

A manual created by and for Sisters in Crime chapter leaders

Sisters in Crime®

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Mission Statement
Sisters in Crime

Promote the ongoing advancement, recognition and professional development of women crime writers.

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Introduction

The first chapter handbook was written in late 2010 by Sandra Parshall, then National Chapter Liaison. She blazed the way to create a useful chapter tool. A decade later, many things have changed. We are in the midst of a global pandemic, ordered to stay apart from our fellow humans for our good health. As a result of the public health orders, many chapters are meeting online and providing great content and support to members.

Another change is our conversion to an online world. All chapters have a presence in some form on social media: Facebook, Twitter, and/or Instagram. Most chapters have a website with online methods to become a member, pay chapter dues, and learn about the chapter's members and their meeting schedule.

Unchanged from 2010 is the desire to create strong chapters and bring value to our members. As John F. Kennedy said in 1963, “a rising tide lifts all boats”. How can we, at Sisters in Crime, lift all writers? Well, the rubber meets the road in our chapters. Every chapter meeting, webinar, or all-day conference has but one goal in mind – to improve the success of our writer members and create a community for all those who love crime fiction, mysteries, thrillers, and suspense.

This handbook is designed to serve as a resource for chapters so they can have a ready source for many of the FAQs that cross my email box. At the National level and in many local chapters we change officers annually. Much of our institutional knowledge to pass along lies within those leaders, and at the time of a leadership change, we don't often remember all the little nuances we learned. This handbook will answer some of those recurring questions.

Thanks to the many chapter leaders who contributed articles for this handbook. Many thanks to Sisters in Crime, NorCal Chapter for scheduling hourly Zoom writing sessions in which this document was drafted. Also, special thanks to Susanna Calkins, Ashley Hagan, Carol Bennetts, Mary Feliz, and Charlotte Hunter for improving this handbook with their edits.

Peace,

Alec Peche

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Chapter 1: About SinC: Working with the National Board

by

Alec Peche, Chapter Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

The history of the formation of Sisters in Crime can be [found on our website](#). Let us take a moment to speak to how the National Board functions and is structured.

The Executive Committee consists of the president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The president and vice president each serve one year. Each president starts as the vice president, then moves on to president the following year, and the existing president continues to serve the Board as the immediate past president. The immediate past president plans each year's SinC into Writing seminar and pursues a legacy project.

The Board is rounded out by the Immediate Past President, Member At Large, Library Liaison, Chapter Liaison, Grants Coordinator, Publicity Liaison, Education Liaison, Monitoring Project Liaison, Web Liaison, and the Membership Development Liaison. These are all unpaid, nationally elected positions. Volunteers can serve for a maximum of five years but are elected each year. In addition, there are volunteers that serve the various liaison positions. The National Board is assisted by an Executive Director (currently Acting Executive Director Julie Hennrikus) and the daily tasks of the organization are handled by an association management company. Finally, the inSinC editor, currently Molly Weston is a member of our staff and edits the inSinC quarterly newsletter, and is the photographer at various conferences. Other non-board volunteers coordinate programs, help run webinars, and assist in special projects.

The Board meets online each month, and in person once a year, sometimes at the Bouchercon Conference. The Board oversees the overall vision of Sisters in Crime, develops the goals and strategies to support that mission, creates and allocates the National budget, and manages Sisters in Crime's brand and presence in the greater literary community. For chapters, the National Board approves each new chapter and its bylaws, name, and logo, approves anthologies and funds chapter grants for local activities. The Board also hosts a Chapter Presidents meeting at Bouchercon and Malice Domestic and an io group chat for chapter leadership all year long.

Board officers are available to speak at chapter meetings online or in person depending on schedules.

Our chapters vary in size from an ideal minimum of fifteen to in excess of 900 members for the Guppies chapter. In addition, some of the larger chapters are: New England, Los Angeles, NorCal, Chesapeake, and Desert Sleuths. We encourage you to ask questions of your fellow chapters on the [io group chat](#) for chapter leadership – your fellow chapter leaders are always helpful, and chances are they have previously solved a problem facing your chapter. If you need contact information for a particular chapter, you can view the leadership on the [Sisters in Crime National website](#) and obtain an email address through the member directory.

Chapter 2: Sisters in Crime Code of Conduct

We welcome people from all backgrounds, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, citizenship, medical condition, genetic information, or any other relevant characteristic. Consequently, Sisters in Crime will not tolerate and strives to be free of any discrimination, abuse, or harassment based on these, or any other, factors.

Harassment and discrimination are behaviors that threaten, alarm, or make someone uncomfortable. All meetings and board actions will be conducted in an environment that is devoid of discrimination and harassment consistent with the principles that govern our organization's Code of Conduct and the Sisters in Crime core values. Sisters in Crime will not accept or tolerate offensive, abusive, coercive or other unwanted behavior which discriminates, violates personal dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or humiliating environment (e.g. physical, psychological, verbal, or any other form of harassment).

Our reputation for integrity and excellence requires observance of the spirit and letter of all applicable laws and regulations, as well as a strict adherence to the highest standards of conduct. Our organization will comply with all applicable laws and regulations and expects its board, its members, its chapter board members, employees, vendors, volunteers, and the like to conduct themselves and business associated with our organization in accordance with the letter, spirit, and intent of all relevant laws and to refrain from any illegal, dishonest, or unethical conduct.

This Code of Conduct applies to anyone acting at any time or in any place under the banner of Sisters in Crime including: members, board members, chapter board members, employees, vendors, and volunteers. We will expect all guests to comply with this policy when attending events sponsored in full or in part by Sisters in Crime.

Consequences of Code of Conduct Violations

Individual consequences of violating this Code of Conduct will vary by circumstance but may include (but are not limited to) a verbal or written warning; the cancellation of event attendance; the cancellation of membership; prohibiting future event attendance of Sisters in Crime events; and/or prohibiting future membership in Sisters in Crime. In cases of major violations of the Code of Conduct, Sisters in Crime may decide to make a public statement to its members and community on the subject. Sisters in Crime may deny membership to any individual on the basis of comments or behavior contained in this Code of Conduct.

In addition, Sisters in Crime reserves the right to withdraw support or deny sponsorship to any event, to withdraw support from any other organization, or terminate or replace any vendor not in compliance with this Code of Conduct.

