Creating Literary Community for All: 
Literary Centers & Reaching the Underserved

Description:
Literary centers create and nurture vibrant and diverse literary communities across the US, bringing together both writers and readers inside and outside academia. In this interactive panel, directors from established and emerging literary centers in urban and rural areas will explore the programs, readings, classes, workshops, events, outreach, and networking which help them to enrich both established writers and those without traditional access to literary arts programming and education.

Category:
Writers Conference & Centers Events

Event Organizer:
Michael Khandelwal, michael@the-muse.org, the-muse.org

Event Moderator:
Shawn Girvan received his MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College. His work has appeared in The Pitkin Review, Wraparound South, and West Texas Literary Review. He has also produced a critically acclaimed documentary film, has owned a wedding videography business, and studied and performed improvisation at the Second City and IO Theaters in Chicago. Shawn currently resides in Virginia Beach where he is finishing his first memoir. He is the Associate Executive Director and the Adult Literary Program Director at The Muse Writers Center.

Event Participants:
Phil Memmer is the author of six book of poems, most recently Cairns. He founded and directs the Writers Voice of the YMCA of Central New York in Syracuse, and is publisher at Tiger Bark Press. He also teaches creative writing part-time at Hamilton College.
**Heather Newton**’s award-winning books include *The Puppeteer’s Daughters, McMullen Circle,* and *Under the Mercy Trees.* She is cofounder and program manager for the Flatiron Writers Room in Asheville, North Carolina, and teaches creative writing for Charlotte Lit and UNC Asheville’s Great Smokies Writing Program. flatironwritersroom.com

**Karen Schubert**, founding director of Lit Youngstown in 2015, is a NEOMFA graduate and author of *The Compost Reader* and five poetry chapbooks. She has taught in numerous academic and community settings. He awards include residencies at Headlands Center for the Arts and Vermont Studio Center.

**Dariel Suarez** is the Cuban-born author of the novel *The Playwright’s House* and the story collection *A Kind of Solitude,* winner of the International Latino Book Award. He is the Artistic Director at GrubStreet and resides in the Boston area.

**Opening Remarks and Housekeeping Announcements:**
Welcome to Creating Literary Community for All: Literary Centers & Reaching the Underserved. A few reminders before we begin:

- For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, please let the moderator of the panel, Shawn Girvan, know, and a printed copy will be delivered to you.
- Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.
- Treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.
- Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from wearing scented products.
- Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including chairs reserved for those with disabilities.
Let’s Begin
The literary arts are transformative, both for the writer and the reader. The WC&C members of AWP believe that the community created by literary arts centers is vital to both established writers and underserved and at-risk populations. Whether a traditional reading or a session in a youth group home that uses the literary arts as a healing and empowerment tool, centers must find ways to connect to the local community, as we believe that the literary arts are urgently relevant to everyone.

I am excited to introduce our panelists this morning: Phil Memmer, the Founder and Director of the Writers Voice of the YMCA of Central New York in Syracuse; Heather Newton, the Co-Founder and Program Manager at the Flatiron Writers Room in Asheville; Karen Schubert, the Founding Director of Lit Youngstown in Ohio; and Dariel Suarez, the Artistic Director at Grub Street in Boston. I am Shawn Girvan, the Adult Literary Program Director and Associate Executive Director at The Muse Writers Center in Norfolk, Virginia, and I will be your moderator and part of the conversation.

Instead of reading everyone’s biographies, I’ll leave it to you to read them on your own. And we’d like to present this panel a little differently than most at AWP. To us, this less of a panel and more of a resource to you and a conversation about the great opportunities that exist for you within literary organizations.

Here’s what we are going to discuss, via roundtable today:
• How have our programs evolved to bring together writers and readers from both inside and outside of academia?
• How can we best reach underserved and at-risk populations, using the literary arts as both an artistic and creative healing tool?
• How can organizations make our vibrant and diverse literary communities visible to the larger community?
• How can we best create access to innovative literary arts programming and education that is relevant to our local communities?
• How can we best use technology to enhance both our new and established programming?

But before we address the moderator questions, we want to make sure that you find out what you need to know or want us to discuss. So, we’d like to open it up for brief questions in the beginning. We’ll write those down and make sure we cover them in our remarks. This panel is as much your time as it is ours.

We understand this event may be more spontaneous than what can be planned for in a written document. But we hope this open discussion will be enlightening and useful to you.

At the end of our remarks, we will again ask you for your questions, and spend the rest of the time addressing questions that may be unique to you or your experiences.