



Because
Words
Matter

2024 Festival Report

The Berry Writers Festival acknowledges the Dharawal and Dhurga language-speaking groups who are traditional owners of this area.

We acknowledge their customs and culture, which have nourished, and continue to nourish, this land. And we extend our respects to Elders, past, present, and future.



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Introduction

The biennial Berry Writers Festival is more than just an event—it's a celebration of the written word, set in the enchanting, historic town of Berry, NSW. Over three days, a dynamic lineup of workshops, talks, discussions, and other literary activities offers locals and visitors an opportunity to come together, inspire readers and budding authors alike, and nurture the local and broader literary culture.

We are proud of the lasting legacy this festival creates within the wider Berry community, affording, as it does, significant cultural impact and enrichment. The inaugural festival in 2022 was a triumphant affirmation of Berry's resilient spirit, following the challenges of the South Coast bushfires and the COVID lockdowns. The 2024 festival cemented the tradition of celebrating the written word, with a bigger, even more exciting and inclusive festival. Over 90 authors and other artists provided a melting pot of opinions, perspectives, and philosophies, addressing contemporary political and social issues while supporting diversity. The festival was enjoyed by over 800 attendees from the local community and beyond, with a total of 3,096 tickets sold.

Powered by our tireless committee, passionate volunteers, partners, sponsors, donors and attendees, it's a true community endeavour, forging and re-establishing the connections that make Berry and the surrounding area a vibrant and stimulating place to live and work. In 2024, our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive festival and giving back to the community led to the launch of two significant initiatives. Esteemed novelist, poet, and playwright Julie Janson, a member of the Burruberongal clan of the Darug Nation, was appointed the festival's First Nations Cultural Advisor. Having Julie on our team was crucial to achieving diversity and inclusion and we had nine indigenous authors and speakers in the program. The introduction of the inaugural free Schools Program engaged students from five local public schools, inspiring the next generation of authors, illustrators, and book lovers. As we come to the final chapter of this year's Berry Writers Festival, our sincere thanks to everyone who has supported this weekend: our audiences, authors, moderators, volunteers, sponsors, partners and donors.

We look forward to seeing you in 2026.



Berry
Writers Festival
25 - 27 October 2024

Because Words Matter



From the Festival President

“Fundamentally, I believe in the Berry community. The Berry Writers Festival has quickly become a key part of its fabric and is important to its evolving identity.

In 2022, we founded our own writers festival in beautiful Berry. In 2024, we consolidated and built a bigger and more diverse community literary event.

In 2026, the Berry Writers Festival will return and cement its place in Australia's publishing industry and event calendar and in our community.”





From the Artistic Director

“When the 2024 program was launched in August, I wrote that “words matter because, in books and poetry, they open up the world to us. It is that spirit of openness, inclusivity, and exploration that animated the 2024 Berry Writers Festival, which we trust provided those who joined us in October with a weekend of memorable experiences.”

I believe we achieved our goal of providing -- in that spirit -- a weekend of memorable experiences in Berry. We welcomed our authors and speakers, our audiences, and our community to a robust and lively celebration of writers and writing across a variety of genres. And we welcomed them as well to engage with debate and discussion about some of the most challenging issues of our time -- including the relationship between journalism and truth; whether civility in public discourse is still possible; and the promise and dangers of AI. We were reminded too of the beauty of poetry and song, as well as the novelist's art; explored how the literary and visual arts interact and influence each other; heard from nine significant Indigenous writers; and enjoyed an exploration of the food and food culture native to this continent. In short, some ninety authors and speakers, over twenty-eight sessions, wove a rich cultural tapestry for the Berry community, our audiences and indeed -- judging by their own responses -- themselves.

Our thanks must be to them, as well as to the Berry community itself, and indeed to all who participated in the spirit of openness, inclusivity, and exploration on the weekend of 25-27 October, 2024.

Mary Cunnane

”





“

I loved the community feel, the ease of getting to each session and the fun of seeing the same friendly faces at many of the events. I loved hearing the Welcome to Country at the Opening Night. It felt so personal to the area and its history and challenges, gave me a real sense of the First Nations community in Berry.’

”

2024 attendee

The 2024 Berry Writers Festival was:

Comprehensive

Taking place over three days, with six venues and more than 90 authors and speakers, plus a special schools day.

Diverse & Inclusive

A wide range of topics, authors and interests enabling attendees to explore new ideas, including from nine First Nations writers.

Engaging

We got to stand and sing, laugh out loud and connect with some of Australia’s literary luminaries.

Memorable

An extraordinary meeting of creative minds against the backdrop of beautiful Berry.