Any member who believes that they have been or are being subject to a violation of our organization's Code of Conduct, or who witnesses a violation, is encouraged to immediately report any such violation to the president or any current member of the Sisters in Crime national board. All such reporting shall remain confidential while an investigation into the alleged violation is conducted according to the [Sisters in Crime national bylaws](#). If a board member or members are parties accused of an alleged violation, they shall not take part in the investigation, other than being afforded the opportunity to respond to the allegations as any other accused

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individual(s) as set forth in the bylaws. To the extent reasonably possible, the investigation shall remain confidential and protected against unnecessary disclosure—including the identity of the accused individual, the individual reporting the violation, and that of any witness. Individuals may consent in writing to Sisters in Crime to disclose their identities.

Any decision, response, sanction, or action of the board and this organization to the alleged violation of the Code of Conduct shall be determined by the guidelines set in the Sisters in Crime bylaws. However, because there is always the potential for or the possibility of legal (civil or criminal) proceedings arising from or the result of the offending conduct at issue, the board and this organization reserves the right and/or upon the advice of legal counsel, not to publicize, comment, or otherwise disclose the allegations, investigation, or consequences imposed by the board in response to their investigation to its members, any outside organization, or the media for the protection of this organization and its members.

Chapter 3: Creating an Equitable and Inclusive Environment for All Members and Guests

by

Sandra Wong, 2020-21 President, Sisters in Crime National
Bess Carnan, VP Citrus Crime Writers chapter (Central Florida)

Many members may have some experience with the ideas and/or implementation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—also known as DEI. Many members may not. This chapter of the handbook aims to set out: 1) basic definitions, so that chapter leadership can guide their membership as needed to understand the common terms used in the DEI sphere; and 2) considerations to be addressed when creating local events and experiences which are welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

Marginalized groups are not “monoliths” within themselves. The opinions and preferences of the individuals within any given marginalized group will not all be the same. For example, a single Disabled individual should not be assumed to represent all Disabled people. Sensitivity to and acknowledgement of these differences is an important step to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.

Related to this, it is best practice to avoid asking marginalized people to educate curious members on DEI issues. This request can end up being emotional labor for the person asked. It can be the equivalent of asking a marginalized person to explain and justify their existence, their humanity, and their lived experiences. Some people will offer to help with this education; others will not. Please be sensitive to this possibility.

DEI work is complex and evolving. This section is not meant to encompass all the available scholarship and theories, nor can it address all the resources available by geographic area. We encourage chapters to explore areas for improvement and available training for themselves. Please consider this section a starting point for a meaningful DEI practice.

I. Definitions

Diversity | Equity | Inclusion

Diversity is the way the members of our group are different. This can include age, disabilities, ethnicities, gender, and more. A quick way to understand is to imagine that Diversity asks, *Who is in the room?*

Equity is about a mindset that seeks to ensure potentially overlooked groups or issues are considered on an equal footing as more mainstream groups or issues. For instance, Equity includes (but is not limited to) questions such as, *How can we ensure that we represent the perspectives of marginalized people? How can we ensure that under-represented voices have equal opportunity to speak? How can we ensure that everyone has the same access to resources?*

Inclusivity is how all those members are brought into the group and empowered to be involved. A group can be incredibly diverse, and wish to hear from all its members, but if

members don't feel safe to speak or listened to, the group is not inclusive. For example, Inclusivity includes (but is not limited to) questions such as, *Have we actively invited and welcomed everyone with an interest or stake in this conversation? Has everyone been heard from and their unique needs/concerns considered?*

Ethnicity | Race

Ethnicity and Race are often incorrectly used in an interchangeable fashion.

Ethnicity is used to refer to things like cultural background, including language and nationality.

Race, used colloquially rather than scientifically, refers to physical characteristics like skin color and hair texture. For example, a person can be Black (race) and Brazilian (ethnicity).

Contrary to theory invented by 18th-century European naturalists, there are no genetic or inherent traits that define Race. Like Ethnicity, Race as a concept can include social or geographical or cultural identity markers.

Race and Ethnicity are now recognized as social and cultural constructs which nevertheless have real-world consequences. They are ways which human beings use to define themselves and others, as well as their attendant relationships.

When people are “racialized,” this means white people have defined them—usually detrimentally—by their racial appearance.

Disabilities | Neurodiversity

Disabilities are conditions that make full participation in society difficult. This is not because of the disability, but because societies fail to take into account the full spectrum of its members.

Disabilities can be visible (eg: using a wheelchair, having a service dog) or invisible (eg: diabetes, depression). They can be physical or psychological. One person can have several disabilities.

When referring to people with disabilities, there are two schools of thought. One is to use “identity first” language, meaning we would say “autistic person.” The other is “person first,” where we would say “person with autism.” There is no perfect consensus on which is better—because individuals with disabilities hold varied opinions and preferences on the ways to be addressed with respect. For example, many disability activists prefer identity first language, as it states upfront something that is an integral part of their lives; it doesn't minimize their disability.

This is a subject where we should listen to and follow the preferences of our disabled members. As with pronouns (see below), we can respectfully ask our members with disabilities about the most appropriate forms of reference.

Neurodiversity is a portmanteau of neurological and diversity. It is the concept that certain neurological distinctions are a result of normal brain differences and not of defects or deficiencies. Conditions such as ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia are some more well-known examples of neurodiversities.

Neurodiversity recognizes that these “atypical” conditions are part of the broad range of human brain functionality. There are various opinions within the Neurodiversity community as to whether or not these conditions are disabilities, so it is a good practice to listen for and respect the preferences of people who identify as Neurodiverse regarding this distinction.

Queer | LGBTQIA2S+

There are a number of ways to refer to people with non-heterosexual sexualities and non-cis gender identities. Cis-gender refers to someone who identifies their gender as the same as their sex at birth.

Some of the terms include:

- a. LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic, 2-Spirit+
- b. LGBTQIAAP+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual/Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Aromantic, Pansexual+
- c. QUILTBAG: (Queer/Questioning, Undecided/Unlabeled, Intersex, Lesbian, Transsexual/Transgender, Bisexual, Asexual, Gay/Genderqueer.

As with all terms for non-straight, non-cis identities, there is conflict over using the “best” term of reference. Again, we should aim for a respectful attitude and use of terms, so we should follow the preferences of people in these communities.

