

Chapter Handbook

*A manual created by and for
Sisters in Crime chapter leaders*



Mission Statement

Sisters in Crime

“The mission of Sisters in Crime is to promote the professional development and advancement of women crime writers to achieve equality in the industry.”

Vision Statement

Sisters in Crime

“Raising professionalism and achieving equity among crime writers.”

Tagline

Sisters in Crime

“SinC into a Good Mystery!”

Website

www.sistersincrime.org

E-mail Address

sistersincrime@juno.com

Executive Secretary & Contact

Beth Wasson

sistersincrime@juno.com

Tel. 785 842-1325

Introduction

As this is written, in late 2010, Sisters in Crime has more than 50 chapters, including two: the Internet Chapter and the Guppies, that function entirely online. Whether it provides face-to-face contact or a virtual community, a chapter is an invaluable source of support for writers at every stage of their professional development and fellowship for all lovers of the mystery genre.

Keeping a chapter strong, offering a variety of services and activities to please all members, can seem like a daunting task, but working together for the common good is what SinC is all about. No chapter can thrive without a pool of enthusiastic and capable volunteers, each doing a job suited to her (or his!) talents.

As any writer knows, though, talent and enthusiasm aren't enough. You also have to know what you're doing. That's where this handbook can help. Leaders from many chapters have drawn on their experiences to give other Sisters clear, practical advice on how to get the job done, whether it's organizing lively meetings or putting out a chapter newsletter or any of a dozen other activities.

The handbook will always be a work-in-progress, with new material added as the writing/publishing world changes and our chapters look for new ways to serve members at the local level. We are all indebted to the contributors to this first edition. Their thoughtful, detailed articles will serve our organization for many years to come.

Sandra Parshall
SinC National Chapter Liaison
sparshall@verizon.net

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How Do You Start a New SinC Chapter?

by Sandra Parshall
Chesapeake Chapter
National Chapter Liaison

Tired of plotting murder all by yourself? Weary of connecting with other mystery lovers only in cyberspace?

Maybe it's time to start a new chapter of Sisters of Crime and bring all the criminally-minded writers and readers in your area together.

Launching a new chapter requires a big investment of time and energy, and the founding members will have to make a commitment to provide leadership. So why do it? Because we all need the support and friendship of others who love the mystery genre. Because SinC is one of the premier organizations in the mystery world, and participating in a chapter is the best way to carry out SinC's mission at the local level. And because it's fun!

Where to start?

Let the national Chapter Liaison and SinC Executive Secretary Beth Wasson know what you're planning, and keep them informed every step of the way so they can advise you and answer your questions. Beth can send you membership brochures and other SinC materials to pass out to prospective members of your new chapter.

Find a suitable place for an organizational meeting—a room at a library, a restaurant, an accommodating bookstore, or your own living room. Ask Beth for a list of all SinC members in your zip code and others within easy driving distance. Invite them to the meeting, by e-mail or regular mail. If you know other local mystery writers (published or unpublished) and readers, invite them too. They'll have to join national SinC in order to join a chapter, but at this point that isn't critical. If they attend the meeting, provide them with SinC materials.

Encourage those who attend to talk about their vision for the chapter and what they would like to get out of it. A critique group? A chance to hear fascinating speakers? An opportunity to socialize and talk about books with other mystery lovers? Field trips that will teach them more about law enforcement?

If the first meeting goes well, schedule several more. Continue inviting anyone who might be interested. Arrange for guest speakers. Set up a Yahoo or Google e-mail listserv for members so you can get the news out promptly about meetings and field trips. Put off charging dues until you're sure the chapter will succeed.

Take about six months to test your commitment and local interest. If the group is still going strong after six months, and you have members who have been willing to take on board responsibilities, you're ready to begin moving from provisional to certified chapter status.

Assemble a small committee to write the chapter's bylaws. The committee members should consult the national SinC bylaws, posted on the website, and keep in mind that chapter bylaws and the chapter's mission statement must mirror national's. When the bylaws are completed, submit them to national SinC through Beth Wasson. She will advise you if any part of your bylaws needs revision.

Make sure all non-SinC members understand that they must join national Sisters in Crime if they want to be members of the chapter. They can join easily through the national website.

The provisional board should decide on the amount of dues to charge. This can be changed later if necessary, but for now keep dues as low as possible, enough to cover costs (such as a website) without accumulating a fund of unspent cash.

Find reliable volunteers to form a nominating committee and present a slate of officers for an initial election. Often the people serving on the provisional board will move into elected positions, if they have performed well and want to continue.

Try to create a chapter website as soon as possible, to serve as the group's public face and a source of information for members. (One of your members may have the talent and time to do this for free, or you may seek recommendations for good, reasonably priced website design and maintenance.) Continue to make use of your chapter listserv.

Once your chapter is up and running, you're ready to use the advice in this handbook. Never hesitate to turn to Beth, or the Chapter Liaison, or leaders in other chapters when you have problems or questions. In SinC, someone is always there to help!

Sandra Parshall has served as Chapter Liaison for the national board of SinC since 2009. She is the author of the Agatha Award-winning Rachel Goddard mysteries and lives in the Washington, DC, area. Visit her website at www.sandraparshall.com.

10 Tips for a Vital & Vigorous Chapter

by JoAnne Lucas
San Joaquin Chapter

Are familiar faces disappearing? Is your Board giving more excuses than action? Does every membership meeting become same-old, same-old? It's time to take 10—10 tips to keep your chapter vital & vigorous.

1. Don't be afraid to have a good time. And corny as it sounds, a happy leader sets the tone of the meeting. Get things moving with door prize drawings for members only. Try to stretch these inexpensive gifts to go with the theme of the speaker's presentation, the season, or an upcoming holiday. Not all prizes need be bought. Some can be donated. Give door prizes of donated mystery books. Wrap them up so they remain a mystery until the winner claims them. Have fun with this.
2. Try to keep the meeting place as permanent as possible. It's too unsettling for members otherwise, thus making it easily skippable. A restaurant with a large room is good. If you hold meetings at a library or book store, encourage curious non-members to sit in and give them printed information on what the chapter is about and how to join. For those chapters not meeting in a restaurant, a meal or coffee elsewhere with the speaker after the meeting is a bonding experience and simply enriches the whole experience.
3. Never berate the membership if a previous meeting had a small attendance. Just let them know they missed a good one and you are a little sorry for them.
4. Encourage guests, but have at least one meeting a year that is for members only—a field trip to a special exhibit at a museum, a visit to a college for crime-related classes or labs, a tour of the police or sheriff's departments, and/or an annual members' party.
5. A healthy membership includes readers. While some readers may sit through a program on how to break writer's block, most will want to hear about breaking and entering. Don't overload your meetings schedule with author speakers. Alternate these with crime specialists. Also, don't have the same authors speak every year. There are a lot of authors out there. Try for a two- to three-year interval between appearances.
6. Build a good pool of Board members. Not everyone is comfortable volunteering for a dedicated monthly duty. However, several will sit in a Members At Large group and step up to fill in a duty for an officer either temporarily or long-term. Others will see that a special cake will be picked up, or help whenever decorations are needed, or maybe take on the job of restaurant liaison. Being exposed to the way the Board operates makes members less leery of volunteering for a more prominent office.

7. Larger chapters: Make certain at least one Board member sits at every table during meetings. This person can answer questions and take suggestions and comments back to the Board. Also, Board members can help a floundering speaker with questions from different areas of the floor. The speaker will feel he/she may have succeeded in generating a great interest and may improve.

8. Encourage members to dress up for a special speaker. Having a professional casino owner or gambler? Throw out a hint that gangsters and molls will be welcome. Shy people seldom do this, but greet them at the door with prime face cards to tape on their clothing and play money to spend. Use Pinochle decks – they have a greater number of high cards. Is it close to Valentine’s or St. Patrick’s Day? Pass out stickers for members and guests to wear. Ask a quiet member to help you and get her involved.

Having a greeter for meetings is excellent. This person can make certain everyone is made welcome, gets a badge, and answers questions, thus freeing up the president and/or speaker coordinator to concentrate on other details of getting the meeting to start on time.

9. Throw in a surprise for the membership once in a while, like a sheet cake in January to celebrate Edgar Allen Poe’s and Sherlock Holmes’s birthdays.

10. Get your newsletter into members’ hands in time for them to read it and make plans attend—at least 10 days before each meeting.

There you have it. Start your engines with these tips for a more vital, vigorous, and va-va-voom chapter.

JoAnne Lucas is a founding member of the San Joaquin Chapter of Sisters in Crime. Also an active member of Mystery Writers of America, she lives in Clovis, CA, where a full-size statue of Festus from Gunsmoke stands next to the bank.