2024 By the Numbers

3 days

6 venues

7 workshops

2 special events

28 paid sessions

2 free events

4.71/5 audience satisfaction

4.9/5 volunteer satisfaction

90+ authors/speakers

3000+ tickets sold

800+ attendees

1600+ school children
from 5 local schools

100+ volunteers

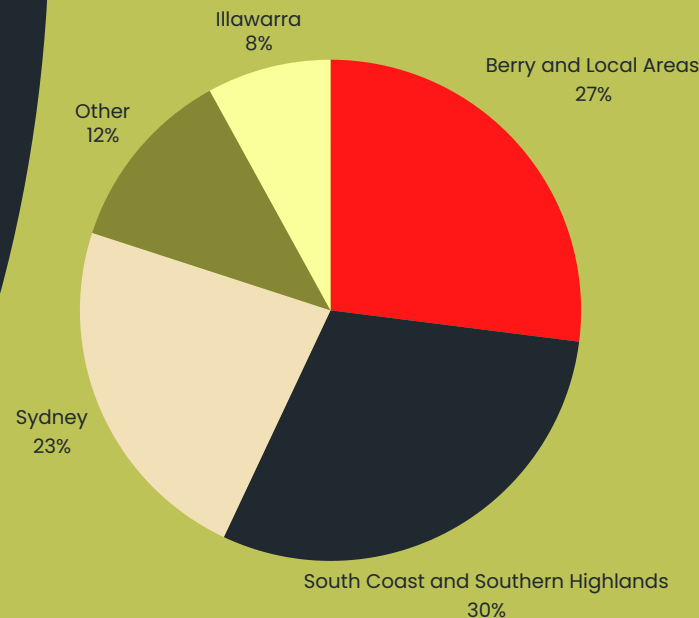
\$105,000 in ticket revenue

\$80,000 in commercial
revenue

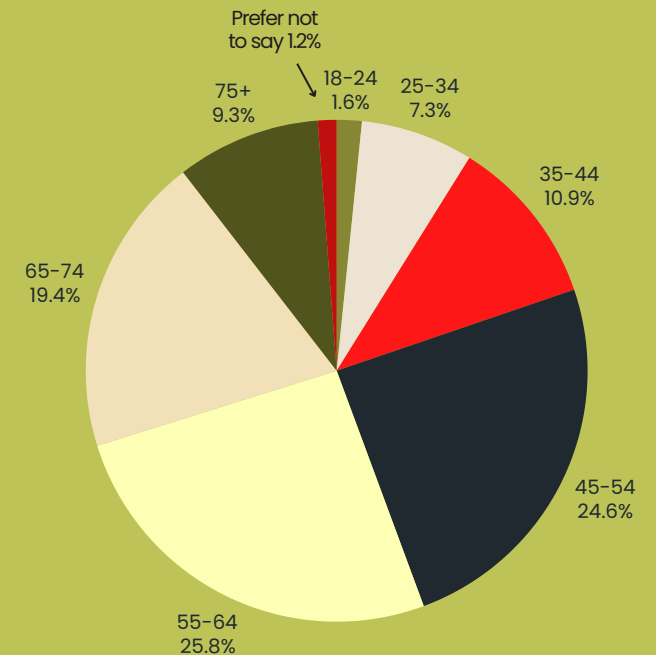
\$26,000 estimated
partner revenue

2024 Attendees

From where



Age & Gender





2024 Festival Program Highlights



Program Themes

Literary Fiction

J.M Coetzee (2003 Nobel Laureate in Literature), Kim Scott (twice winner of the Miles Franklin Award), Alice Pung, Nardi Simpson, Omar Sakr, Ceridwen Dovey, Kate Mildenhall, Nina Wan and Julie Janson were just some of the fiction authors presenting to packed venues.

Commercial Fiction

A strong expansion into commercial fiction in the 2024 festival saw authors like Sally Hepworth, Holly Wainwright, Jessie Stephens, Madeleine Grey, Bri Lee, James Colley, Ali Lowe, Karen Viggers and a crime contingent of Dinuka McKenzie, Hayley Scrivenor, Suzanne Leal and Michael Robotham among others delighted audiences.

Biography & Memoir

Personal stories continued to be one of the most popular genres, with sessions featuring Susan Wyndham, Gina Chick, Grace Tame, Kate Legge, Helen Elliott, Kaya Wilson, Anna Broinowski and Sonia Henry.

Poetry

Omar Sakr, Julie Janson, Nicole Smede and Kirli Saunders drew audiences into the social and political impact of the form.

Non-Fiction

Sessions on *Journalism and Truth* with Jennifer Robinson, Chris Masters, Ed Coper and Lenore Taylor were in high demand, as was *AI and its Discontents*, with Tracey Spicer, Toby Walsh and Seamus Miller and *History Matters* with David Marr, Marc Fennell and Alison Bashford.

