed:

5/13 are run by writers' organizations	4/13 are run by standalone organizations	2/13 are run by provincial governments or subsidiaries	1/13 is run by a publishers' association (BPAA)	1/13 is run by a coalition (MBA/PLM)
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Within the community, there was relatively limited awareness about how the coalition structure operates and some division regarding which organizations are most appropriate as coalition members. However, participants in the process generally expressed appreciation for the coalition and their work. It also generally understood that the coalition model is not sustainable and that to continue on in the current manner will create risk for all of the organizations involved. This is especially the case for the AMBP and WIWF who carry the brunt of the work and cover underfunded costs out of their base budgets, despite having full programming portfolios outside of the awards program.

However, there is no natural home for the program. The existing organization with the most aligned mandate is the MWG which is currently volunteer-run and unable to administer the program on its own. Despite a collective desire for the program to exist across the community, there are very few organizations that are able and willing to take it on as a core program (even if full funding was available). This is a major challenge for the program.

Program Impact

There is varying familiarity about the program amongst community members. Those who are most familiar are writers, publishers and, to a lesser extent, funders.

The current program is almost universally appreciated and desired by writers and funders. There was more dissonance amongst publishers about whether the program should continue to exist in its current form. Our insights related to readers outside of the industry are limited, although anecdotal information from industry partners suggests there is some familiarity within those communities.

“

With such a saturated book market, regional awards give a significant boost (in terms of book sales, recognition, and sense of accomplishment) to Manitoba authors and small-press trade publishers whose books are rarely featured on national or international book lists. – *Survey Respondent*

”

A notable majority of survey respondents shared that they are more likely to read a book if it has won a Manitoba Book Award (82%). A similar percentage of respondents said they believe the program helps celebrate Manitoba culture (88%). Of those respondents who had been shortlisted for or won a prize, most said that it led to greater recognition for them and validated their work (80-90%). In the survey, many community members reiterated that the awards give a much-needed boost to Manitoba writers that may otherwise be underrecognized on a national scale.

Throughout the feasibility study, there were regular discussions about intended impacts of the program. Generally, it was agreed that the current program tries to accomplish a great

deal with very few resources, which leads to diminishing returns in some or all areas. This is another major challenge for the program.

Potential Areas of Impact:

- Developing new audiences and promoting book sales and/or borrowing
- Recognizing excellence within the industry/supporting career development
- Providing money to creators
- Validating and/or motivating creators
- Bringing the industry together to celebrate and encourage collaboration
- Providing a vehicle to support advocacy for sustained or increased arts funding

Data on the impact that shortlists/winner announcements have on book borrowing or sales has not historically been collected. However, anecdotal information suggests some impact, albeit nothing ground-breaking (in the short- or long-term). Likewise, the amount of money that goes to creators, for those prizes that have an attached purse, is minimal. Although some writers felt the prize money was integral for creating prestige, it was generally agreed that the cash prize isn't a major benefit of winning one of these awards.

As it stands, the program is most effective at recognizing excellence within the industry and supporting career development for creators. Many writers also spoke about the intangible benefits of being shortlisted or winning an award—namely the way it can validate, motivate, and encourage them to continue working on their craft.

I endeavored to prioritize program outcomes as part of the study. While there was no clear consensus, participants generally agreed that the program should primarily benefit writers, whether through increased awareness, career development, financial reward, or all of the above.

Priority outcomes (by ranked choice voting):

1. Encouraging readers to seek out work by creators and/or publishers (5.39)
2. Promoting book sales and/or borrowing (5.06)
3. Attracting media attention for creators (4.98)
4. Recognizing excellence in the industry (4.58)
5. Providing money to creators (4.18)
6. Hosting an event that celebrates Manitoba creators/publishers/culture (4.18)
7. Shaping Manitoba culture (4.16)

“ The awards are a way of celebrating local writing and culture. Too often, Manitobans downplay their achievements in the arts, and this is a long-term way to raise the profile of local authors and publishers to readers across Canada and the world. – *Survey Respondent* ”

Program Funding

This program is underfunded for the scope of its awards portfolio. Other programs that administer the same number of awards with similar language allowances, engage in a comparable level of promotion, and host award events generally operate with an average budget of \$70,000-\$120,000. The MBA/PLM coalition endeavours to provide similar results on less than \$30,000 per year in revenue (on average). In order to meet community expectations, the coalition relies heavily on existing overhead and resources provided by member organizations, despite receiving little financial support for administration.

