

National Impact: Volunteering with AWP

There are countless writers' festivals and conferences where literary citizens may volunteer a few hours of their time by helping with registration, set-up and tear-down, and guest services. Volunteering for large scale events often comes with perks: free registration or festival passes, meeting authors and guest speakers, and developing skills that may translate to career-building opportunities. Most importantly, volunteering has its own reward in contributing to the success of an event, in assisting others, and being a valued member of the community.

In this Q&A, Christian Teresi, the Director of Conferences for the [Association of Writers and Writing Programs](#), discusses the role of volunteers and the benefits for all involved.

Can you describe some of the conference volunteer opportunities? What can a first-time volunteer expect in an assignment?

CT: Volunteers are fundamentally important to AWP's ability to produce a successful conference. They help us at registration, provide directions and answer questions for attendees, or troubleshoot issues that may arise with some of the events. Though the conference is very large, the AWP conference staff is only four people including myself; needless to say, the conference would not be possible without the volunteers. Volunteers can expect to participate in the conference community in a more significant way. Not only are they going to have the experience of attending the conference, but also they are going to gain insight into the execution of a large artistic event.

Why should an emerging writer volunteer with AWP? What about published writers?

CT: Conference volunteers receive a free registration in exchange for four hours of their time. So for us the focus was more about making sure underfunded and under-resourced writers would be able to take advantage of the opportunity, which is why volunteering at the conference is only open to current or recently graduated students and adjunct professors. We hope the volunteers feel like the time they donate to us is going to a worthy literary non-profit, but we're also happy to have an option to help these writers to reduce their expenses for attending the conference.

What sort of skills or experiences do volunteers gain by helping out?

CT: Volunteers are given the opportunity to exercise leadership and interpersonal skills, expand professional networking contacts, and to interact with all levels of the writing community.

What can you use volunteers for year-round?

CT: Besides volunteers sharing their positive conference reviews through social media and word of mouth, the complexities of the conference don't really allow us to utilize volunteers year-around, but other AWP projects do. If you are interested in discussing other volunteer opportunities at AWP, I would encourage you to speak with the AWP Director of Membership, Diane Zinna (diane@awpwriter.org).

Do you have any volunteer success stories?

CT: We have noticed that volunteers—especially first time volunteers—are able to network with other like-minded individuals and build connections at the conference. Each year we hear stories about how our volunteers get to meet or help one of their favorite authors. Of course, they also receive the benefits from attending the conference, from searching the bookfair for residency options or discovering new presses, to hearing lectures or readings from authors they admire. The conference and bookfair is full of exciting possibilities for all of our attendees.

Literary citizens interested in volunteering with AWP may sign up on the conference website https://www.awpwriter.org/awp_conference/registration_volunteer. Applications are accepted every fall for the following year's conference.

For more information about volunteering with local and national organizations, see Chapter 8: Community outreach in *The Write Crowd: Literary Citizenship & the Writing Life*.