Writers, police officers, crime scene investigators, criminal attorneys—the list of potential speakers for your chapter meetings is endless. But they won't usually come to you. The chapter needs a program chairperson or committee tasked with finding willing speakers, arranging their appearances, and making sure everything goes off smoothly. Here are some tips from an experienced program chair, followed by her advice on turning a chapter meeting into a field trip or special event.

Keys to Successful Meetings

by Cheri Plant
San Joaquin Chapter

The key ingredients in planning a successful meeting with a speaker are pretty simple.

1. Listen to the members' wants and needs.
2. Network, network, and network.
3. Always have a running list of potential speakers to draw from.
4. Above all, do your homework prior to the invite.
5. Know the market and seek individuals who can provide that one piece that will bring credibility to the genre.
6. It's a compliment to be asked to speak to a group. Ensure you convey that feeling when approaching an individual to speak to your chapter.
7. Have a clear and positive discussion with your potential speaker about the platform for the meeting.
8. Do your best to provide any materials or equipment your speaker may require for his or her presentation.
9. Offer assistance with selling the speaker's books at the meeting.

Planning Special Activities & Field Trips

by Cheri Plant
San Joaquin Chapter

Once in a while it's important to step out of the box and plan something intriguing for your group. Discuss the possibilities with your members and feed off their ideas and requests for field trips and special events.

When you feel a field trip or special event may enhance the meeting, don't hesitate to suggest this to your speaker. You may be pleasantly surprised by what they add to the idea.

Ensure all details are well thought out and the location will be convenient not only to the guests but the speaker as well. A field trip can be exciting if planned and handled as if you are the tour guide.

The key is to make it appealing, well organized, convenient and memorable.

A few ideas for field trip destinations (all requiring advance arrangements for groups):

Museums with crime-related exhibits
Police training academy
Firing range where members can handle and fire guns
Crime lab
Police dog training school
Murder trial in progress
Tour of a jail

Cheri Plant is the Speaker Coordinator for the San Joaquin Sisters in Crime and a member since the chapter's inception. She is an aspiring writer, currently enrolled in a creative writing class.

Some chapters have abandoned newsletters, turning instead to websites, e-mail loops, and e-blasts to get their news out to members. A newsletter still serves a purpose, though, and it can focus members' attention on news that might quickly be forgotten if it comes only in e-mail form or has to be sought out on the chapter website. If your chapter wants the twin advantages of saving money and having unlimited space, an electronic newsletter is an easy choice these days. If your members enjoy receiving something printed in the mail, you can go the traditional route. As two experienced editors explain in this article, the process of producing a newsletter is much the same, whatever delivery method you choose.

Create a Newsletter That Gets Noticed

By Nan Robkin and Gigi Pandian
Puget Sound Chapter and Northern California Chapter

Why does a Sisters in Crime chapter need a newsletter? And what constitutes a newsletter, anyway?

Our particular chapters—Northern California and Puget Sound—have had some form of newsletter for the past umpteen years. Northern California recently went to an e-mail PDF format, while Puget Sound still uses a printed format, sent out via the US Postal Service.

The advantages of a newsletter are many: Obviously, it shares the chapter's news, including meeting information and upcoming extra-meeting events; it helps with publicity for its members who are authors; it gives members who can't attend meetings a connection to the group. A newsletter is much more than a meeting notice, as it can contain a lot of information useful to the group and its members. A local newsletter isn't meant to duplicate the National SinC newsletter, but rather can provide specific items of interest to local members. Lastly, it serves the important function of being an archive of chapter activities over the years.

How often should you send a newsletter? That depends.

Northern California, by virtue of its digital format, can send out a large number of pages at one time; thus it can easily cover a whole quarter. Its editor, Gigi Pandian, includes, along with basic information and interesting contributed articles, lots of pictures and a full-page calendar of each month in the quarter, with important dates highlighted covering both SinC meetings and local member author events. She can do this easily because she doesn't need to worry about postage for the multiple pages she sends out. Until 2008, the Northern California chapter sent their newsletter as hard copies to members. The board voted to switch formats when they calculated the amount of money the chapter could save by not printing and using postage. With the money saved by going

electronic, the chapter has been able to have most of their events open to members free of charge, so that cost is not an issue for members to attend meetings.

Nan Robkin, on the other hand, sends out a monthly printed newsletter of four to six pages, with articles about the upcoming meeting, the immediate past meeting, notices of as many workshops and conferences as she has room for, and any communications from National. This requires only one first class stamp; Nan sends it in an envelope to ensure that it arrives in one piece.

Some groups may find that something in between, like a bi-monthly publication, suits their needs adequately. As long as any required information, like meeting times, dates, and speakers, is sent out in a timely fashion, the interval between issues doesn't matter.

What should be in it? The content of a newsletter could include, along with meeting notices, notices of upcoming book tour visits by Sisters, follow-up articles if a member attended an author event, articles of interest written by members, such as a report on Bouchercon, Left Coast Crime, or another conference; notices and reviews of workshops. A Sister who has recently published a new book may be featured in an article as well. Writing tips and tricks are always welcome. Pictures are good, if they are available and can be manipulated for size and clarity on the newsletter page. And, of course, any news from National can be repeated in the newsletter.

Who should actually do the newsletter? If your group is lucky enough to have a professional graphic designer, like Gigi, to do your newsletter, the choice is easy—provided that person is willing to do it. Nan is an amateur, but she has the software and the time to put into the task, and has been doing newsletters for PSSinC and other groups for so long that she would actually miss it if she had to stop.

Not every group will have someone like Gigi or Nan, though, so some thought has to be given to the choice of newsletter person or persons.

Someone has to do the layout. It is wise to pick someone who is sufficiently adept at word processing to format an attractive presentation. Fancy software is nice, but not totally necessary. Most word processors will let you make columns, insert photos and other graphics, and adjust type sizes, and these are the basic skills needed to format a newsletter.

An editor is also required; whether this is the same person who does the layout, or someone else, depends on the willingness of a volunteer to put in the necessary time to do both. The publication will need an editor, though, to see to the spelling and grammar, monitor the length of articles, twist the arms of conference attendees to send a paragraph or two about their experiences, check on what National has to say, and the like. The editor can also proofread the finished product before it goes out. However, if the editor is also the formatting person, having another volunteer to proofread is a good idea.

Who should get the newsletter? The members, of course. But maybe your chapter wants to use the newsletter as an outreach tool, and wants to include bookstores and libraries on the mailing list. The SinC Chapter Liaison should receive copies, too.

If you use the newsletter as outreach, you need to be aware that some things we would normally discuss “just between us siblings” should not go into print in the newsletter. How then to let the members know? Well, if our meetings are well-attended, you can share that sort of thing there; if not, you can create an e-mail distribution list of members and send the “private” news that way.

Who sends out the newsletter? If your newsletter is digital, the editor just sends the PDF to the distribution list. If you are sending out a printed newsletter, you might want a committee to do the folding, stuffing, and stamping. If your group can afford the slight additional cost, when the newsletter is printed at the copy center, it can be folded in half if you use a “booklet” format, and then the committee can fold it again to fit into the envelope.

What should the newsletter look like? There are many choices of format: two, three, or four columns, sidebars, included graphics, varying numbers of pages, and on and on. Your editor and layout person can figure that out. What is important to know is that a six-by-nine inch envelope is the largest you can send for a single first class stamp; luckily, a letter-size sheet folded in half will fit. You can send six letter-size sheets folded into the envelope for one first class stamp. That’s 12 pages of text. If you have your newsletter printed on 11 x 17-inch paper (tabloid size), you can print four pages at once. When folded in half, then in half again, this will fit into the six by nine envelope.

A layout tip for fitting more information on the page without having it appear too crowded or small, is to make your text 10 point font. 12 point font size is the Word default, but 10 or 11 point fonts are also quite readable. Any smaller, though, and it will look crowded on the page and some people will have difficulty reading it.

Where do you get supplies? To send a digital newsletter, your group will need access to software that will produce the PDF format, a kind of “universal” format that can be read by both PCs and MACs. Adobe makes one, but there are others out there that are relatively inexpensive. The chapter should own the software, and let it out to the editor and layout person to use as long as they are doing that job.

For a print newsletter, the paper will usually come from the copy center. However, this isn’t necessarily convenient for every group. One of the groups Nan does a newsletter for has invested in a laser printer that can print both sides of the paper in one pass; Nan gets custody of this printer, and prints the newsletter each month. The group also supplies paper and toner. This might work for chapters with forty members or less; it would not be cost-effective for larger groups.