Privilege | Privilege Distress

Privilege is unearned access to resources. Having privilege does not mean someone hasn’t struggled, or that they haven’t been marginalized in another way. It just means that, in some areas, they have an advantage, whether they’re aware of it or not.

Privilege distress is the discomfort of having a privileged position changed. It can feel an injustice for a privileged person to be seen as equal to someone with less privilege. For example, people who find closed captioning an annoying distraction might be upset at its integration at a conference. However, the inclusion of closed captioning means that people who previously couldn’t attend are now included, and perhaps can provide a broader range of experiences which will benefit all attendees.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions are actions that create an unsafe space for members in indirect, subtle, or unintentional ways. Things like telling a wheelchair user “you’re so brave,” or saying “I don’t

see color” are small, painful reminders that the people they’re said to or about are not considered “normal” members of the space they’re in. This is the most common form of exclusion and oppression our marginalized members will face and possibly the most challenging to overcome, so therefore is all the more important to tackle.

II. Creating Inclusivity

Part of being inclusive means ensuring that Sisters in Crime and its chapters demonstrate that we value diverse membership through equitable and inclusive practices. No SinC member should feel they are only valued because they come from a different background than the majority of their chapter. We want all of our members to feel that being a member of SinC is both valuable to their career and free of marginalizing experiences. SinC is strengthened by including writers from all backgrounds, and the crime fiction community as a whole is made better by stories which share diverse experiences. We have to make sure we lift our entire membership up.

Age, class, body size, and religion are just some of the forms of diversity that we should consider when creating inclusive spaces. Chapter leadership is encouraged to survey their community and do their best to include crime writers and readers from all backgrounds and lived experiences.

Creating an Inclusive Space

What is a safe space? A safe space is a space where people feel empowered to have all sorts of conversations. It ensures that no one will be made to feel unsafe or unheard. It does NOT mean a place where no disagreement is allowed. It does mean that disagreements will be carried out respectfully, with no name calling or derision.

- a. **Ways to listen:** One way to help create a safe space is to have a method of anonymous feedback. For members who are too shy to speak up or are afraid they won’t be listened to, being able to speak up without fear of reprisal can help them make their voices heard. It’s incumbent on the leadership of safe spaces to monitor the space and keep them safe. Many local colleges hold safe space training for leadership that is unsure how to tackle such a project.
- b. **Members’ Private Lives:** All members should be protected from value judgments aimed at physical appearance or perceived abilities, eg: “unprofessional hair” or “overblown dependency.” Similarly, members who are curious about those from a different background from themselves should be encouraged to research (Google) their questions on their own. These kinds of unsolicited and unexpected questions often result in “othering” or further alienating those from marginalized backgrounds, thus creating the opposite of a safe space for them.
- c. **Ways to stop microaggressions:** A first step can be rooting out the ways “majority” members view marginalized members with well-meaning condescension and/or patronizing sympathy. Taking a few moments to reconsider a comment about a marginalized person’s

“fortitude” or “bravery,” or questions about how they “manage,” is another important step in stopping oneself from performing a microaggression. These examples are just a beginning. There is ample reading and viewing material available for chapter members to find and learn from. To varying degrees and depths, the work of ending microaggressions means searching within oneself for the attitudes that “other” marginalized people and then, getting rid of them.

Inclusive Language

One of the simplest ways to create a more inclusive space is to change the language used in meetings to be more conscious of inclusivity. For example, it can be helpful to open meetings with a general reminder of things like pronouns and ableist language. Please note that language is constantly evolving, so things that are considered acceptable now may be inappropriate later, so it’s incumbent on all of us to stay informed of best practices.

- a. **Gender-neutral language:** Gender-specific language like “hey guys” or “let’s get started, ladies” or “Sisters and Misterys” can be exclusionary, regardless of intent. We may not be privy to every member or guest’s private history, and by using these gender-specific phrases, we would be ignoring that some of those we’re addressing do not include themselves in these binary terms, which is the opposite of creating a safe space for them. Consciously using gender-neutral greetings such as “Siblings” or “Members” will help create the inclusive environment we’re aiming for.
- b. **Ableist terms:** Things like “stupid” and “lame” are common in modern language, but are rooted in disdain for people with mental and physical disabilities. Much like how we avoid the R-word, terms that reference disabilities negatively should be phased out of our conversations.
- c. **Racial terms:** There are many terms that are commonly used that members may not realize are hurtful. “Gypped” and “gypsy,” for example, are both racist terms used to reference Romani or Roma people. Words that members of racialized communities use for themselves may not be acceptable for use by people outside of those communities, so it’s important to be aware of this whenever we learn new terms related to race.
- d. **Queerphobic language:** Words like “dyke” or “gay” can be used to marginalize queer people and alienate them. Words that members of the queer community use for themselves may not be acceptable for use by non-queer people, so it’s important to be aware of this whenever we learn new terms related to LGBTQIA2S+ communities.
- e. **Pronouns:** Including our pronouns during introductions and on nametags is inclusive both of members with non-cis gender identities and members with trouble parsing gender identity coding. Your pronouns are the ones for others to use when referring to you in third person and can be written as she/her, he/him they/them, etc. It is appropriate now to use ‘they’ in reference to a single individual and should be used as default when pronouns are unknown. They are no longer referred to as ‘preferred’ pronouns, as that implies there is an acceptable alternative to using a person’s pronouns, which there is not.
- f. **Appropriative terms:** There are many words and phrases that have entered common

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usage that are actually very hurtful to the groups that originated them. For instance, terms such as “spirit animal,” “powwow,” “finding one’s tribe,” and “smoke signals” come from historically and spiritually important cultural practices of Indigenous peoples. Use of these terms by non-Indigenous people is inappropriate as that usage debases their cultural significance to the original peoples.

III. Creating Standards of Equity

Creating policies for the treatment of members and visitors can help chapters make themselves into safe spaces for everyone.

- a. One important pillar to ensure our chapters are places of equity and inclusivity is setting a standard payment rate for speakers and not deviating from it. Non-standardized fees can, intentionally or accidentally, be used to create an imbalance between speakers of varying marginalization.
- b. Members should be assured of the same rights. No member should have to sit in the hall because their mobility device isn’t accommodated by a meeting room or feel excluded because they are the only member of a marginalized group present and their voice is being devalued.
- c. Allow time and space for every member to be heard. If a marginalized member’s voice is being silenced, creating space for them to speak can be achieved by bringing the conversation back to them as the meeting or event leader.
- d. We encourage all chapters to make a conscious effort to seek out speakers from a broad range of backgrounds. It’s important to invite marginalized speakers to speak on subjects of interest at the level of craft or research or business, etc. Do not invite them **only** to speak exclusively on topics related to marginalization.