There was division within the community regarding funding. Those participants who are *not* affiliated with government funders felt strongly that operating funds should come from the Province. The awards are seen as a feather in Manitoba's cap, demonstrating its literary talent to the rest of the country. On the flipside, those participants who *are* affiliated with government funders felt the program should seek support from other sources, such as private donors, corporate sponsors, publishers, and public foundations.

Overall, it was agreed that government funding is not particularly stable and the most realistic—and sustainable—approach would be a mix of revenue streams. This reflects the approach of comparable programs. However, it was also widely understood that seeking out and maintaining relationships with a diverse mix of funders require steady person power. Although dedicated volunteers are very capable of raising funds, a professional approach to donor and funder management is necessary for long-term sustainability, and this requires money. Given the current reticence to fund program administration and overhead, it seems highly unlikely that support for this expense can be found within the current community of funders.

These challenges reflect a larger trend facing national and regional award organizations and programs. Coming out of the pandemic, arts and culture organizations across Canada are facing government funding cuts, diminishing support from private donors due to inflation and shifting priorities, and changing financial priorities of corporate sponsors. The most stable organizations are those relying on existing endowments. In the case of smaller programs, there is also some reliability in community fundraising efforts.

One additional area of agreement among participants, including sponsors, was the assertion that multi-year funding commitments are essential.

Additional Takeaways

Given the challenges facing the program, it was imperative to take a “big picture” approach, although detailed feedback was sought where appropriate.

Overall, community members agreed that a large number of awards dilutes the impact of the overall program—especially if the same writers win multiple awards—and streamlining to focus on fewer awards would deepen the program’s impact overall. However, there was hesitancy to discuss which awards are more impactful than others and, when it was discussed, there was little consensus.

The awards event/gala was so closely associated with the program that many community members often conflated them. This is partially intentional—many participants said the event was necessary for media coverage—and partially due to how beloved the event is within the community.

Throughout the consultations, it was generally agreed that the awards event is a *nice-to-have* but not a *need-to-have*. Many participants suggested that a community- or public-facing event celebrating the awards would not have to be run, funded, or promoted by the award program administrators. A crowd-funded, volunteer-run event could complement the program, bringing the community together without putting the financial and administrative responsibility on program managers. This approach might lead to inconsistency year-over-year, although this is already an issue due to unstable funding.

“ It is important that [these] are community events, open to as many people as want to attend, instead of a gala. We need to keep the doors as open as possible! – *Survey Respondent* ”

Overall, there was a desire for increased promotion and clarity about the target audience for marketing efforts. The awards are seen as a way to combat diminishing review space in traditional media. Suggestions were shared for promotional opportunities to explore, such as dedicated issues of *Prairie Books Now* and *Prairie Fire* and advertising on public transit. However, it was agreed that this growth would be difficult, if not impossible, without an influx of financial support. Most community members who participated in consultations agreed that the focus of promotion should be within Manitoba.

There was some discussion about issues related to the types of books that are recognized by the program (e.g., self-published books that are not widely available). It was also reiterated that awards should be adjudicated by a jury of peers in any given genre/age group, although selecting a jury is admittedly difficult for certain awards (e.g., a changing jury of bilingual poets for the Lansdowne Prize for Poetry).

Finally, it was universally agreed that award history—e.g., information about past shortlist honourees and winners—is important, especially for authors. This history should be preserved no matter what the future holds.