Medicine: The Next Twenty Years and *The Age of Rage: Is Civility Dead and Buried?* (with Hannah Ferguson) were also strong drawcards.

Adam Liaw in conversation with Damien Coulthard and Rebecca Sullivan (*The First Nations Food Companion*) enthralled audiences with *The Taste of Australia*, in partnership with Bangalay Dining while Kirli Saunders and Judith Nangala Crispin appeared in partnership with Bundanon in *The Literary and Visual Arts: How They Interact*.

Industry Trends

Meredith Curnow, Catherine Drayton and Elizabeth Weiss dissected the issues affecting the future of publishing, while Penny Chapman, Marc Fennell and Courtney Collins explored the process of adapting books to screen.



2024 Festival Program Highlights



Special Events

The Opening Address

Presented by David Marr to a full-house at The Berry School of Arts, following a smoking ceremony by Gadhungal Marring and a Welcome to Country by Aunty Delia Lowe and Uncle Gerry Moore.

In the words of an attendee at the Opening Celebration, "I loved hearing the Welcome to Country at the Opening Night. It felt so personal to the area and its history and challenges and gave me a real sense of the First Nations community in Berry".

An Evening of Words & Music

The event included Tim Minchin in conversation with Marc Fennell, and performances by Lenka, Kane Calcite and Kay Proudlove. It sold out within two hours.

New Voices of the South Coast: A Showcase for Debut Writers

A partnership with the South Coast Writers Centre, *New Voices of the South Coast*, showcased the works of 10 emerging local authors in a free event hosted by Meredith Jaffé and Allison Tait.

The event allowed for a continuous flow of attendees, with all 60 seats occupied at all times and additional guests standing throughout the space. As it was not a ticketed event, people came and went throughout each session, enabling a wide and diverse audience.

Schools Day

Involving five local primary schools—Berry Public School, Kangaroo Valley Public School, Bomaderry Public School, Nowra East Public School and Falls Creek Public School—three talented children's book creators; Charmaine Ledden-Lewis, Nathan Luff and Maryam Master, presented free author talks for the entire school.

They then led writing and illustration workshops for small groups of students who demonstrated a strong interest and talent in writing or visual arts.

Workshops

The Festival kicked off with seven workshops for budding authors, including a Drawing Stories Workshop for 6–12 year olds providing a nurturing and imaginative educational opportunity for young readers and aspiring writers.





Our Authors Said...

“ Berry Writers Festival brings together our country’s best writers and thinkers in one of our most beautiful small towns ”

Jennifer Robinson





Our Authors Said...

“ The Berry Writers Festival is one of the friendliest, most accommodating festivals I've ever had the pleasure of attending. It is family-friendly, and the organisers absolutely go out of their way to make sure your experience is seamless and a delight. My panel was intellectually and emotionally engaging, and by the end of the festival I came back with a bevy of books by my co-panellists. What a truly enlightening festival! ”

Alice Pung





Our Authors Said...

“ The 2024 Berry Writers Festival was one of the most nourishing experiences of my creative life. The festival team set the perfect tone of warmth and inclusion, and as a result everybody – writers and readers alike – felt so safe to explore our endless curiosity about what it means to share books and ideas in an intimate as well as public setting. A highlight of the year – and such an essential contribution to genuine connection and dialogue. ”

Ceridwen Dovey



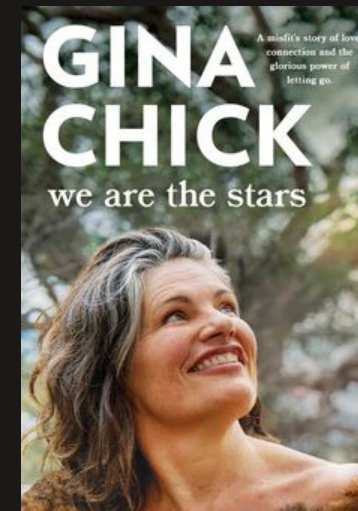
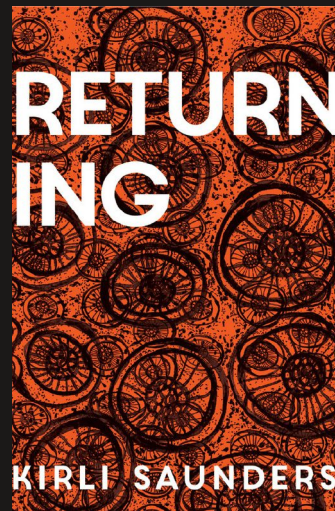
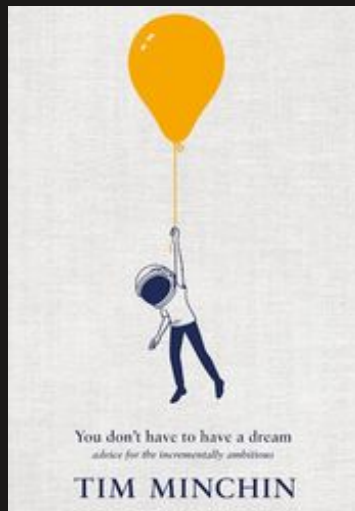


Our Authors Said...