Accessible Spaces

It can be hard to find an affordable or free space to meet, but it’s equally important that all interested members can attend. Try to find spaces without stairs, or with a fully functional elevator. Consider public transit routes to the meeting location. Try to have accessibility tools for members who are hard of hearing or deaf, or visually impaired. Members who are prone to seizures or migraines can be triggered by overly bright or flashing lights, so ensure that presentations are trigger-free, or at least have warnings.

- a. **Bathrooms:** Bathrooms attached to SinC meeting spaces should have accessible stalls and a restroom that is gender neutral or, at least, single stall.
- b. **Costs:** You may find that some members don’t have access to the same finances that more privileged members have. To be more inclusive, your chapter may consider alternate fee options like having a sliding scale, scholarships, or sponsorships for members who otherwise couldn’t join. Some groups ask members who can afford it to pay a little extra to a specially-named fund that members who need financial assistance

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can apply to for anonymous help. Your chapter can handle chapter fees as it sees fit. You can refer members in financial straits to SinC National to apply for a fee waiver; a limited number of these are available.

- c. **Sensitivity:** Consider the symbolism and history of certain spaces when holding in-person events. Research into potential event spaces should include searching for any historical connections to misogynistic, queerphobic, and/or racist practices. For example, holding an event at a plantation is inadvisable.
- d. **Nothing suits everyone:** It's impossible to have a place meet the needs of every single person. This doesn't preclude trying, but recognize that perfect is the enemy of good and it's most important to accommodate as best you can and always work for improvement. Try to vary meeting spaces and times, online offerings, topics, and other variables in order to make meetings inclusive of as many members and potential members as you can.

Content Warnings

When talking about sensitive subjects, as often come up in crime writing, consider having content warnings. Content warnings are a quick list at the beginning of an article or presentation that function like the ratings on a movie. Members with trauma or discomfort with certain topics will have ample warning before things like violence, blood, or sexual violence come up so they can react in a manner that will keep them safe. This is also a useful place to have anonymous feedback so members can add things to the list of things that need a content warning or can request help managing the subject matter in a supportive and productive way.

Code of Conduct

It's imperative to have an explicit plan in place that 1) outlines what is acceptable and unacceptable among our members and 2) what will happen if the code of conduct is violated. Places that have the first without the latter are not seen as safe spaces by marginalized members because it means that nothing will happen if they are assaulted or harassed. Your chapter may use SinC National's Code of Conduct in full or as a template:

<https://www.sistersincrime.org/page/code-of-conduct>.

[The Code of Conduct is also included in this Handbook.](#)

Genuine Effort (or, How to Own Up to Our Mistakes)

For people who were previously unaware, it can be intimidating or frustrating to be presented with "a list of words they can't say anymore." Many people react with anger or confusion. However, please remember that perfection is impossible. Genuine, honest effort is what matters. Best practice for making a mistake, such as a misspeak of a person's pronoun, is to authentically apologize, correct the mistake, and continue on. Please don't compound the mistake with figurative self-flagellation because that puts the onus on the hurt person to reassure the mistake-maker.

For a more significant mistake, the best practice is:

- a. **Center the injured party.** Ask for their feelings and thoughts. This is no longer about the person or group that made the mistake, but about making things better for the injured person or group.
- b. **Listen and learn.** Hear what they say, sit with it, and make sure the mistake-maker has a complete understanding of their impact.
- c. **Apologize.** Even though it was an accident, this is important. Center the injured by focusing on taking responsibility for the hurtful actions. For example, “I’m sorry I interrupted you and silenced you.”
 - i. Do not include self-flagellation or justifications.
 - ii. Do not water down an apology with “if/that” statements:
 - a) “I’m sorry if you were offended”; or
 - b) “I’m sorry that you felt ignored.”
- d. **Take steps to keep it from happening again.** If there needs to be a group training or re-familiarization with the chapter and/or National code of conduct, ensure that the injured party and any other marginalized members will feel safe and supported when doing so.

Additional Resources for Curious Members

- <https://www.perkinselearning.org/technology/blog/how-be-ally-disabled-friends>
- <https://www.themuse.com/advice/what-is-an-ally-7-examples>
- <https://disabilityalliancepdx.wordpress.com/resources/accessibility-and-inclusion-in-activist-spaces/>

Materials Referenced for This Chapter

Inclusivity, Diversity, and Privilege:

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Chapter 4: Starting a New Chapter

by

Alec Peche, Chapter Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

The work of being an author is done in isolation. No one but you can put words to the page. Chapters offer many benefits to Sisters in Crime members. We meet our fellow authors, we learn about writing craft, we learn about techniques of law enforcement, and we are cheerleaders as each of us reaches a writing milestone. We have readers who tell us what they like to read and inspire us to produce it. However, what if there isn't a chapter in your local area? How do you go about starting one?

Ask yourself if you'll commit time for several months to help get a new chapter launched. While National can help, it takes boots on the ground in the new chapter's city to make a successful chapter. Once you're willing to commit the time, contact your [National Chapter Liaison](#). They will start by doing a search of 16,000 names in our Sisters in Crime database to find national members in your area. We keep a database of essentially anyone who has ever been a member. We will have people join our national organization, then leave after a year or so, as they really want a local chapter. So, reaching out to members that have left our family often bears fruit.

Either the Chapter Liaison or the interested person in the city of the new chapter can then reach out by email and solicit interest in a new chapter. Once there are at least seven positive responses, a second email goes out asking for volunteers for an organizing committee. These members will review the chapter bylaws template and adjust any wording to suit the new chapter. Once the organizing committee approves their bylaws, selects a dues amount, and picks a chapter name, then that information goes to the National Board for approval at their monthly meeting.

Along the way, the organizing committee continues to attract additional chapter members who may serve on the new chapter's board. It is important that any new chapter offer quality programming as soon as possible. New chapter members should reach out to contacts who may be guest speakers at upcoming chapter meetings. In some cases, chapter members can offer expert programming for their chapter.