Scenario Mapping

With a broad understanding that the coalition was an interim solution, consultations often turned to discussions about alternative approaches. Suggestions included:

- Creating a standalone organization with an independent board
- Creating a subsidiary or funded “department” within an existing organization (such as the Manitoba Arts Council) that relies on umbrella operations but functions as a separate initiative
- Incorporating the awards into Manitoba Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism
- Bringing new members into the coalition and redistributing responsibilities
- Merging with the Saskatchewan Book Awards (and possibly the Alberta Book Publishing Awards and/or Alberta Literary Awards) to create a “Prairie Book Awards” program akin to the model in Atlantic Canada
- Separating the awards and having them administered by existing sponsors/funders
- Retiring all awards to create space for something new

There was little agreement among consultation participants about which scenario, if any, makes the most sense. Almost all of the above suggestions were contradicted or felt to be ineffective by other participants over the course of my consultations. The suggestion that received the most general agreement was that of a standalone organization. However, enthusiasm for this idea was tepid at best. Some participants were also adamant that the program, as it stands, does not have the weight to be funded as a standalone organization.

I assessed each suggestion against a range of criteria including existing precedent, fundability in the current landscape, and long-term sustainability and selected the four scenarios most worth exploring. In order to facilitate a meaningful discussion, I led the coalition co-leads through a “What Would Have to Be True?” exercise, wherein the group reviewed each scenario to determine the internal and external forces that would impact its success. The co-leads were encouraged to consider each scenario from the perspective of program beneficiaries (authors/illustrators) and consumers (readers), as well as partners (funders, publishers, sponsors, etc.).

An overview of each scenario, its opportunities and challenges, and high-level notes from the group discussion can be found below.

Scenario 1: Rehoming

Summary:

There is no natural home for the program as it stands. Between an unwieldy portfolio of awards, inconsistent and unstable funding, and a lack of capacity within organizations, the program would require major adjustments to find a new home with an existing organization. In theory, it would live entirely within this existing organization, either as a component of its current program strategy or as a subsidiary.

Opportunities:

- Program could continue to be managed by people who see its value
- Could be rehomed to an organization with charitable status in order to acquire public and/or private funding
- Could benefit from existing operational structures within an organization

Challenges:

- Program would need to be streamlined to diminish risk factors
- Would require stable funding including coverage for hard costs and overhead
- Would require a lengthy transition period with support from the coalition (and funding for said transition)

Coalition Co-Lead Discussion Notes:

- There isn't really an existing organization that is capable *and* willing to take it on, especially one that is stable, has a good reputation in the community, and has staff with the relevant skills, connections, and working language abilities
- Funding would need to include all hard costs (money for winners, jury fees, postage, publicity, promotional costs, event costs) as well as full funding for administration in order for it to be a feasible acquisition for any organization
- The transition would require the program to continue its hiatus to allow for format changes, a transfer of knowledge and assets, and more
- Taking on the awards program would need to align with the current and/or future priorities of the organization
- Unless a willing organization were to receive generous multi-year funding and have the capacity to fundraise for the program, this scenario is unlikely to create any more long-term stability than the current coalition model (i.e., it would likely be another interim solution)

Scenario 2: Rebuilding

Summary:

There is an ongoing discussion about establishing a standalone organization to manage the awards. There is some precedent for this in other provinces and, although there is no consensus, some community members think it may be the most viable option. As a result of this study, community members also have a better understanding of what establishing a new organization would entail.

Opportunities:

- Could potentially create more long-term stability for the program
- Would detach the program from the mandates of other organizations and be governed by one defined mission
- Could tap into the passion and dedication of existing community

Challenges:

- Would need to be a priority for people across the supply chain, especially for government funders
- Would require a major volunteer commitment and a financial investment for start-up costs (e.g., consulting fees, lawyer fees)
- Would need a long runway wherein all awards are on hiatus or find a new temporary home

Coalition Co-Lead Discussion Notes:

- Unsure if there is an existing community leader able and willing to take this on and it can't fall on the existing coalition members
- Would need to identify a leadership structure and appropriate members for a steering committee early on in the process
- Running a standalone organization would mean not only funding for the hard costs and program administration but also for operational management (e.g., bookkeeping, office supplies)
- Once again, would require a massive change to programming to make it feasible and fundable, striking a delicate balance of autonomy and history—what happens to the awards that don't fit into the new vision?
- Funding challenges are much bigger for new organizations

Scenario 3: Reimagining

Summary:

The current program endeavors to accomplish a number of objectives. By trying to be “all things to all people” without appropriate resources, the program often comes up short. Perhaps the program can be reimagined as a new, more sustainable initiative, such as a “Manitoba Books of the Year” list for which a single committee of established authors annually selects books across genres to promote through existing channels and celebrate with a reader-facing event.