“ Berry Writers Festival is a beautifully intimate weekend to have your horizons widened. The event is welcoming, diverse, enthralling and thoughtfully programmed. ”

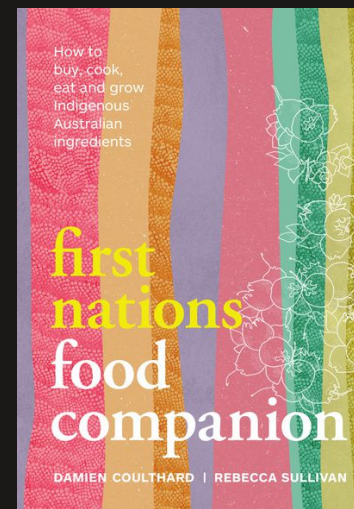
Marc Fennel





Berry Writers Festival 2024: Top 5 Best Sellers

DYMOCKS
books & gifts





Schools Program

We are thrilled to have introduced our free Schools Program as part of the Berry Writers Festival 2024, bringing the joy of literature to life for local primary school students.

On Schools Day, 24 October, three talented children's book authors – Charmaine Ledden Lewis, Maryam Master, and Nathan Luff presented talks to the students of Berry Public School, Kangaroo Valley Public School, Bomaderry Public School, Nowra East Public School and Falls Creek Public School, where they also led writing and illustration workshops. A huge thank you to our authors for their inspiration and to all the students who participated!

We could not have done this without the generosity of donors Helen and Toby Greenacre and Stephanie and Dale Kemp, to whom we offer our heartfelt thanks.

“ Stories help us
make sense of
our world. They
help us dream
and to escape. ”
Maryam Master



Our Schools Said...



"Thank you to Nathan Luff – children's author and Maryam Master, Author for giving us their time today. To our friends at Kangaroo Valley Public School for joining us!!! Lastly, the biggest thank you to Berry Writers Festival for helping to fund this amazing and memorable event!" **Berry Public School**

"Such an inspiring day of learning for our students, many of whom are commenting they'd like to read more from these creators, or perhaps even be an author or illustrator in the future. Thank you to the Berry Writers Festival for their support for our school community." **Bomaderry Public School**

"Another, very big thank you to Berry Writer's Festival for providing our students with such a wonderful opportunity, and for the generous gift of some books written and illustrated by our guests for our school library." **Nowra East Public School**

"Today, as part of the Berry Writers Festival, we were invited to Nowra East Public School for an inspiring session with children's author Nathan Luff and illustrator Charmaine Ledden-Lewis. Our students were captivated by their creativity and storytelling! It was a fantastic opportunity for our young readers and aspiring writers to hear from talented creators. Thank you, Nathan and Charmaine, for sharing your passion with us!" **Falls Creek Public School**





Meet the Team

Bringing the festival to life requires an extraordinary effort from a dedicated team. The 2024 committee—James Robinson, Mary Cunnane, Stephanie Kemp, Nuala Higgins, Colleen Fry, Christa Wood, and Ian Carroll, supported by Tori Haschka, Associate Artistic Director, Nathan Luff, Schools Program Co-ordinator, and Julie Janson, First Nations Cultural Advisor—worked tirelessly for months to make this legacy possible. From programming and marketing to logistics and event management, there is a very big effort involved.



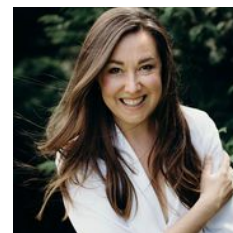
James Robinson
President



Christa Wood
Vice President



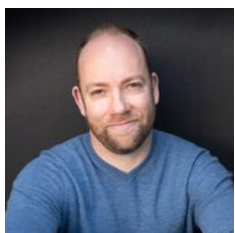
Mary Cunnane
Artistic Director



Tori Haschka
Assoc. Artistic Director



Julie Janson
First Nations
Cultural Advisor



Nathan Luff
Schools Program
Co-ordinator



Stephanie Kemp
Treasurer



Nuala Higgins
Secretary



Ian Carroll
Committee Member



Colleen Fry
Committee Member

We would also like to give special recognition to our honorary committee members: Dave Jordan, Jo Bolam, Angela Lie, Barbara Vickery, and Catherine Hutchinson. Their skills, expertise, and patience have been invaluable in shaping the festival's impact. Without their support, the festival wouldn't have been possible. To everyone else who has contributed in countless ways, though we can't name you all, know that your efforts have been essential and we thank you deeply.