Six by nine envelopes, called either catalog or booklet envelopes (depending on where the flap is located) can come from an office supply store. It is best to invest in a box of

500 of these at a time, and replace the box well before you run out, as they are sometimes out of stock when you need them.

Should there be compensation for the newsletter staff? That depends on the group. One large chapter (more than 100 members) does compensate part of the newsletter staff; these people have to put in a lot more time getting the newsletter out and distributed. Smaller groups can employ the adage, “Many hands make light the work.”

Is a newsletter worth all the trouble? Yes.

Gigi Pandian, the newsletter editor and designer for the Sisters in Crime Northern California Chapter, is a graphic designer, photographer, and mystery writer in the San Francisco Bay area. She was awarded a William F. Deeck Malice Domestic Grant for her first mystery novel about a treasure-hunting Indian-American historian. Visit Gigi at www.gigipandian.com and www.pensfatales.com.

Nan Robkin is an avid mystery reader and would-be published author. After a career in academia, writing and illustrating under the name A.L.H. Robkin, Nan became involved with Puget Sound Sisters in Crime as a founding member and chapter secretary-treasurer. PSSinC was one of the very first affiliated chapters. Nan is still secretary-treasurer, and about 15 years ago took on the job of newsletter editor, which she has held ever since.

Get the Word Out: PR for Chapter Activities

by Kathie Felix
Chesapeake Chapter

Define your communications goal:

To promote an event, an activity, the chapter itself, etc.

Define your audience:

Chapter members
Prospective members
Others

Define your communication style:

Internal communications (to chapter members)
Provide information to chapter members regularly. Don't expect members to uncover information about the chapter on their own.
Rate your own media: Can members find info easily? Do they have to know where to look for specific info?
Don't assume everyone has bandwidth: how does your info load on a dial-up line?

External communications (to prospective members and others):

Provide information of interest to prospective members through appropriate media.

Select the media appropriate to the chosen audience:

SinC media (chapter web site, blog, e-news, etc.)
Writers' organizations, writers' groups
Libraries (bulletin boards)
Traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television, radio)
Trade media covering mystery and crime fiction
"New" media (blogs, social networking, etc.)

Keep up with media details:

Know your media. Take some time to learn about the type of information "published."
Know your media deadlines. Take some time to develop a list of deadlines.
Keep up to date on available media outlets.
Update your press list (email addresses, phone numbers, etc.).

Provide useful information in a timely fashion. Work closely with chapter event planners to get information as soon as it's available.

Prepare materials for distribution to the media:

Press release/news release
One-sheet or fact sheet
Photo with caption and contact info

Kathie Felix is the Publicity Chair and Program Co-Chair for SinC's Chesapeake Chapter. She is a public relations consultant, newspaper columnist, content provider to online and print publications and a mystery writer. She has developed and implemented public relations programs for the publishing, television, radio, dairy, gift and stationery industries. In addition, she has worked as the managing editor of a technology magazine, a book editor for a national education press, a newspaper copy editor and a copy desk staffer at a news service located on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

See next page for a sample news release.

[[Sample News Release]]

For immediate release
February 15, 2009

For more information, contact:
Kathie Felix, [phone number, e-mail]

Sisters in Crime Presents Bestselling Thriller Author Katherine Neville

Merrifield, VA—International bestselling author Katherine Neville is the featured speaker at the March 14, 2009 meeting of the Chesapeake Chapter of Sisters in Crime (SinC), an organization of individuals in support of women who write mysteries.

The meeting—open to the public—takes place at Alfio’s Cucina Italiana (www.alfios.com), 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. The check-in and social time begin at noon. The luncheon begins at 12:30 p.m.

The cost is \$16 for members and \$19 for nonmembers. Reservations are required. Reservation information can be found online at www.chessiechapter.org.

Neville’s latest book is *The Fire*, a sequel to her 1988 thriller debut, *The Eight*. Both books feature a chess set with roots in antiquity, historical and contemporary settings, and secrets that could change—or explain—the world.

A member of the Chesapeake Chapter of Sisters in Crime, Neville is also the author of *A Calculated Risk*, a banking mystery with an element of romance, and “The Magic Circle,” a blend of historical fiction and high tech thriller.

Her books are bestsellers in more than 30 languages. *The Eight* was voted one of the top 10 books of all time in a national poll conducted in Spain. Neville’s official web site is www.katherineneville.com.

Sisters in Crime is an international organization founded by author Sara Paretsky and a group of women attending the 1986 Bouchercon World Mystery Convention in Baltimore. Today, the organization is made up of 3,600 members in 48 chapters worldwide—authors, readers, publishers, agents, booksellers, librarians, and others who love mysteries. Sisters in Crime is online at www.sistersincrime.org.

The Chesapeake Chapter of Sisters in Crime was founded in 1990. The group’s monthly meetings rotate among a variety of venues in Maryland and Virginia. The chapter’s web site is www.chessiechapter.org.

##

Running a Chapter Speakers Bureau

by Diana James
Los Angeles Chapter

What are the benefits of a Speakers Bureau?

1. It aids in recruiting new members.
2. Author members gain exposure to potential new readers.
3. The chapter gains exposure in local newspapers, online calendars, blogs, etc.
4. Unpublished Speakers Bureau staff gain exposure to librarians, bookstore staff and book event planners. This allows member to build rapport and make connections that will benefit them when they become published.
5. Author members are appreciative of the work and effort on their behalf and often return the favor in ways that will help the staffers grow in their writing pursuits.

If you currently do not have a Speakers Bureau, here are some questions your chapter should discuss about arranging events:

- 1) Will events be available only to published author members or do they include members who have areas of expertise surrounding publishing/mystery/crime (such as forensics/police/ medical personnel)?
- 2) Will speakers accept honorariums or request that books be sold instead? (Check with your library's policies regarding book sales.)
- 3) Who sells books—an authorized bookseller, the Friends of the Library, the SinC Chapter? Remember a resellers license is needed,
- 4) How many events do you wish to handle each month? How many members do you have to promote? (Novelists, published short story authors, journalists).
- 5) Who will create the panel topic?
- 6) Who will moderate the panel? Select someone who will prepare by gaining knowledge of the authors' works and can create entertaining questions.
- 7) Who will promote the book events? A SinC member should be selected to place the event in the SinC newsletter and online on various calendar pages, as well as reminding the author to promote on her website/blog/Facebook, etc.

How many members should staff the Speakers Bureau? Depending on the size of your city, state or area, you may need more than one person to help set up events. Designate one member as the Director of the Speakers Bureau. The Director is responsible for recruiting team members, taking on special events, coordinating activities and reporting events to the newsletter editor.

The Speakers Bureau team members should agree to arrange a certain number of events as a goal. Start by reaching out to libraries in your area to build your list. When contacting them, remember you are offering to assist libraries with their book events. With the reduced staffing in our libraries, it is easy to promote your authors to them as long as you follow through by handling the details that you commit to. Here are some suggestions for working with libraries:

- 1) Provide a selection of panel topics. Come up with topics that fit your author member's published works, such as:
 - Perfume and Poison - female protagonist/antagonist type works
 - Deadly Divas – open to a broad range of books
 - Murder by the Book – police procedural, etc.
 - The Long and Short of It – Short stories, novellas.

Program books from past conferences are a great resource and can help in creating strong titles.
- 2) Provide a choice of authors based on the topic. Promote your author members as well as occasionally inviting an industry expert when appropriate. To be considered for events, ask your author members to provide a bio and a photo for your use in sharing with libraries. This info can be posted on your website under a section designated for Speakers Bureau. Remember, however, to update this webpage annually with the authors' most frequent books, etc. Delete authors from the list if they do not renew their membership by the required deadline. This service is a definite bonus of membership.
- 3) Promote the events to the local media as well as to your membership via newsletter, Yahoo Group, Vertical Response e-newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Non-profit chapters: Vertical Response provides a FREE account with 10,000 mailings per month!
- 4) Books for sale – How will this be handled? Does the library allow books sales? Some do not. Others prefer to offer an honorarium instead, but this limits who will appear at their branch. Ask each individual library about their preference. Some prefer that their Friends of the Library handle the sales. If they do not, then arrangements must be made. Options:
 1. Contact a local bookseller to handle books regularly. Ask if they will provide a staff person to bring books and handle sales. If not, ask if they will consign the books to your chapter. A good relationship with a bookseller is a must as

they are trusting your organization to return the books in good condition and account for the funds.

2. Authors can be required to bring their own books. This is not the best practice. Not all authors wish to handle their book sales. In such cases, however, bring a SinC cash box with some change to handle all purchases. The authors should be paid for books sold before they leave. In this instance, the lack of credit card availability will affect sales.