Opportunities:

- Would be much less expensive to administer and achieve similar (promotional) outcomes
- Could be *managed* by one organization and promoted through partner organizations (e.g., the WPL, McNally Robinson)
- Could be funded by a pool of funders and corporate sponsors (as opposed to specific award sponsors)
- Could tap into the passion and dedication of the existing community

Challenges:

- Not as prestigious for the authors
- Choosing selectors and public communications could be more complicated or delicate
- Would still require some funding for hard costs (e.g., selector honoraria) and administration
- Would still need a plan to wind down existing awards
- Transition would require support from coalition members (and maybe continued involvement)

Coalition Co-Lead Discussion Notes:

- Could see there being support from the community and promotional partners
- Would be complex and require a lot of diplomacy, clear criteria about who is chosen as a “selector,” guardrails in place for bias, ego checking, etc.
- Would it still require a submission process and access to books for selectors (which inflates expenses and labour costs)?
- How can the list be curated to ensure diverse representation, including Francophone authors, while ensuring a manageable workload?
- Would need a prestige element to provide career development for writers
- A natural home still doesn’t exist
- Unsure if it would appeal to current funders

Scenario 4: Retiring

Summary:

Although it is clear that this program is impactful and meaningful for the community, between the unstable funding landscape, a lack of natural home options, unrealistic expectations, and diminishing returns on impact, it is justifiable to consider retiring the MBA/PLM as an umbrella program.

Opportunities:

- Would create space for something new in the community
- Would be affordable and relatively straightforward to implement
- The coalition and key funders could support and/or explore opportunities for individual awards to continue existing where there is space to do so

Challenges:

- Community would be disappointed and may resent coalition members and/or funders for “letting it happen” (even if there is no other option)
- Would require transition support from existing coalition members (especially for awards funded by endowments)

Coalition Co-Lead Discussion Notes:

- This scenario is the most pragmatic if there is no other clear option
- Some awards could continue to exist within other organizations
- Sponsors would need the capacity and willingness to take on award administration internally or fund an external contractor to manage it (which seems unlikely, given existing reticence to fund overhead)
- Could work as a community to find ways to honour the history of awards that can't find new homes
- Wouldn't require any new infrastructure or communications channels
- Wouldn't be as effective in terms of promotion and would likely lead to more competition for media coverage (between individual awards)
- Would lose the community spirit behind the umbrella program

Recommendations

In some ways, all the scenarios explored during the mapping exercise seem possible. However, none come to the fore as the ideal option, and none would achieve all expressed community priorities. Additionally, every one of these scenarios would require the same investments: a generous runway of time, financial support for the transition, and a willingness to embrace change to the program as it currently operates.

There are benefits to rehousing or building a new home for the existing umbrella program, but the paths outlined in scenarios 1 and 2 will be challenging to traverse with no guarantee they will lead to the ultimate destination—a realistic and sustainable home for the awards. This is especially true without a significant long-term investment from the provincial government or another major funder.

Based on the feedback from coalition co-leads, any reimagined initiative (as outlined in scenario 3) would not be effective unless it incorporated hallmarks of an awards program including funding for hard costs, a submission process, and prize purses or some other way to create “prestige” for selected authors. If that sentiment is shared by others in the community, we would simply be reinventing the wheel.

During the study, it quickly became clear how meaningful this program is for the Manitoba book community. The MBA/PLM is a testament to the depth and breadth of talent found in the province. Likewise, with some restructuring, it has the potential to raise the profile of Manitoba and its literary culture on a national stage. However, meaning and potential are insufficient in a landscape that cannot support the program's operational needs.