Support From Our Community

Principal Donor



Founding Donors

Ornella Botter & Jok Kearney
 Simon Buckingham & Annie Crawford
 Lucy & Frank Calabria
 Jean Cockayne
 Michael & Suzanne Daniel
 Alison & Joseph Galea
 Helen & Toby Greenacre
 Joanne & Lee Hopperton
 Dugal & Ilana Lamont
 Stephanie & Dale Kemp

Kathryn Lovric
 John & Lisa McGuire
 Amelia Ramsden
 James & Isobel Robinson
 Damien & Justine Roche
 Geoffrey & Julie Rosenberg
 Emily Simpson
 Kate Towey & Ross Drinnan
 Louise Walsh & Dave Jordan
 Felicity Youl



The Festival was only made possible with the support of

100+ local people who volunteered their time (including the organising committee)

28 local accommodation providers who cared for Authors & Speakers!

The Australian Cultural Fund

WebDesign Solutions NSW
 Travel Focus, Gerringong

Sponsors



Together we built a legacy for our community, all without government support

Partners





Volunteer Feedback

Festival volunteering
experience met their
expectations

4.8/5
AVERAGE RATING

Enjoyment of the festival

4.9/5
AVERAGE RATING

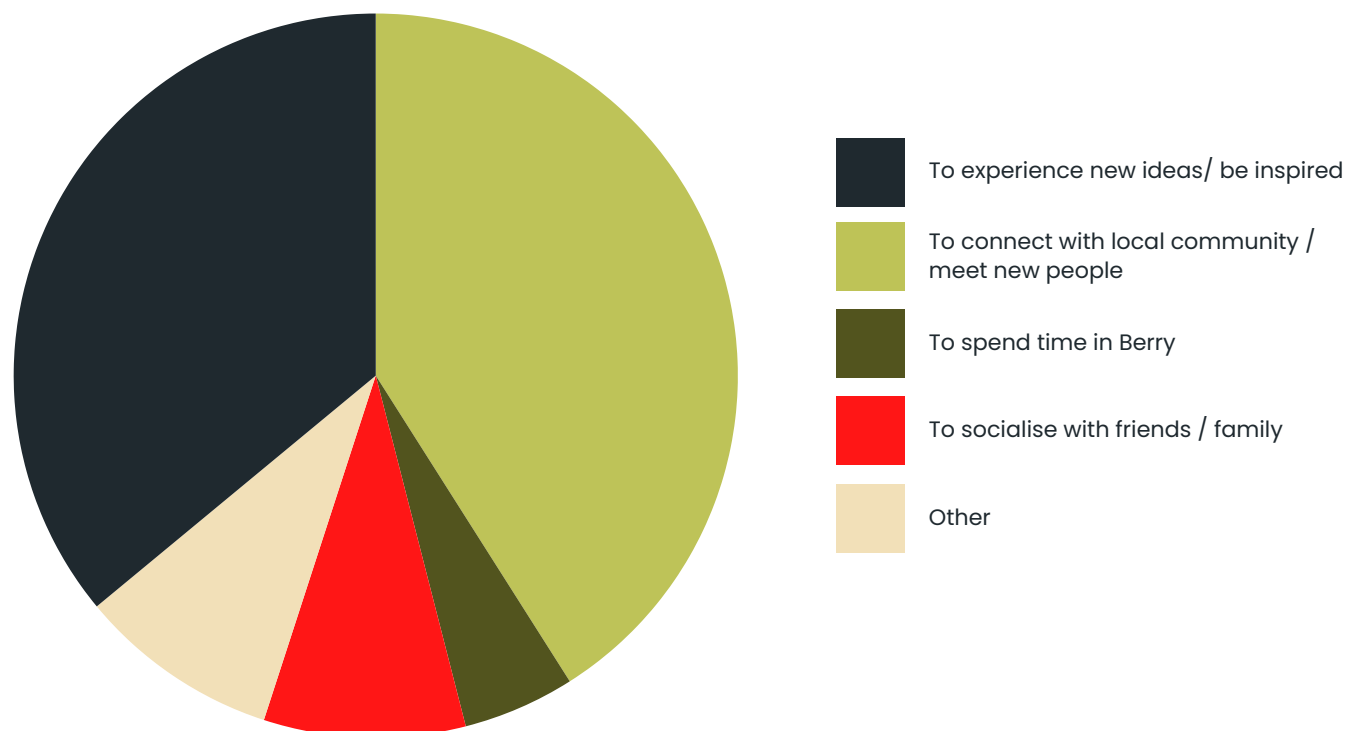
Our Volunteers

Our Berry Writers Festival is only possible because of the incredible support from our wonderful team of volunteers, co-ordinated by Colleen Fry. We couldn't be more grateful for their dedication and enthusiasm. This event truly comes together thanks to the hard work of so many who are passionate about making it a success. A huge thank you to each and every one of you.