- 5) Promotion – Take photos of each event! Ask the Speaker’s Bureau team member to provide photos and a very brief write-up of the event to the newsletter editor. This is a great illustration of the services your chapter is offering to its members and to the public.

- 6) Moderators - Our chapter relies upon a number of our long-term SinC/LA members who have a strong familiarity with many of our members’ works. This is a good way to bring your non-published members into the public eye and provide them exposure. It is essential to find someone who is willing to put forth some effort to make the panel fun and interesting.

Clarify your goals for the Speakers Bureau and establish policies so that there is no confusion among your membership. Each chapter may have different views about the process.

For instance – Will your chapter accept honorariums? Should they? Does your chapter view this as a way to generate funds or is it a way to give back to your community and your membership? Providing sales through a bookseller without requesting a percentage of sales is a way to support your community.

Work to establish an annual calendar of events with the libraries that generate a good turnout. This will save time and energy and will create a strong recognition of your chapter within that branch over the course of a year.

As you can see from the above info, the Speakers Bureau team members are integral to a chapter’s success. Each must be committed to a high level of activity to make events successful. It pays off as it creates a vital chapter and a strong presence in the community.

Diana James is a Los Angeles publicist who also manages a select list of authors. Through her firm, P.R. Me!, she provides promotional expertise to authors, artists and event coordinators. As a past president of Sisters In Crime/LA, she is responsible for resurrecting the chapter’s very successful Speakers Bureau and for spearheading the formation of the California Crime Writers Conference, inviting MWA/SoCal to partner with the LA chapter.

Planning a Writers Workshop

by Annette Dashofy
Mary Roberts Rinehart-Pittsburgh Chapter

Workshops vary in length, cost, number of presenters, and effort. However, to have an event run smoothly, even a small one takes time and preparation.

The first consideration is whether your workshop will be a money-raiser for your chapter or a low-cost or free event. For the latter, you'll most likely need to search out venues and speakers willing to provide services for a minimal fee. Larger money-makers may require a better known speaker and appropriate facilities.

Regardless, the two big essentials are a realistic budget and time.

You should give yourself plenty of time to put an event together. If you're planning to bring in a nationally known speaker from out of town, you should book them six months in advance if possible. Likewise, if you plan to hold your event at a hotel or hall, you may need to reserve your venue at least six months ahead of time.

As for the budget, don't just include the big items such as rental of the facilities and speakers' fees and travel expenses. Remember to add in such items as notebooks, pens, and name tags for attendees, advertising expenses such as flyers (ink and paper), envelopes, address labels, and postage.

How will you promote this event? Thanks to social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, and Yahoo groups, a great deal of advertising can be done online for free. However, if you intend to run ads in local or national publications, you'll need to investigate pricing and lead time. Even something as simple as mailing flyers to area libraries and bookstores will need to be counted in the budget.

If you're holding the event in a hotel, you will likely have to include refreshments or even a meal if it's to be a day-long affair. What about coffee and water service? These are extra expenses. The hotel's event planner can help you determine your needs and the costs of those extra niceties. Schedule a meeting with this person to go over all the details. They can tell you how far in advance of the workshop this meeting should occur, but if you're planning to include a meal with the workshop package, you'll have to do this (to select a menu) before you open registration.

Also, hotels generally provide rooms for your speaker at a discounted price. You can request a discounted block of rooms also be reserved for attendees traveling in for the event.

Does your speaker need a Power Point projector as part of the program? These can be rented from the hotel, but perhaps a member has one to lend. In exchange, you can comp her workshop registration.

If the workshop you're planning is smaller or if you're trying to offer something at little or no cost to your members, there are several tricks and options. Do you have a local author or writing teacher willing to speak for little or no compensation? Or can an event be planned around an out-of-town author's book tour? If the publisher is already paying travel expenses, you don't have to.

A hotel is not the only option. Some restaurants offer meeting rooms. Check with the establishment's manager regarding pricing. Frequently these rooms are free if a certain amount of food is ordered. Size may be an issue, however. Some libraries also offer meeting rooms at a reasonable cost. Their facilities and policies will vary. Ask plenty of questions to determine whether something like this will suit your needs. Also, look into holding your event at a local university. Perhaps you can offer free attendance to their students.

One concern you may need to address for these smaller venues is liability insurance. The cost of coverage may be as high or higher than renting a hall in a hotel. Tip: look into Firemen's Insurance online. They provide good coverage at a great price.

Once you've included all of your expenses, decide how you'll pay for them. A small, low-cost workshop may be paid for out of your chapter's treasury if it's to be a reward to your members. You might also consider totaling those expenses and dividing them by the number of attendees so they're only paying for the actual cost of the event. However, be aware that if someone drops out at the last minute, you (or they) may be stuck for that person's portion of the cost.

If this is to be a money-maker, total your expenses and divide the amount by the minimum number you expect (hope) to draw. That will give you an idea of what to charge. It will also give you an idea of your "break even" attendance number. Once you've reached and surpassed that number of registrations, you can stop sweating.

As for registrations, your group may or may not be set up to take them online. If not, you may still want to offer the registration form as a Word document or PDF on your website. Interested parties can download and print it out, then mail it in.

Once those registrations begin to arrive in the mail, I recommend starting a spreadsheet with attendees' names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses. You can add a column for special notations such as someone who is being comped or who plans to pay at the door.

Whether or not you accept walk-ins depends on the circumstances. If you have to give the hotel or caterer a headcount prior to the workshop, drop-ins may not be feasible. Check with the hotel or caterer about their ability to add on meals or seats at the last minute. But

if you're struggling to fill more chairs, by all means, leave that option open. Be sure to have extra registration packets ready.

Speaking of those registration packets, what you include can vary. Most often, a notebook, pen, and name tag are all that's required. Perhaps some sort of folio to hold everything together can be used as well. If you have any kind of chapter or organization information, include it. Tip: purchase office supplies for upcoming workshops during back-to-school sales. I've purchased notebooks at Wal-Mart for as little as 5 cents each!

Another tip for cutting costs or raising extra money: If your speaker is staying around after the workshop, consider raffling off dinner with him or her, if the speaker is agreeable to this plan. Sell raffle tickets during your lunch break. You'll want to make sure you sell enough tickets to cover the cost of that dinner for two.

With enough time and foresight, planning a workshop doesn't have to be stressful. Round up a committee and delegate tasks, taking advantage of your members' individual strengths.

Enjoy and good luck!

Annette Dashofy is the president of the Mary Roberts Rinehart (Pittsburgh) Chapter of Sisters in Crime. She is also the Pittsburgh Area Representative for Pennwriters. She coordinated their 2009 writers' conference, helped organize the 2010 MRR SinC Writers' Retreat as well as various workshops over the years. She is a regular contributor to Pennsylvania Magazine and her short fiction has appeared in Spinetangler and Mystercal-e, including "A Signature in Blood" which was nominated for a 2007 Derringer Award. A member of Guppies and Agent Quest, she is currently seeking an agent to represent her long fiction. Annette lives in rural southwestern Pennsylvania with her husband of 27 years and two very spoiled cats.

Tips for Organizing a One-Day Conference

by Roni Olson
Desert Sleuths (Arizona) Chapter
with contributions from Chantelle Osman and Deb Ledford

PLANNING

Begin by forming a conference committee, preferably 9-12 months (or more) in advance. The chairperson will be the contact person for speakers, venue etc. Select people to handle other areas, such as finance, publicity, etc. The finance person will handle the budget and make crucial decisions. Committee members and volunteers are an invaluable asset. Assign a committee member or volunteer to oversee donations and keep track of authors participating in the bookstore, etc. Also, arrange volunteers for conference day to man the registration table, hand out tote bags and name tags, sell raffle tickets, man the auction table, or act as runners.

In the beginning flexibility is required. You must select a date, a venue, and a keynote speaker, and these choices are interdependent.

SCHEDULING

In choosing your date, make sure it doesn't coincide with a vacation holiday or any other large annual or local event that would draw your target attendees (national conferences, local book festivals, etc.). Armed with one or two workable dates, approach your venue and keynote speaker.

VENUE

Cost is a key consideration, but be sure to choose a venue that is comfortable, with adequate space. A venue that can provide the food is highly preferable to bringing in an outside caterer. For an all-day conference, be sure to provide coffee, tea, and some sort of pastry or breakfast snack item (coffee and water should be available throughout the conference). Lunch should be included in the price, and offer at least two choices plus a vegetarian option. Quality of food is key. If the attendees like the venue and LOVE the food, they will be back next year. Avoid doing a buffet; you will lose control of your time and your crowd. Parking should also be taken into consideration. Make sure it is nearby and adequate. Valet, if necessary, should be included in the price, and attendees should be informed. Send an e-mail a week in advance with parking instructions and directions.