In the end, the findings of this study support a recommendation to disband the umbrella awards program. The current system is not working, and the landscape has become increasingly unstable. Disbanding the umbrella program creates an opportunity to explore new approaches to some awards and allows space for new initiatives to emerge.

If accepted, execution of this recommendation will require a great deal of care and transparency with the community. Execution milestones will likely include:

- Informing the community about the decision and answering questions
- Creating a project plan including list of prospective homes for individual awards and a transition deadline
- Inviting funders, sponsors, and partners to discuss the possibility of transitioning individual awards to new homes
- Preparing an overview of costs/workflow for individual awards where appropriate

- Discussing contingency plans for endowments with the appropriate funders (The Winnipeg Foundation for the MB Poetry and Eileen McTavish Sykes and the Manitoba Foundation for the Arts for the John Hirsch)
- Establishing an ad-hoc committee to develop a plan for preserving the history of awards (e.g., a web archive)
- Transitioning assets for individual awards to their new homes
- Providing institutional knowledge and, potentially, hands-on support for the first year of a new award cycle

If possible, it is recommended that one member of the coalition be responsible for overseeing the transition, with support from other coalition members as well as select community members including authors, publishers, and sponsors. However, whichever organization steps up to lead the work cannot be held responsible for individual awards that don't find new homes. The retirement of any given award is unlikely to be the result of one individual's or organization's efforts, but rather of a challenging environment, general industry instability, or a diminished need for the award.

The coalition should ask existing sponsors to reallocate their annual support for one final year, applying for additional public funds, or leading a small community-level campaign to raise between \$7,500 and \$10,000 to support the transition. This money could fund the human resources required to facilitate the transition of individual awards as well as commemorative initiatives for retiring awards.

The timeline for this transition will depend on several factors, including the capacity of coalition members, the community response, and whether funding is available. In an ideal world, the process would unfold between July and October. All individual awards would be transitioned, and an award history committee would be in place by December 31.

Next Steps

The scope of my role includes facilitation of a feasibility study, the development of a report that can be shared with the community, and the provisions of informed recommendations for the future of the program. However, the decision to accept and act on my recommendation lies with the coalition and, more specifically, with the individual organizations that form the coalition.

In the early review stages, confidentiality will be key. Each organization should be given the equal opportunity to consider the study results internally and determine how they wish to proceed. Leaders within each organization should take great care with the sensitive information contained within the report.

Recommended next steps:

- Share the confidential report with coalition members (senior staff/board)
- Meet as a coalition to discuss the report and discuss collective communications
- Distribute the final report to additional constituents (i.e., sponsors/funders, AMBP and MWG members, authors)
- Conduct the business of voting to accept this recommendation in whatever manner is appropriate for individual organizations (e.g., board vote, member vote)

As time allows, I would be happy to meet with the coalition and/or board members to discuss the study, my recommendations, and proposed next steps. If the decision to accept or not accept the recommendation is not unanimous within the coalition, organizations who wish to explore alternate scenarios should be given freedom to do so.

This is the most pragmatic path. It will be difficult and, for some, disheartening, but disbanding the current structure will create space for community leaders to explore innovative and sustainable ways to support and celebrate Manitoba's literary culture.

“ Whether you're a writer, a publisher, a librarian, or run a book festival, you want the same thing. You want your locally written and produced books to be of good quality and for the broader public to be well-informed about them. And you want the books to be bought and read. The book awards are a valuable contributor to those aims. But I think they have suffered from the general reduction of financial support in the government culture and heritage sector. We are geniuses at doing more with less, but we are a small community... To the folks who've run the awards in the past: thanks for the hard work you've done. It really is appreciated. – *Survey Respondent* ”

Note on Appendices

In an effort to optimize shareability of this report, the appendices have been compiled as a separate document. They include:

- An overview of the situation and SWOT analysis for the program
- An overview of industry ecosystem research and highlights of our findings
- Results from the community needs assessment survey
- An overview of the community consultations and discussion highlights

Anyone who wishes to review the study findings in more detail through the appendices can access them at www.manitobabookawards.ca.