A chapter can apply for a grant from National to help with start-up costs. New chapters may wish to have a website, or purchase technology like Meet-Up to publicize their meetings and attract new members. These services cost money and yet a young chapter has no bank balance gained from dues, so as soon as a bank account is opened, a new chapter can apply for the start-up grant.

As your chapter is in formation, you may want to think of a name, and establish a Facebook page and a logo for the chapter. The Sisters in Crime National Logo is trademarked and **not** available for chapter use. When you set up an email address for your new chapter, you need to set it up as Sisters in Crime [Chapter Name] or [Chapter Name] Sisters in Crime.

Chapter 5: Chapter Bank Accounts, Insurance, and Tax-exempt Status by

Carol Bennetts, President, Houston Chapter Sisters in Crime, Jackie York, Treasurer,
Sister's in Crime National, Charlotte Morganti, President, Canada West Chapter

Opening A Chapter Bank Account

The Houston Sisters in Crime chapter was approved for charter at the 2019 Bouchercon conference in Dallas in the fall. Before that, starting in July, the volunteer officers and chairs got busy making plans for a successful general membership launch in January 2020. Some of the leadership team advanced monies for meeting rent, website creation, etc. and needed to be reimbursed in a timely fashion. We received our \$500 start-up grant from national and eagerly made plans for our financials. Our leaders discussed various options for collecting dues. We communicated with other chapters to see what worked well and what didn't. Since we were new, we hesitated to create a credit card option, through PayPal, etc. We decided to collect dues in person at meetings (either cash or check) or by mail to our membership chair (we also decided against a P.O. Box, in order to save money).

After the holidays, the treasurer and I decided to open a checking account at a credit union close to her home and met there one morning in January. We signed in to be seen by a bank associate and felt confident that the process would go smoothly since we had our approved charter. When she called us in, we walked into her cubicle with confidence. How hard could this be? We were a small writers' group with little money but the need for checks and deposit slips. We were immediately peppered with questions. *Are you a non-profit organization such as a 501(c)(3)...funded by dues and tax exempt? Are you a business? Do you have a charter? Do you have minutes approving you as co-signers on the account?* We were fish out of water. We assumed that we were a non-profit group, since our national Sisters in Crime parent was. We knew we weren't a business but thought that we should be tax exempt, maybe even qualifying for a free or reduced cost account.

We left without our checking account and regrouped. We consulted with our chapter liaison. She told us that individual chapters were not eligible for the national 501(c)(6) status as they were separate organizations and told us that her research showed while approximately one-third of the SinC chapters did go ahead and apply for non-profit status on their own, the others did not. She communicated with chapter presidents on our behalf to see how they handled the initial financial process. Many of the chapter accounts had been opened so long ago that the current presidents and treasurers weren't sure what had been done at that time.

I checked with my accountant who told us that we could operate as either a non-profit corporation or an unincorporated nonprofit association in TX. Or we could simply take official meeting minutes to a bank showing that we were approved by the members to open an account for our group. He suggested that we would likely need a federal EIN tax number and that our treasurer would need to file taxes yearly even though there would be no taxes due.

We decided to try again, this time at a commercial bank with branches near both of us. We contacted the branch manager of a local bank and received the same round of questions as the credit union rep. Were we qualified as a non-profit organization? Did we want to open a

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business checking account? He told us that we would need to bring the following in order to open the account: a signed charter from national stating that we were officially a new chapter, approved minutes from a meeting that specified that we planned to open an account at his bank, our start up grant check, and a Federal EIN number. He also told us that he would have to check with his managers at the main branch to make sure that nothing else was needed. (Note: afterwards, we found out that the bank we chose worked mostly with commercial banking so their standards may have been slightly more rigorous. However, the banking industry has indeed become more highly regulated than when other chapters may have opened accounts).

Our treasurer volunteered to fill out an EIN application, on-line, for our Houston Sisters in Crime chapter, see link below. She immediately received the EIN number which we would use for our checking account application. We made an appointment with the manager and met at a branch where I had a personal account, figuring that couldn't hurt our cause.

<https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/how-to-apply-for-an-ein>

Our meeting with the manager went well but we had a few giggles when he had to call his branch manager to assure her that the Houston Sisters in Crime chapter was not actually involved in crime but simply writing about it (we kid you not). At the end of the meeting, we had an account, two co-signers, several temporary checks, and an order for four more books of checks. We were glad to have carefully chosen a bank that had numerous locations across our large city so that any future treasurers would be able to find a branch nearby. We left the branch, had a late lunch at a local French restaurant and toasted our water glasses to getting the job done.

Minimum Needed to Open a Checking Account:

- Approved charter for new chapter from national.
- Minutes verifying that the treasurer (and in our case, the president) are authorized as co-signers on the account to be opened (do name the bank you have chosen in the minutes).
- A federal EIN tax number
- Generally, \$200-300 to open the account.
- The social security numbers of the co-signers.
- Up to date drivers' licenses of the two co-signers with correct addresses.

Bank Information for our Canadian Chapters

Here's some information about non-profits in Canada (from the Canada Revenue Agency's website). <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/publications/it496r/archived-non-profit-organizations.html>

- a. a non-profit organization can be a corporation, but does not have to be (for example our chapter is an informal association/club that is not registered or organized under any Canadian or provincial statute)

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- b. non-profits that **are not** corporations do not have to file any return with CRA, they do not pay tax and basically the Liaison Officer told us they don't want to hear from us....
- c. if it is a corporation, it must file an income tax return every year (and this involves preparing financial statements and submitting information from them), but still will not be assessed tax. If it earns over a certain threshold in investments then there is a second information form it must file (also if a chapter incorporates there are incorporation fees and there are annual reports that it must file with the relevant government corporate registry in order to keep itself in good standing - an added expense).

You might also put a caution in the materials to the effect that tax laws often change and people should check with CRA (the Liaison Officers are a great place to start because the calls are free and it is all part of CRA's goal of making the tax system accessible and easy to use) to make sure that the information in the above publication is still valid.

The Treasurer's Role

The treasurer deposits dues payments and pays vendors for chapter services. They should be a signatory on the chapter bank account. External audits can be performed on the chapters' bank account, but as those cost around \$10,000, it doesn't make financial sense for most chapters. Instead, someone who isn't the treasurer should review the checkbook once a year.

By National Sisters in Crime standards, you must give access to banking records and passwords to at least two active leaders in your chapter at all times. A chapter with only one person with access to important financial records and access to the bank account is no longer in good standing with Sisters in Crime and may endanger their chapter charter.