SPEAKERS

As early as possible, the committee should start brainstorming potential speakers. Choose a headline/keynote speaker carefully, because his or her field of expertise will usually set the theme for the conference and will affect your selection of other speakers. Choose

someone with drawing power. It will improve your attendance greatly if the keynoter has a following. The theme should be the common link between the speakers, and attractive to writers and fans as well as to the general public (readers, CSI viewers, etc.).

Local speakers can keep costs down, but may be overused. Most areas have a limited number of local authors/experts, and it's possible that the majority of members and potential attendees have already heard them speak, which will discourage registration for your conference. You might scope out and approach potential speakers at out of town conferences and author events.

It is imperative that your speakers be engaging. The topic may be entertaining and the speaker well known, but if the speaker's personality and delivery don't engage the audience, attendees will lose interest and next year's registration will suffer. Try pulling speakers from a variety of areas; author/experts (an author who has interesting practical experience, i.e. a former FBI agent), professionals (forensic expert, etc.), industry/experts (agents, publishers, etc.) and experts on craft (who will address a specific topic regarding the writing process, i.e., developing interesting characters, writing sharp dialogue, any topic that relates back to your theme). Encourage your speakers to promote your conference through blogs, websites, e-mail lists, etc. Send them brochures and flyers to share at appearances.

You may need to provide your keynoter with an honorarium, but many speakers will be eager for the publicity. As a draw, consider covering travel expenses. Many conferences do not offer that.

Once you choose your speakers, get a firm commitment from them as soon as possible, so that publicity can begin. It will be the job of the chairman to maintain contact with the speakers throughout the process. You need to stay in contact regularly, to keep them up-to-date, enthusiastic, and above all, committed.

You may also want to consider selecting a local Guest of Honor, a person who has added value in some way to your writing community; i.e. a book store owner or librarian. This can generate good will and even more publicity.

PUBLICITY

This is probably the most important part of conference organization. The more visibility the conference has, the better attendance will be. Alert chapter members and past conference attendees to the upcoming conference by e-mail or in the newsletter. Design a poster and a brochure (local printers can print them at very low cost). Post or drop off your promotion materials at various venues (bookstores, restaurants, grocery stores, libraries), anywhere you might reach your target attendees. List your event in conference calendars, newspaper event calendars, online event calendars, and radio community announcements. Also, contact other local writers groups and ask them to let members know. Consider dropping in to their meetings to make an in-person announcement about the conference.

SCHEDULING/ORGANIZATION

Schedule plenty of time during the program for bathroom breaks. Smaller venues lend to long lines, and attendees don't like to miss any part of the conference. Also, annual conferences draw members who don't regularly attend meetings as well as new faces, so schedule mingling breaks (for coffee, drinks, etc.), as frequently seating doesn't allow for mingling outside of your table mates during lunch.

PRICING

This is a key element in attracting attendees. It can be tricky to find a balance between profit and accessibility. Determine whether your goal is to make money or promote your group. For groups that are set up as clubs or nonprofits, making a lot of money can be a problem, but at least make sure your costs are covered. A bookstore, critiques, raffle or auction can supplement income. Auxiliary methods often bring in more money for the group than registration fees. Online registration and payment (through PayPal or otherwise), both for the conference and supplemental activities such as critiques, offer ease and immediacy of payment and encourage spur-of-the-moment registration.

BOOKSTORE

This is a fantastic method of promoting your published members and bringing additional funds into your group, if you have the space. Local bookstores are often willing to supply and sell books. Consider arranging to keep a percentage of all book sales for the group as another means of supplementing the chapter's income.

At a minimum, you will need a separate space with tables to allow speakers to sell and sign their own books.

CRITIQUES/EDITING SESSIONS

As a cost-effective option to draw agents or editors to your conference, consider offering short (20-30 minute) editing or critique sessions at your conference, for an additional small fee. Often the sessions will not only sell out before the conference, but can draw additional registrants. Short sessions allow attendees to get feedback without missing much of the conference. Tap your members for recommendations of local editors. If necessary, share the fee with the expert.

RAFFLE/AUCTION

If space allows, a silent auction is a great draw. So is a raffle, with items listed in the conference brochure or on display. Ask local authors and businesses to supply items. It's a great way for them to get publicity, and many businesses can be encouraged to donate if a portion of the proceeds go to charity.

TOTE BAGS

Similarly, tote bags are a great way to advertise the organization as well as encourage attendance (people love free gifts). Ask chapter members to donate bookmarks, their own books, or other publicity items. Solicit donations from local businesses. Don't limit yourself to writing-related items; consider discount coupons from businesses you frequent, or small product samples. A local printer may provide the notepads for tote bags in order to get free publicity for their services. Remember to drop off flyers at the businesses that support the conference.

Begin with a committee that is willing to work hard. Plan carefully and follow through. Build on your success year by year. Think outside the box when organizing your conference. Don't limit speakers, publicity, or donations strictly to writing or mysteries. Make your conference unique and unforgettable.

Roni Olson enjoys life in downtown Scottsdale, Arizona, with her dog Jemima. Writing as R. K. Olson, she has published short stories in the "How NOT to ..." mystery anthologies. She is currently at work on a traditional mystery series and is a founding member of the Sirens of Suspense.

A SinC table or booth at a regional library convention or an independent publishers or booksellers trade show is a great way to publicize your chapter, its authors, and national Sisters in Crime. The New England Chapter has been a presence at both types of events for several years, and their experiences can help you organize your own booth and avoid some common pitfalls of poor planning.

If you open up signing times and volunteer opportunities to Sisters from other chapters, your chapter may be eligible for a Sisters in Crime grant to defray costs. Find an application and read the requirements in the Members Only section of the SinC website, under Resources/Event Grants. Remember that you must apply at least three months in advance of the event. Ask Beth Wasson in the national office for SinC banners, signs, bookmarks, membership pamphlets, etc., at least a month in advance.

Exhibiting at a Library Conference

by Rosemary Harris

Sisters in Crime-New England (Scarlet Letters Chapter)

It may seem overwhelming if you've never done it, but it's really not that hard, it's lots of fun, and it's a great way to get exposure for SINC and its members with some of the biggest book-buyers in the country.

Here's what you should consider when planning your exhibit.

WHAT LIBRARIANS WANT

Freebies—Books, postcards, bookmarks, tchotchkes, raffle drawings. Members from all over (not just your chapter) will be happy to send you promotional items and raffle donations if you ask. A modest \$25-30 investment in a basket or tote, pads, mugs, and local items to add to signed books can create a great raffle prize that will bring people to your booth.

Facts—What else is in it for them? Provide information about SINC's "We Love Libraries" grants and authors who are available to speak and do programs for libraries.

Food—Put out a bowl of individually wrapped candies.

Fun—Host an opening night reception with refreshments and a raffle.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Books/ARCs to be given away—Provided by authors or their publishers and delivered to the booth by them. Books can NOT be shipped directly to your booth because the cost is prohibitive. Authors MUST bring books themselves or have their publisher bring to your booth on first day of event.

Small promo materials such as bookmarks and postcards—Provided by and delivered by authors or mailed in advance to the booth coordinators. (Note: Many conference attendees don't like to carry around a lot of loose paper. If you can assemble small bags of promotional materials to give out, you may get more items into librarians' hands.)

SINC banner or sign—Available from national SinC. Ask Beth Wasson a month in advance.

Speakers Bureau brochure (if applicable) or one-sheet with information on authors' appearances and the URLs of national and chapter websites.

Miscellaneous—SinC bookmarks, brochures, and author stickers (all available through Beth Wasson with one month's notice), sign holders, poster/bulletin board for the author signing schedule, a large raffle item, index cards (lots of librarians don't have business cards) and a bowl or basket to collect names for the raffle drawing, tent cards for authors' names, bottled water, candy, sharpies, gluestick, Velcro, tape, stapler.

MAJOR EXPENSES (varying by event)

Booth space—10x10 is usually big enough.

Rentals—Tables, chairs, rug, pad (everything else is elective).

Volunteer expenses—Parking, shipping, supplies for the booth. Everything else is up to the individual chapter exhibiting.

PLAYING NICE

Depending on number of authors, allot 45 minutes to 1.5 hours per signing session.

Allow 15 minutes between sessions to tidy up.

Schedule two to three authors per session, depending on available space.

Make a schedule, but be flexible. (Sometimes authors who hover after they're finished signing can bring people over to the booth. Sometimes they're poaching. Try to keep things collegial so that everyone has a good time.)

Advise people to leave suitcases, coats, etc. **elsewhere**. Otherwise the booth will be crowded and look messy.

