



Association of Writers  
& Writing Programs

**PRESS RELEASE**

Contact: Chloe Schwenke, Interim Executive Director  
301-226-9714 [chloe@awpwriter.org](mailto:chloe@awpwriter.org)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **AWP Releases Report on ADA Accessibility & Inclusion Assessment of the AWP Annual Conference & Bookfair**

COLLEGE PARK, MD – AWP released today the results of an assessment of AWP’s performance with regards to the American’s with Disabilities Act (ADA) in terms of conference accessibility and inclusion. The assessment was carried out by Cindy Shima Kauffman between July 17, 2017 and March 10, 2018. Ms. Kauffman serves as the Director of Strategic Operations for SEEC (Seeking Empowerment, Equality, and Community for People with Developmental Disabilities), responsible for the organization-wide facilitation of SEEC’s strategic mission and vision. Ms. Kauffman has been involved in the disabilities field for over 30 years, and has served as Director of Accreditation, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) and as an assessor for the Maryland University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

The report features not only a review of AWP’s policies and procedures in relation to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but also the feedback from discussions with attendees with disabilities and a town hall meeting about accessibility that was held at the 2018 Tampa conference. Ms. Kauffman reviewed and consolidated this information and created the report which assesses AWP’s current accessibility services and makes recommendations for improving the service at future AWP conferences.

The report released today has led to several key initiatives which AWP will put in place for its upcoming 2019 Portland annual conference. These include:

- Close captioning and livestreaming of the keynote speaker event featuring Colson Whitehead;
- Offering complimentary registration to individuals who must Skype into their panel for accessibility reasons;
- Transportation assistance for those attendees with accessibility needs;
- Formation of an Ad Hoc Accessibility Committee to provide a comprehensive review of the accessibility services at the annual conference;

- Curating an AWP-Sponsored event featuring writers with disabilities who have been active in the disability writing community
- Revised Presenter Guidelines to improve accessibility.

AWP is continuing our efforts to communicate regularly with all attendees and presenters to increase awareness of the accessibility needs of their conference peers. Ms. Kauffman's recommendations, for example, were further expanded on and enhanced by the work of an Ad Hoc Accessibility Committee, consisting of Suzanne Bair, Marlena Chertock, Jess Silfa, and Ellen McGrath Smith, who volunteered their time to contribute additional recommendations for improving conference accessibility and inclusion. AWP was very fortunate to gain their assistance in this effort. Says interim Executive Director, Dr. Chloe Schwenke: "AWP feels very positive about the steps we have taken and are taking to document and develop a continuous improvement plan for accessibility at our conference. We are firmly committed to improving accessibility and to working with AWP members with disabilities to ensure this happens. Our goal is a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible conference for all attendees."

For more information, please view:

[https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine\\_media/writers\\_news\\_view/4496/](https://www.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/writers_news_view/4496/)

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*The mission of AWP is to foster literary achievement, to advance the art of writing as essential to a good education, and to serve the makers, teachers, students, and readers of contemporary writing. Founded in 1967, AWP supports nearly 50,000 writers, over 560 college and university creative writing programs, and 150 writers' conferences and centers.*