In all, over 90 people volunteered across our six venues in roles ranging from ticketing, venue and green room management, author escort, first aid, logistics and administration. 2024 saw the introduction of an electronic system to check tickets and admit attendees to venues. Our volunteers rose to the challenge magnificently and after some initial nervousness about the app, the process was by and large smooth.

In 2024, we introduced a volunteer survey to find out more about our volunteers' experiences of the festival, what we are doing well and where we can improve. In line with our desire to reinforce the local sense of community and bring literature to a regional centre, we discovered that 41% volunteered to connect with their local community and to meet new people and 36% to experience new ideas and be inspired. The volunteers who responded told us:

Main Reason for Volunteering





Our Volunteers said...

"Able to listen to quite a few interesting talks and met interesting people. Everyone was very friendly."

"Event was extremely well organised; attendees and volunteers were awesome; much better than I expected and I had high expectations to begin with."

"Supporting this small town festival that has a big presence for both writers and audiences."



Audience Feedback

How much did the audience
enjoy the festival?

5/5

**FROM 79% OF
AUDIENCE**

Enjoyment of the festival

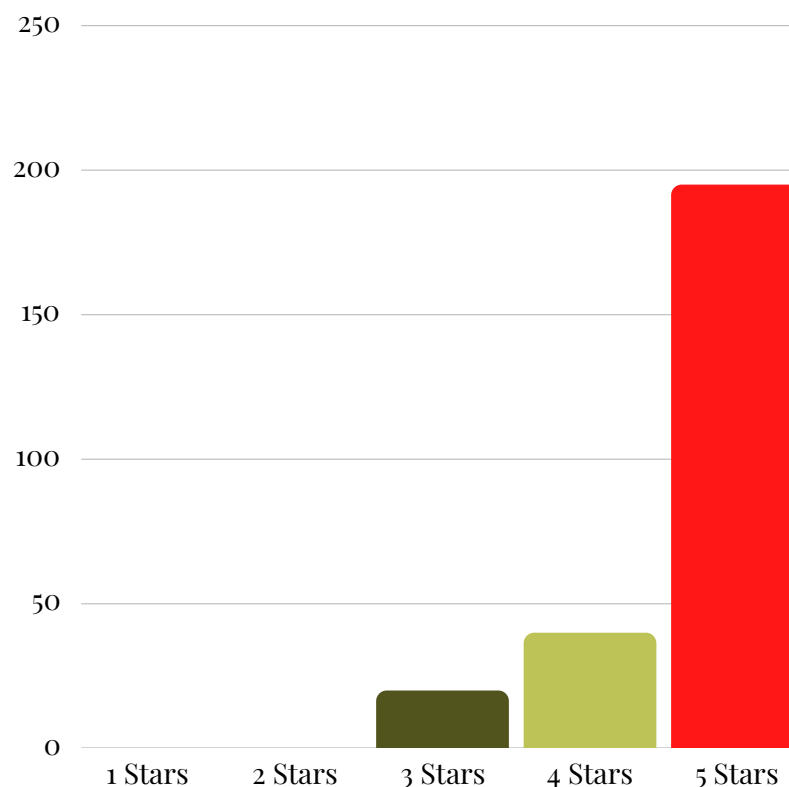
4.71/5

AVERAGE RATING

Our Audience

The Berry Writers Festival exists to offer locals and visitors an opportunity to come together to celebrate the written word, with 801 unique festival attendees purchasing tickets, in excess of 120 audience members who attended the free *New Voices of the South Coast* events and approximately 1600 school session participants.

Overall Festival Enjoyment, Rated by Audience



The most cited reasons for high ratings were the quality of speakers, excellent organisation, and the welcoming community feel.



Our Audience said...

"The selection of presenters was brilliant... I found the talks were so engaging, thought provoking and simply wonderful."

"Interesting, wide range of topics, genuine, community-driven, great discussions."

"Such diversity of subjects."

..."a relaxed atmosphere, easy walk to the different venues there was a serenity about the festival, a lovely crowd...a wonderful informative experience"

" The seamless organisation was brilliant."