Soda, water and the quick snack are okay, but chowing down at the booth, especially when others are signing, is rude.

GIVING GOOD SHOW

Create a welcoming arrangement of tables.

Keep the tables neat.

Smile.

Walk around and enjoy the show. See who's doing what. There are contacts to be made on both sides of the table.

Know when to lay back and just let people browse.

Have fun!

Rosemary Harris is a former president of the New England (Scarlet Letters) Chapter. She is the author of the suburban noir Dirty Business Mysteries. A former bookstore manager, video producer, and television executive, she lives with her husband in New York City and Fairfield County, Connecticut, where she practices her skill as a master gardener. Visit her website at www.rosemaryharris.com.

Read on for tips on exhibiting at a trade show.

At any event where members are representing SinC, maintaining a professional appearance is important. Ask volunteers and authors scheduled to sign to dress in business casual. Faded blue jeans and a tee shirt aren't suitable for a gathering where they will be meeting professionals.

Exhibiting at a Booksellers Trade Show

by Sheila Connolly
Sisters in Crime-New England (Scarlet Letters Chapter)

The New England Independent Booksellers Association (NEIBA) trade show is held annually at one of a rotating group of New England cities. Last year it was at the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford, CT. Sisters in Crime-New England (the Scarlet Letters chapter) has been participating for several years.

The trade show brings together publishers and vendors of a wide range of book-related items. NEIBA reported that the most recent show had 360 exhibitors (83 vendors), 80 authors signing, and 545 attendees, many of whom are New England independent booksellers.

Sisters in Crime-New England joined forces again with New England Mystery Writers of America to share a booth on the trade show floor. Fifteen volunteers from both organizations (all but one belonged to either SinC-NE or both groups) not only staffed the booth, but introduced themselves to the other exhibitors and distributed literature for both SinC and MWA. SinC-NE introduced a new pamphlet aimed specifically at booksellers and libraries that highlighted the chapter's membership benefits, including our very active Speakers Bureau, and included an array of recent publications by our New England authors. We also conducted raffles for two well-stuffed bags of books by member authors, and presented a variety of promotional materials from SinC and MWA members from across the country.

Expenses totaled \$1,461, which was split between the two organizations. The largest single component was the cost of booth rental, at \$900. SinC-NE's expenses were largely offset by a grant from Sisters in Crime.

Why appear at a booksellers trade show?

- NEIBA offers valuable exposure for SinC to the local and regional booksellers who attend. Many were not familiar with the organization or its authors.

- Those who sign at the booth generally give away all their books—who doesn't like free books?—but the benefits to SinC and to the local chapter outweigh those for any one author.

Recommendations for getting the most out of the show

- It is important to be proactive at an event like this. It's not enough to sit behind your booth and smile at people walking by: make sure you engage them in conversation. Ask them if they know about the Sisters in Crime organization (do your homework first so you can give them just a few sentences about SinC and its history), or about the authors in the local chapter. After all, we're not trying to sell them anything—we're simply trying to make them aware of our authors and (in our case) our Speakers Bureau, and what we can offer them.
- When you ask for volunteers to staff the booth, recruit from both your published and your unpublished members. While published members can promote their own books, unpublished authors have a great opportunity to familiarize themselves with publishers both large and small and their offerings, as well as with booksellers. Contacts made at this kind of event can prove valuable later when a writer does have a book available.

Managing your volunteers

- When you plan your staffing for the booth, make sure you have enough people. Tell them how long their shift will be, and what is expected. Give them enough information ahead of time, such as where to park and where to go to pick up their pass.
- If an author is signing at the booth, he or she can give information about SinC, but it's their time to sign, so be sure to have at least two other volunteers there as well.
- Build in some break time for the volunteers, so they can go to the restroom, find something to eat, and most important, check out the other booths and talk to people. There are many major publishers and their representatives there, and it's worth stopping by to see what books they're promoting, and even to chat with their representatives if you have the opportunity.
- The decision about whether to compensate volunteers for mileage and/or parking (which can be quite expensive in a city setting) should be made by each chapter individually.

Other details

- The majority of booths at this kind of event will be very professional in appearance. Make sure your chapter has a large, clearly visible and professional sign. You want it to

attract people from across the room.

- A bowl filled with candy or other free items, placed in front, will draw people in (individually-wrapped is best—we've used Lindt chocolate truffles).
- Members who aren't able to attend can give you small promotional items to hand out (bookmarks, postcards, pens, etc.). Designate one person to solicit and collect these and bring them to the event, and set a reasonable deadline for the authors to send them. Keep them neat when you're displaying them.
- Raffle bags or baskets are very popular, and have the added bonus of letting you collect contact names from the business cards used for the drawings.

Above all, enjoy the event. It can be a lot of fun, and if you're lucky you can pick up some free books at the end of the day.

Sheila Connolly is the author of the Orchard Mysteries, the new Museum Mysteries series, and the Agatha Award-nominated Glassblowing Mysteries, written as Sarah Atwell. She has worked as an art historian, a nonprofit fundraiser, an investment banker, and a professional genealogist. She and her husband live in an old Victorian house in Massachusetts, where Sheila is adept at fixing anything that needs fixing.

Social Networking for Chapters

by Karen Laubenstein
Alaska Sisters in Crime

It's easy to underestimate what a powerful tool social networking can be for your chapter. By using social networks and maintaining an active online presence, you can keep connected. In today's world, connections are what it's all about.

Through social networking, your chapter can share information online with members, authors, publishers, literary agents, libraries, criminal justice personnel, speakers (past/future/present), other chapters, and more. You can link to blogs, author pages, bookstores, publishers, reviewers, and just about anyone your chapter is interested in. From Facebook, Ning, Internet message boards and Yahoo or Google, hosting your own social networks is a crucial way to do business in today's world.

Brainstorm, for a moment, the ways a social network can help your chapter. In a nutshell, you can promote your activities and events, post newsletters, recruit volunteers, increase participation, announce elections, facilitate reader and writer groups, link to reviews and blogs, involve people near and far, reach those who can't make it to your meetings, post photos or videos of events, and it doesn't hurt when you're applying for grants. You can use the social networks just for that – socializing and news/public affairs promo—and keep your main organization page for the business of the organization.

Alaska Sisters in Crime began a Ning social network in 2008. We currently have 98 members on that network. We screen each applicant. If the person has no obvious connection to mystery and crime fiction, is not located in our state, or doesn't provide any personal information, we won't approve their membership. If someone posts spam or otherwise abuses the network, we can ban them from membership. We stream popular blogs and our member's blogs on the main page. It is a great way to keep in touch with members who leave the area and is an instant resource for those who wouldn't otherwise connect with us – because of distance and time or scheduling.

Our Facebook pages are not made up of our paid membership, but mostly of authors and people who came to Alaska for the two mystery conventions we sponsored. This is a solid resource for us to run new projects by, recruit for Authors to the Bush or the eMentorship program, announce writing opportunities, and for many other activities. It is also a form of branding, helping get our name out there, helping with the recognition factor and getting us established.

Best of all, social networking is free, or nearly so (we pay about \$28 for a year for our Ning network). Alaska Sisters in Crime has a PayPal donation button available on our main website for people to donate to our chapter, literacy fund, or as a way to pay for events and membership online. We do not do PayPal, event registration,

or membership dues on the social network pages. It is worth going through the process with PayPal to get this setup for your chapter. We do very different things on our sites, using the main site solely for business and information about the organization.

Discuss social networking with your Board and members. Social networking is very easy to set up and maintain. Be sure to appoint administrators who can do this regularly, and more than one member so you have a backup.

Drop in on our sites if you have questions. We'll be glad to help you out!

ALASKA SISTERS IN CRIME www.aksinc.org

Online Social Networks: NING: <http://aksinc.ning.com/> and FACEBOOK: nonprofit page; organization page; individual member's pages

Karen Laubenstein is president of Alaska Sisters in Crime. She has published 13 books, including an archaeology book for children and ghostwritten projects. Her current project is the Intrigue of the Past juvenile detectives series—fictionalized nonfiction. A former Peace Corps volunteer and a Washington correspondent for several newspapers, she now works as an Alaska state writer-editor for a federal agency.

Alaska Sisters in Crime has pioneered author outreach to students with its Authors to the Bush and Authors to the Schools programs and has recently begun an e-mail mentoring program that puts student writers in touch with published authors who are willing to work with them. Students in your area may be more accessible, but your chapter can set up a mentoring program by following the proven procedure used by the Alaska Chapter.

E-Mentorship: Using the Web to Mentor Young Writers

by Karen Laubenstein
Alaska Sisters in Crime

How many writers wish they had learned what they now know about writing, back when they were in high school?