Tax Exempt Status

Each chapter of Sisters in Crime is a separate legal and business entity. Sisters in Crime is a 501(c)(6) non-profit organization. National's status as a non-profit does not confer non-profit status on any chapter. Around one-third of Sisters in Crime chapters have applied for and received non-profit status. Each chapter needs to make its own determination on whether it makes financial sense to pursue non-profit standing. In some cases, the filing fees are greater than the taxes. However, throughout the country many chapters meet in libraries and some libraries require non-profit status in order to use their community rooms.

Liability Insurance

Liability insurance is a matter for each chapter board to discuss and decide. In most cases, this type of insurance is extremely expensive and unnecessary.

However, 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

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insurance may cover any mishaps. Consult an insurance professional before you make a decision. See the [Venue/Food](#) section of [Chapter 15: Special Events](#) for more information

Chapter 6: How to Interact with the SinC National Website

by

Barbara Ross, Web Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

There are only two things chapters are required to do on the national website.

- Inform national of changes of officers, including the president, vice president (or co-president), membership chair, treasurer, and secretary using the [Chapter Update Form](#).
- Keep your membership roster up-to-date.

There are also a number of ways chapters can use the national website that are entirely optional.

Required Functions:

- [How to Update Chapter Officer Names on the National Website](#)
- [How to Keep Your Member Roster Up-to-Date on the National Website](#)
 - [Signing in as a Chapter Administrator](#)
 - [Viewing the Member Listing for Your Chapter](#)
 - [Adding Member Names to Your Chapter Listing](#)
 - [What to do if a chapter member's name does not appear in the national database search](#)
 - [Removing Member Names from Your Chapter Listing](#)
- [How to Update Your Chapter Description](#)

Optional Functions:

The website offers a number of additional features available to chapters. It is totally up to you whether you choose to use them. These functions include chapter event registration, chapter forums and blogs, photo gallery and emailing and messaging

- [Optional Features](#)
 - [How to turn optional features on and off](#)
 - [How to use the optional features](#)

How to Update Chapter Officer Names on the National Website

To update the names of your officers, use the [Chapter Update form](#).

When chapter officers change, either because of a planned election or for any other reason, you must submit the names and a few other pertinent pieces of information to national. National will then update your officer names on the national website, add the new officers as group admins on the national website and remove group admin privileges for former officers.

To review your chapter's current information, [go to the chapter listing on the national website](#) and click on the name of your chapter.

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When you submit the form, Sisters in Crime national will

- Add the new officers and make them group admins for your chapter on the national site.
- Remove officers who are no longer serving from the listing and remove their admin privileges.

This is a manual process, so the new information will not appear immediately.

Important Note: If you are forced to remove an officer and you need national to remove chapter administrator access for that former officer IMMEDIATELY, please email us at admin@sistersincrime.org and chapters@sistersincrime.org in addition to filling out the Chapter Update form.


To update any other chapter information on the national website, for example your chapter description, link to website, Facebook page, etc, see [How to Update Your Chapter Description](#) below.

How to Keep Your Member Roster Up-to-Date on National Website

Signing in as Chapter Administrator

All of the instructions in the remainder of the chapter require you to be signed into the national website as a chapter administrator in order to complete them.

To Sign in as a Chapter Administrator.

1. Go to the national website. <https://www.sistersincrime.org/>
2. Sign in as you normally do.
3. When you are signed in, click on Manage Profile.
4. On the Manage Profile page, scroll down to the Community section
5. In the Community section, click on Groups.
6. Your groups will appear. Next to your chapter group, there will be a figure in blue. 
7. Click on your chapter name and it will bring you to the admin page for your chapter.

Viewing the Current Member Listing for Your Chapter

To find out who is currently listed as a chapter member

1. Sign in as a chapter administrator (as above).
2. On the top bar, click on Group Admin option.
3. In the pop-up window, select View Current Members.
4. You can sort the list by last name by clicking on the words Last Name in the header.

Adding Member Names to Your Chapter Listing

The most important interaction you will have is adding chapter members to your listing on the national website. If you apply for a chapter grant or other benefit, the national Chapter Liaison will compare the chapter listing on your website to the chapter listing on the national website to make sure all your members are current members of national.

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To add a member to your chapter listing:

1. Sign in as a chapter administrator (see above.)
2. Click on Group Admin Options in the top bar.
3. On the pop-up menu, select View Current Members.
4. On the current members screen, change the Search field to Entire Community.
5. Enter the last name of the member you wish to add and press the Search button.
6. A listing of national members with the last name will appear. Find the one you want and click Add to Group.

What to do if a chapter member's name does not appear in the national database search

From time-to-time chapter members names do not appear when you search the national database using the instructions above. There two possible explanations.

- 90% of the time we find this is an issue with the name.
 - Check your spelling of the last name.
 - Check multiple variations of compound names. For example for Jane Jones-Smith, check Jones, Jones-Smith and Smith as last names. For Lidia de Young check both de Young and Young.
 - If your member has an unusual first name, search under just first name and check the list of results.
 - Is your member a national member under a different name? This happens frequently with authors who use pen names, or who use both their married and birth names. Our members have a lot of names. Email your member to verify the name they use for their national membership.
- 10% of the time, your chapter member has let their national membership expire or never joined national in the first place.
 - Your first best step is to email the member and ask their status. Be sure to confirm the name they use for their national membership.
 - If you and the member are completely stuck, email customer support and ask for help. The address is admin@sistersincrime.org.

Removing Member Names from Your Chapter Listing

From time to time, members may choose to maintain their membership in national while dropping their chapter affiliation.

To remove these members from your chapter listing:

1. Sign on as the chapter administrator (see above)
2. Click on Group Admin Options on the top bar.
3. On the pop-up menu select View Current Members.
4. Locate the member you want to remove and click on Remove from Group.

How to Update Your Chapter Description

You may need to update your chapter description for several reasons, including but not limited to a meeting place change, a new web address or Facebook page. Or you may want to refresh your description of the chapter for recruiting reasons.

To update your chapter description:

1. Sign in as a chapter admin.
2. Click on Group admin options in the top bar.
3. On the pop-up menu select Homepage Options.
4. On the resulting page, scroll down to the box called Group Homepage Welcome Text.

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5. Enter or update your text.
6. Click on the Submit button.