Audience Feedback

How Often Have Audience Members Attended Writers' Festivals in the Past?

29%

**FIRST TIME
ATTENDEES**

45%

**OCCASIONAL
ATTENDEES**

26%

**REGULAR
ATTENDEES**

Where Did the Audience Come From?

Most audience members were from Berry or the South Coast/Wollongong region, however 28% travelled from further afield and 2% said they had never visited Berry before. The variety of audience members meant that as well as bringing a cultural event to the South Coast, we also brought tourism to the community with the influx of visitors from further afield.

Why Did the Audience Attend?

The top motivations for attending the festival were hearing a specific speaker (22%), experiencing new ideas (21%), and seeking inspiration (20%). Social aspects were also important, with 12% attending to socialise with friends or family and smaller percentages drawn by the chance to connect with the local community (7%) or meet new people with similar interests (5%).

We were delighted to introduce a new audience to a writers' festival – 29% of our audience who provided feedback said this was their first experience of such an event.

What We Can Do Better

Although overall audience respondents were positive about their ticket purchasing experience, with 57% rating it five stars, we appreciate the feedback that this needs improving before the next festival.

Some feedback indicates we need to better brief moderators to provide unobtrusive facilitation and controlling dynamics.

Some audience feedback mentioned missing tickets for sessions due to sellouts or program clashes, which limited their enjoyment slightly but did not detract significantly from their overall positive experience. We will consider how to increase audience capacity and repeat popular sessions where possible for future festivals.



Inclusiveness

We strive to offer a festival that is accessible to all.

The 2024 festival attracted a younger audience overall compared to 2022, with significant growth in the 25–54 age bracket, and a predominantly female audience. We will continue to focus on offering a diverse range of speakers and sessions so there is something to entice everyone to attend the festival.

Where possible venues are accessible, within the constraints of some of Berry's heritage buildings.

We offer complementary companion tickets for holders of a Companion Card, with one audience member bringing a companion to the 2024 festival.

Volunteers and new voice authors were offered access to selected sessions free of charge.

Concessional pricing was available to students, and other concession card holders. Overall, 11% of total ticket sales were concessional.

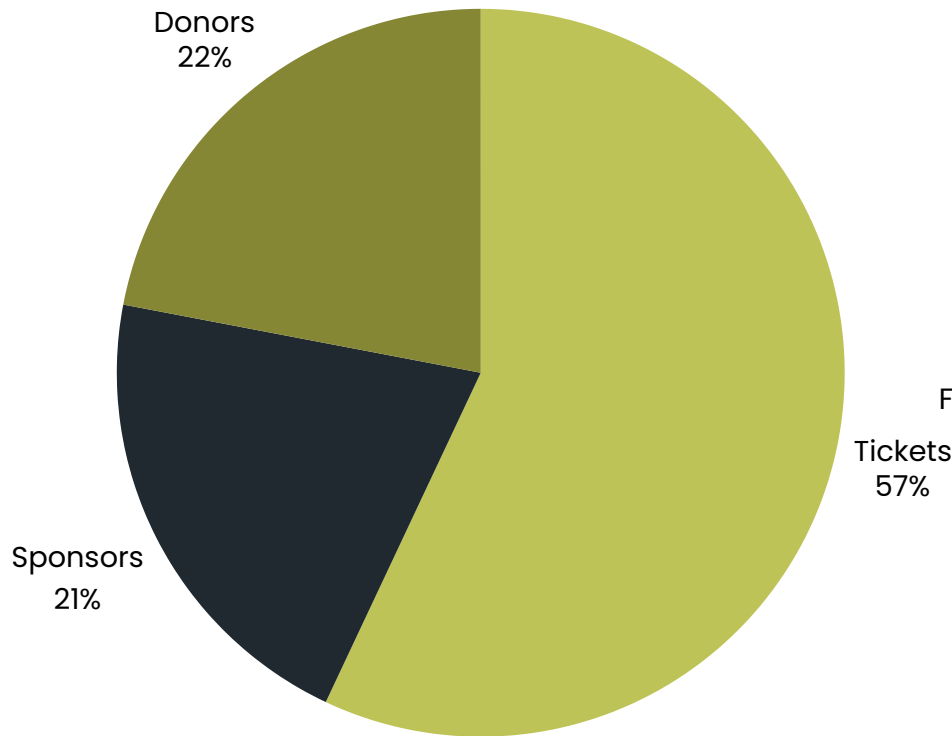
Two free un-ticketed sessions were available on Sunday, and five schools participated in the free Schools Program.