How many writers would have loved the opportunity to have a published author serve as their one-on-one mentor?

Alaska Sisters in Crime (AKSinC) has taken the idea of author visits and mentoring students from its Authors to the Bush/Authors to the Schools programs, and created an eMentorship Program to continue putting students in touch with author mentors through the Internet. The eMentorship Program pairs up published authors (usually these are authors AKSinC members know personally) from around the world with Alaska high school students who show an aptitude and desire to write.

When Alaska's New York Times best-selling author Dana Stabenow began the Authors to the Bush program in 2001, she says the program "is a direct result of me growing up in Seldovia, a fishing town on the southern shore of Kachemak Bay. You can only get there by boat or plane, and you can go a whole winter without seeing someone you don't know. I would have killed for an author to have walked into any of my classrooms back then and said, 'Hey, I'm a writer. You can be a writer, too!'"

SELECTING THE STUDENTS

Teachers and/or librarians identify the students, and as their sponsor, coordinate permissions with their school and parents/guardians. The students must show an aptitude for writing and want to be involved as a protege.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Before selecting the authors for the student(s), AKSinC works with the school to set up a partnership memorandum of understanding that describes the program, expectations, and

roles. In Anchorage, this involved registering with the Anchorage School District Business Partnership.

SELECTING THE MENTORS

Once the memorandum of understanding is signed and all of the permissions have been granted, then AKSinC selects authors their members know personally and invite them to mentor the students. Often, AKSinC will give two or more author names to the student or teacher/librarian to select who they want for their mentor. If they agree, their e-mail address is furnished to the teacher/librarian to go to the student.

E-MAIL MENTORING

Students can work with their mentor through an approved e-mail address, whether it is through the school, parents, or their own e-mail address. Authors will be contacted by the student at the e-mail address they furnished. With technology and access comes the responsibility for discretion and student privacy/confidentiality. This is an important component of the mentoring program for all parties involved.

TIME AND COMMITMENT

Alaska Sisters in Crime asks both authors and students to remain flexible on the time and commitment involved, since it is through e-mail, you can go at your own pace. That said, the formal commitment should be for one year (either school year or 12-months) to establish a mentoring-student relationship and allow time for the student to write and the authors to guide them. For authors, their writing takes time and focus, involves deadlines, and many other commitments. This program should be fun and positive for all involved, and will vary in how often and how much. Some mentors may build a mentoring relationship with their student like the pen pals of old, one that lasts years beyond the formal commitment. Others may need to cancel or find a different person to make it work.

CANCELLATION OR REASSIGNMENT

Although the commitment should be for either one academic year, or a period of 12 months, it can be cancelled or reassigned at any time by request from the author mentor. Students will need to work through their sponsor to do this. Simply e-mail Alaska Sisters in Crime at info@aksinc.org or karenlaubenstein@gmail.com.

REAL WORLD MENTORING

The eMentoring program is to provide information, encouragement and support to high school students with an aptitude for writing. In Alaska, being able to get exposure to the “real world” information, encouragement, advice, and access to publishing and authors would likely not be possible. Many experts believe mentoring can make a difference for students in a way not otherwise possible. Authors and sponsors are asked to keep Alaska

Sisters in Crime informed about how their mentoring efforts are going, discuss any issues, and communicate any accomplishments or concerns.

Authors should work to stay in a mentor role, not taking on other roles such as confidant, editor, or literary agent. Authors to focus on guiding the students with their writing, learning what their writing goals are, and offering information and insight on how to accomplish those goals. While this may involve assigning writing to students and reviewing student-generated work, it may instead involve the student as a resource for the author.

A key element of this e-mentoring program is ensuring the safety and privacy of its participants.

Resources:

http://nmp.mentoring.org/mentors/support_for_mentors/

Free Newsweek “How to Be A Great Mentor” Guide is available at

http://nmp.mentoring.org/mentors/find_an_opportunity/support/

Karen Laubenstein is president of Alaska Sisters in Crime and the author of 13 published books.

Recipe for a Great Anthology

By Barb Goffman
Chesapeake Chapter

So you want to put out an anthology. It will spark your chapter members' creativity and give them the chance to have a publishing credit.

That sounds great from a high-level perspective. Now let's get into the weeds to see if this task is really for you.

Recipe for a Great Anthology

Ingredients:

Publisher (traditional is preferred)
Coordinating editor(s) (at least one)
An editorial panel (three members are best)
Guidelines for the stories (word count, etc.)
A style guide
Proofreaders (at least one)

Step One:

Start with the coordinating editors. These will be one, two, or three people (more becomes unwieldy) who have the skills and desire to run the project. The most important skills: An understanding of what makes a good short crime story, the ability to work with the authors to make their stories as good as they can be, and the ability to edit well. You also will need at least one person who is very organized to keep things on track. Ideally you should have at least one coordinating editor who is well known in the mystery field so you can use his or her name to promote sales.

Step Two:

The coordinating editors should look for a publisher. Although a traditional publisher can be hard to find, you should seek one if possible. Traditional publishers can offer advice about marketing the book, will send out advanced-review copies, and—most importantly—have the means to get the anthology into book stores. Being traditionally published is also a prerequisite for some awards. For instance, eligibility for the Edgar Award is limited to stories published by traditional publishers on Mystery Writers of America's approved list. A story in a self-published anthology will be ineligible for the Edgar.

If you can't find a traditional publisher, you can take other routes to get the anthology printed, such as using Lulu.com or putting the book directly on Kindle. But taking this route will make it extremely difficult for you to get the book into bookstores, which remains a key selling point, even in this age of online sales. Using self-publishing also will probably limit your ability to get reviews and would put a larger burden on the editors and authors to market the book themselves.

Step Three:

The coordinating editors should find individuals willing to serve as members of the editorial panel. These folks will read all the submissions blindly (i.e., without knowing who wrote any particular story) and choose which stories will be in the book. Blind decision-making is recommended so you can ensure that the stories that are accepted into the anthology are chosen based on merit. Under a blind-review policy, a first-time author has the same chance of having her story accepted as a multiple-award-winning author.

Because editorial panelists decide whose stories are accepted, these individuals should be ineligible to submit to the anthology in order to ensure their decisions both look and *are* impartial. (In contrast, your coordinating editors could be eligible to submit stories if you choose since they do not pick which stories are accepted.) The editorial panelists don't have to be short-story writers, but they should have a good eye for strong writing. Ideally they would also be good editors who can work with the coordinating editors to help polish the accepted stories. Try finding editorial panelists who are published in the mystery field as it can both help with promotion and give you confidence that these authors are up to the job.

We recommend you have an editorial panel with an odd number of individuals to avoid any tie decisions.

Step Four:

The coordinating editors may want to select a theme for the anthology. While not absolutely necessary, a theme could ultimately help with sales. Do you want all your stories set in a particular region? Perhaps your publisher is based in the Southeast and has great ties with area bookstores. If all the tales in the book were set in the region, the book might sell better. Or perhaps you want all the stories to involve a particular topic, such as revenge. That could help you to come up with a kicky title for the book, which also could help with sales. For instance, the most-recent anthology put out by members of the Chesapeake Chapter of Sisters in Crime is called *Chesapeake Crimes: They Had It Comin'*. This title lets a reader know right away what kind of stories she can expect.

Before you settle on a theme, beware of potential downsides. A narrow theme could limit the number of submissions you receive and also could limit sales. The book mentioned above with all Southeast stories might sell well in the Southeast, but perhaps not so well in the Northwest. One way to avoid such a downside: have a theme, but make it clear that while authors are encouraged to write to the theme, they aren't required to do so. If a

fabulous story that did not fit the theme was submitted, the editorial panel might want to include it anyway.

Step Five:

Work with your publisher (if applicable) to come up with a timeline and follow it. Give yourself enough time to get tasks done. Remember that most things will take longer (perhaps much longer) than you expect.