To enter live links to the internet in the text box:

1. Enter the link text.
2. Select the text.
3. Click on the Insert tab at the top of the text box.
4. Click on the link symbol.
5. Complete the information in the pop-up box and press OK.
6. Press the Submit button at the bottom of the page.

Optional Features

The Chapter groups on the national website offer several features in addition to member management. Each chapter must make its own decision as to whether to use any or all of these features.

Here are some reasons you might want to use these features.

Events: Using the Events function gives you the functionality to

- to schedule events
- collect rsvps or registrations
- send reminders and message the registrants
- have the event appear on the chapter member's profile pages.

Forums and blogs: The functions do exactly what you would expect them to. The advantage of using them over external software with the same capabilities is that you can restrict access to the chapter members you have listed on the national website. When you add people they will be added and when people drop their membership they will be removed.

Photo gallery: You may wish to use the photo gallery for recruiting or preservations purposes.

Email and Messaging: Chapter admins can email or message every member of the group.

How to turn optional features on and off

The optional features are turned on by default. If you do not want your chapter members to see them when they are on your chapter page on the national website do the following:

1. Sign in as a Group Admin (see above)
2. Click on Group Admin options in the top bar.
3. In the pop-up menu, click on Homepage Options.
4. Scroll down to Group Feature Menu Options
5. Unclick those options you do not want to appear on your chapter page.
6. Click on the Submit button.

How to use the optional features

1. Sign in as a Group Admin
2. Click on Group Admin options on the top bar.
3. Click on the feature you wish to use.

Chapter 7: Elections and Grooming the Next Generation of Leaders

by

Alec Peche, Chapter Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

We all lead very busy lives, dividing ourselves up between family, friends, work, and writing. Finding time to help lead your chapter may seem impossible, but it has its rewards. Elections are required by your Chapter Bylaws at least every two years. Your national board holds elections every year and changes leadership every October 1. The President and Vice President are new each year, but other positions like members at large, secretary, treasurer, and board liaisons serve a maximum of five years. Turnover is good and some of our smaller chapters have the same Board members for years, but they switch position each year. This makes for a healthy chapter. We have had chapters close and most commonly it's because there was no change at the president level. Elections are important and a chance to invigorate your chapter with new energy and ideas!

Put an election date on your chapter calendar for the same month every year. If you're a small chapter, you'll have a small number of volunteers and you can do an election by email with a Chapter member who is not on the election slate recording the votes. If you're a large chapter like the Guppies, then use a technology (electionbuddy, ezvoteonline.com, etc) to record votes.

Usually the Executive Committee of the Board screens candidates. Here are some questions to ask – what is their past experience?, what is the writing experience?, do they exhibit the values of Sisters in Crime? Most chapters have one member per position per election. Certainly you may want some potential technical skills for some positions – can they manage a checkbook for the chapter (treasurer), is the secretary good at recording votes, does the media person have experience with Facebook and Twitter? Chapters aren't looking for experts, they're looking for familiarity with some aspect of a board position and a willingness to help and learn.

There are other ways to invite chapter members into the management of the chapter. Can you split your social media job between two persons? Are you allowing job sharing? Some chapter jobs warrant a committee like education/programming which can make the possibly time-consuming job of finding speakers, and meeting locations more manageable. Ask yourself if your chapter is doing everything possible to invite people into the management of a chapter.

Chapter 8: Mentoring New Writers

by

Kellye Garrett, Member at Large, Sisters in Crime National

One of the things you may want to offer your chapter members is a mentoring program where more established writers with agents and/or published books or short stories provide feedback on the work of a writer who is either unagented or unpublished. It can be a valuable resource for your members who have yet to be published as well as provide a sense of community for both established writers and those they are helping.

There are several options for creating a mentoring program and you should tailor your initiative to fit the unique needs of your chapter. Organizations like [Pitch Wars](#), which has had over 300 success stories including SinC members Kristen Lepionka, Layne Fargo, Kellye Garrett, and Dianne Freeman, have a very hands-on program where mentors select their own mentees, provide two or more rounds of edits on their full manuscript, and end their program with an [Agent Showcase](#). Other organizations like Mystery Writers of America's New York Chapter and our own Guppies Chapter with their Fantasy Agent initiative anonymously match the mentors with manuscripts and ask them to critique the first 25 or so pages. In the past, MWA-NY has also sent one winning manuscript to an agent who has volunteered to read it.

No matter how you tailor your program, there are several things to factor in, including:

- **Number of participants:** How many mentors will you have? This may depend on the number of agented and established members who volunteer their time and the number of emerging writers who submit their work. You'll need to be clear in your announcements whether everyone who submits will receive a critique or if only a small number will be chosen based on factors including readiness of work, order of submissions, etc.
- **Time frame:** You'll need a long enough submission period that emerging writers can polish their work for submission and a critique deadline that gives your busy volunteers time to read the work and provide a solid critique.
- **Anonymity:** Will the mentors know whose work they're reading and vice versa? You can always give the mentor an option of deciding to share their name or not.
- **The submission package:** How many pages will be critiqued? Should writers submit just manuscripts or is your program also open to short stories? How polished should the work be? Will they need to include a synopsis and/or a query letter as well? These are all things to consider.
- **Matching manuscripts:** If you decide to match your mentors with a manuscript, please ask your mentors their reading preferences including subjects they **do not** want to read. You should also do your best to match each mentor with manuscripts that match their professional backgrounds in order to provide the best critiques. For example a spy thriller writer who never reads amateur detective novels might not be the best person to critique a cozy.

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- **Release forms:** You'll need to provide a release form to any submitting writers. In addition, please ask your mentors if there are any conflicts of interest once they receive their submission including if it's too similar to a project they're working on.
- **Guidelines.** You should set up clear expectations for both mentors and emerging writers of their own roles.
 - **For emerging writers,** this should be the submission requirements including number of pages, how to submit, sub-genre, format, etc. You should also be clear on the type of feedback they will receive and if they should or shouldn't contact the mentor directly.
 - **For the mentors,** you should provide a detailed guideline document or rubric including their deadline, how they should tailor their feedback including even providing questions for them to answer about the tone, setting, plot, pacing, conflict, dialogue and more to help them craft their critique. Perhaps most importantly, please provide written guideline showing how to critique someone else's work. Please do not assume the mentor knows how to provide helpful feedback to someone.
 - Many emerging writers have not yet built up the thick skin needed for publishing and a negative or blunt critique from an established writer can be devastating. You should provide guidance to your mentors about constructive, specific feedback that avoids negative statements and personally criticizes the writer. They can provide suggestions for specific edits but the emerging writers' voice should remain their own.
 - It's okay for them to say something isn't clear or might need to be reworded, but should never rewrite the work.. In addition, the mentors shouldn't discuss the manuscript or writer online or with their friends/colleagues.