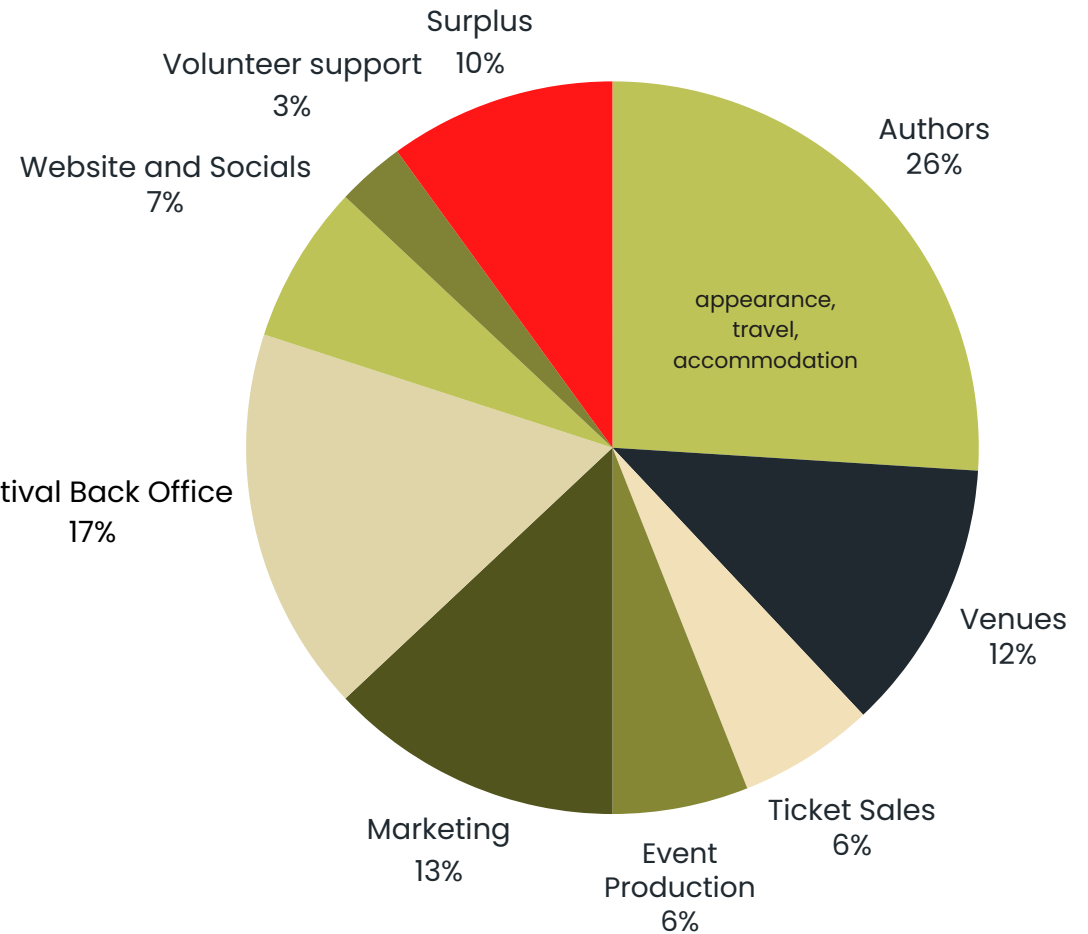


2024 Festival Financial Snapshot

2024 Source of Funds



2024 Use of Funds



Figures are based on provisional, unaudited management accounts, rounded up to the nearest thousand



2024 On Our Socials

Social Media



Instagram

147,000 views
2,527 interactions
170+ content posts



Facebook

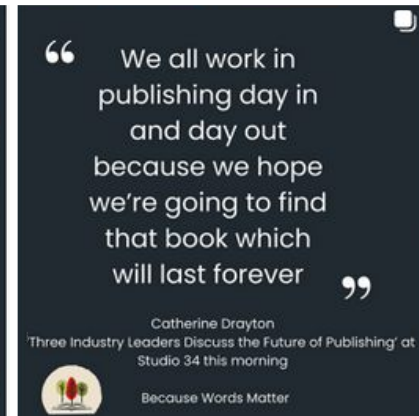
Reach 25,000
22,000 interactions

FOLLOW



Festival reached target of
2,500 followers

Some Instagram posts from the 2024 Event





The Future



For the 2026
Festival we aim to

Invest in live-streaming of
sessions

Provide more free events

Expand our schools
program

2026 dates to be
announced soon!



2024 Video

Click to view



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcUIUwrLtsY>



Berry Writers Incorporated

ABN 63903506341

Registered as a charity with the ACNC

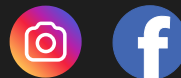
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NSW 2565

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Berry
Writers Festival
25 – 27 October 2024



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