As an example, here is the planned timeline for *Chesapeake Crimes: This Job Is Murder*, which is now underway. We typically have our books come out in the spring (every other year). Working backward from a desired March 2012 publication date:

- To enable book to be published in March 2012, with enough time for the publisher to send out advance-review copies, proofed copy should be submitted to the publisher by September 2011.
- To enable the copy to be finished on time, the proofreader(s) and authors should receive the book by early August 2011 to give a few weeks for review. (Sometime before the book comes out, find at least one person with an eagle eye willing to proof the book. It could be a chapter member. It could be an author in the book. It could be a third-party, if you are willing to pay for this service.) Because the proofreader likely will be doing this task as a volunteer activity, make sure she has enough time to fit the work in with her day job. (Yes, your publisher should also proof the book, but with so many stories coming from so many people, you want to ensure you submit to the publisher as clean a copy as you can.)
- To ensure a copy is ready for the proofreader(s) by early August, the coordinating editors should send a final edited version of the story to each author by mid-July 2011 to ensure the author and editor agree on the final product.
- To ensure a final edited version of each story is completed by mid-July, the coordinating editors and editorial panel should begin working with the authors of chosen stories to help improve their stories by mid-April 2011. If the editorial panel members are willing to help with the editing, you may divide this time by having the editorial panel work with the authors for a first pass (mid-April through end of May), and then the coordinating editors take a second look from June through mid-July. One of the coordinating editors should be tapped to keep a master copy of all the stories and to enter all changes to ensure the final version is complete.
- To ensure that editing of the stories can begin by mid-April, all authors should be notified of their acceptance by April 1, 2011. Send a legal release form to each author when they are notified and ask that the form be returned right away. The release should make clear that the author understands the terms of

the publishing offer (for instance, that the story is the author's own work, that the author expects no payment (if you choose that option), and that the author grants first publishing rights to the anthology). Once you have acceptances from all the authors, you can start sharing the news of whose stories have been accepted in the book. But before you do that, you should notify each submitter who was unsuccessful. It isn't kind to let an author find out her story wasn't accepted by hearing about the authors who did make the cut.

- To ensure all the stories are chosen by April 1, the editorial panelists should finish reading all the stories by mid-March 2011 at the latest. That will give them at least two weeks to argue over the stories and make decisions. You might want to have the panelists keep track of each story as they read them, giving the stories a grade on a one – ten scale. Then, when the time comes for them to choose the stories, they could decide, for instance, that all stories with an average score of 8 or more are automatically in (unless one of the panelists chooses to pull one out for discussion) and all the stories with an average score of 4 or fewer are automatically out (again unless one of the panelists chooses to pull one out for discussion). The panelists could choose to discuss every story submitted, but that could take a long time depending on the number of submissions. While decisions about which stories to include should be left to the editorial panel, the panelists may want to consult the coordinating editors on whether any particular story could be brought up to the anthology's standards. You also may want to give the coordinating editors veto power if a majority of them feel a story that the editorial panel likes would be too difficult to edit. (The more seasoned an editorial panel you have, the less likely your coordinating editors would need to exercise any veto power.) If the editorial panelists choose more than one story by the same author, the one coordinating editor who knows that information (see below for more details) should notify the panel of this issue and let the panel pick which story they like better. (We don't recommend running more than one story by any author in a book.)
- To ensure the editorial panelists can read all the submissions by mid-March, they should receive all the stories by the first week in January, 2011. While the editorial panelists are reviewing the stories, you might have at least one of the coordinating editors read them all, too, to ensure you have received enough stories of good-enough quality to put out a good anthology. If you only received five submissions, for instance, they would not be enough for a book, even if they all were great. If you received thirty submissions, but only ten of them could ultimately be molded into a publishable story, you might not have enough for a book. By having a coordinating editor reviewing the stories at the same time that the editorial panel does, you can determine earlier if you haven't received enough good stories and thus should re-open the submission period. (Doing so, of course, would require revamping the rest of your timeline.)

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- To ensure all the submitted stories have been sent to the editorial panel by the first week in January, 2011, the one coordinating editor who will gather all the submissions (more on this in the next bullet) should be available to review the submissions received just before the deadline (likely to be several), to ensure that they meet the submission guidelines, particularly that the author of the story is not listed on it.
 - All submissions are due by December 31, 2010. All submissions should be sent to the one coordinating editor who will be in charge of organizing the submissions, sending them on to the editorial panelists, and keeping track of who wrote what. This coordinating editor is the only person who will know all the individuals who submitted. This person also will be the only person who could let the editorial panelists know if they have chosen more than one story from the same person.
 - To make it easy for the coordinating editors and editorial panel to have access to the stories, set up a private email group (such as through Yahoo) in which the stories could be uploaded as they are submitted so the editorial panel and coordinating editors can easily read and print them.
 - You can't get submissions if you don't tell people about the call for stories. So put out your call as early as you can. Tell people about the anthology at chapter meetings, in the chapter newsletter, on the chapter listserv. Tell people about the theme, the deadline, who the coordinating editors are, and who the editorial panel members are—and remind them not to discuss their submissions with the editorial panel. Put out guidelines on how to submit, the desired word count, and whatever other information you think might be helpful. Are you creating your own style guide? Or are you requiring your submitters to follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*? To save yourself editing headaches, you might want to put in your guidelines or style guide reminders of some of your requirements: That you use (or don't use) the serial comma, that you want all numerals up to 100 to be spelled out, etc. It might be hard the first time out to guess what types of problems will crop up frequently, in which case, you'll likely find out the hard way. But that's part of the fun!
 - Before you can announce the anthology, you have to get approval from the national board of Sisters in Crime. You can find the anthology permission form on the SinC National website. Once you fill out it, send it to Beth Wasson, SinC's executive secretary, who will send it on to the national board.

The timeline above is just a sample. You of course should come up with your own. Maybe you'll be much faster than we are with the *Chesapeake Crimes* series. Or slower. It doesn't really matter. In the end, just make sure you take enough time to put out a quality product. Oh, and make sure to build in time for delays, cause you'll have them, too. You might want to have one of your coordinating editors take on the job of nag. (I do this job myself.) If people are falling behind on the schedule, the nag—yes, you guessed it—nags them to move things along.

So that's it, in a nutshell. If it looks like a lot of hard work, it is. But it's also certainly a doable task, and it can be a lot of fun to work with authors in your chapter, helping them to make their stories as good as they can be. If, after reading this, I haven't scared you off and you have any more questions, I would be happy to answer them. You can reach me at barbgoffman@yahoo.com.

Barb Goffman is one of the three coordinating editors of Chesapeake Crimes: They Had It Comin' and the forthcoming Chesapeake Crimes: This Job is Murder. She quite enjoys playing the role of nag to her fellow coordinating editors, Donna Andrews and Marcia Talley. Visit her website at www.BarbGoffman.com.

Frequently Asked Questions

Must chapter bylaws conform to national Sisters in Crime bylaws?

Yes. Both chapter bylaws and mission statement must mirror those of national SinC. Consult the bylaws posted on www.sistersincrime.org.

Do chapter members have to be members of national SinC?

Yes. Inform nonmembers of this requirement and direct them to the national website for easy sign-up. Check your local membership list annually against the national membership list, available at www.sistersincrime.org, and urge non-renewers to send in their national dues if they want to remain in the chapter.

Do chapters have the same tax status as national SinC?

Chapters are independent entities for tax purposes and are required to have their own federal tax number. Chapters may apply for and obtain tax-exempt status, but are otherwise responsible for their federal, state, and city taxes. We recommend that all chapters hire professionals to advise them on tax matters.

Should our chapter carry liability insurance?

This is a matter for each chapter board to discuss and decide. In most cases, insurance is unnecessary, but you might wish to consider a special-event policy for a workshop or other chapter-sponsored gathering. If you hold most of your meetings at restaurants, the business's insurance will cover any mishaps. Consult a professional before you make a decision.

How much should our chapter dues be? Do we have to share the money with national SinC?

Set dues as low as possible to encourage people to join and renew, but make sure you will bring in enough income to cover expenses. Most chapters charge in the range of \$20 to \$30 per year. Chapters do not have to share dues with national SinC.

What are the rules covering the use of the national SinC logo and trademark by chapters?

All Chapters must comply with Article IX, Section 5 of the by-laws by doing the following:

1. Send a letter or e-mail to the current president (with cc: to Beth Wasson at sistersincrime@juno.com), stating and describing all the ways your chapter wishes to use the Sisters in Crime logo, and the way in which you are using the Sisters in Crime name. We will respond to your letter in writing giving your chapter permission to use the logo or name. The requests should include all existing and future uses of the Sisters in Crime logo or name. When your chapter is considering a new project, a request for permission must be step #1 of your plan.
2. The Sisters in Crime name must always be followed by the name of your chapter.
3. No individual or chapter is permitted to use the Sisters in Crime name or logo without written permission from the president of Sisters in Crime.

Does SinC offer financial help to chapters for special events?

Yes, but your event must meet certain criteria and you must apply early so the Board will have time to consider and approve your request. Consult the Resources/Event Grants information in the Members Only section of the national website.

What display materials does SinC provide for chapters?

Your chapter may obtain SinC banners, table signs, podium signs, bookmarks, membership pamphlets, lapel pins, business cards, and “A Sisters in Crime Author” stickers for books by contacting Beth Wasson at sistersincrime@juno.com. Try to give a month’s notice.