When done properly, a mentoring or critique program is an amazing opportunity for all involved and can be just the push a writer needs to make their writing dreams come true.

Chapter 9: Leadership Transition Checklist

by

Alec Peche, Sisters in Crime National Chapter Liaison

Chapters@SistersinCrime.org

When one leader leaves a chapter and a new one takes over, what should be passed along to the new member-leader? Here are some suggestions:

- A red Sisters in Crime binder has been distributed to every chapter. These binders should contain copies of all pertinent records, but also have a record of where your electronic records are stored.
- Complete the [Chapter Update Form](#) to update officers on the National website.
- Job descriptions of the board members. If your chapter doesn't have any, it's never too late to create them. You can ask your fellow chapter presidents for copies of their job description, or ask the national board for a copy of their position descriptions. The national job descriptions are updated regularly, so they are not included in this handbook.
- Financial record pass codes and signatures with banks; the new leaders may need to visit the bank to transfer access from one member to another. Bank records, logins, and passcodes must be transferred to current leaders and must be kept by more than one chapter leader to keep in good standing with Sisters in Crime National.
- A reminder of what information can be found on the national website
- A membership list noting who is delinquent and/or experiencing hardship at the time of the transition
- A list of chapter grants that have been applied for and received and status on the money spent and/or reimbursed, and receipts
- A list of commitments by the chapter for local community presentations or book fairs
- A list of guest speakers already arranged for the upcoming year
- An explanation of who manages the Facebook page, chapter website, and listserv and logins and passcodes for all of these chapter properties to keep in good standing with Sisters in Crime National

Chapter 10: Ideas for Keeping Your Chapter Alive and Well

by

Lori Radar-Day, 2019-20 President, Sisters in Crime National

Membership Engagement

When we think of what it means to keep a chapter vibrant, we often think first of finding new members. We'll get to that. The best way to keep membership strong, however, is to engage with the people who have already shown interest in Sisters in Crime. If you engage with current members, you'll retain more of your membership each year and build a basis for growth beyond maintenance of your membership numbers. You'll also spend less time and worry with recruitment, and will have more time to work on new and exciting programs, which advertise your chapter well to current and new members alike. An engaged, active, and satisfied membership is its own advertisement to other writers looking for a community.

A few ideas for engaging your current members:

- *Small assignments:* Some of your members would never willingly step forward for board leadership, but they might help out with a small assignment: writing an article for the newsletter or website, hosting a meeting or special event, or running the social media account. Sometimes it's easier for leaders to perform small chores rather than to assign them to others, but getting help with short-term projects from others is a great way to show members that they are valued and have a role in the life of their chapter.
- *Shared opportunities:* At the same time, don't parse out the work and forget to share the spoils. If you have the opportunity to include, engage, and promote a member, spread that opportunity around as much as possible. Don't always turn to the "big names" of your chapter when an opportunity arises. Find ways to include members your community doesn't know, but should. If you have an idea for a topic that could be a panel, provide variety in viewpoints by engaging members with varied experiences.
- *Shared conversations:* A great way to engage current members is to ask their opinions. If your board is unsure which way to go on a decision, ask the membership. You may not hear from everyone, but you will have given them the opportunity to have a say. Taking suggestions from your members about topics and speakers for future meetings and events is also a way to open up conversation (and get great ideas for events your members will want to attend).
- *Engaged experts:* We all need community, and our chapters are made richer for the presence of authors who have publishing experience they can share. These authors are key mentors to our newer members, if only by being models for what it looks like to be a publishing writer or to have to change tack in a writing career. If you have authors in your chapter who have stepped back from chapter meeting participation, consider what

else they might have to offer. Could they speak on a topic on which they are clear experts? Could they critique a manuscript or two in a contest or promotion? Follow them on social media and celebrate their successes in your newsletter. Their successes give your as-yet-unpublished members someone to look up to and learn from. Purely social meetings can be difficult to commit to for busy people, but can sometimes draw members who don't normally attend craft talks.

- *Varied offerings:* A simple change your chapter might consider is varying what benefits you offer to members. Varied meeting topics and locations engage current members, no matter what stage of publishing they are in and even if they live a distance away from the “center” of the chapter—and bring new faces through the door.

Here's a case study: A few years ago, the Sisters in Crime Chicagoland Chapter nearly shuttered. It had a good number of members, but none who had been groomed for leadership or had been asked for help. In two years, however, the chapter more than doubled its membership. One of their tactics was simple variety. “In the last few years we've varied the location of our meetings, so that we can connect with writers across the Chicagoland area,” said current chapter president Susanna Calkins. “We choose locations, usually libraries, that are accessible by public transportation but which also offer some parking. Some libraries will help us advertise our event as well. We have found that moving locations throughout the city has broadened access which in turn broadens membership. Since our meetings are public, if we can just get people in the door, we then forge personal connections.”

Your chapter should consider a mix of craft topics, business topics from industry experts, including publishing pros, and talks by experts from crime-adjacent professions who can answer questions members have about policing, arson, poison, etc. You might also offer occasional social events that connect your members to one another and to others in your community. Varying your content means finding topics of value to beginning writers, published writers, traditional and indie, and well-established writers.

But consider who your membership could be, too. “We have actively tried to recruit and support more writers of color, and our membership has grown more diverse in recent years,” Susanna said. “In part, we try to change the content of our sessions, so that presenters, as well as the content of their presentations, represent more diverse voices.”

Fresh Voices

The basis of an active chapter is its current members, but every chapter will find new energy from the enthusiasm of new members. But how do you find new members, and how do you give beginning writers the help they seek?

A few suggestions for attracting and “converting” guests to new members:

- *Likely suspects:* Sisters in Crime National takes in members who sometimes do not know about local chapters. Make sure to work with our Chapter Liaison to send invitations from your chapter to national members within your service area.

- *New partnerships:* To meet new people, your chapter should consider new ways of engaging with good prospects for membership. Where do writers hang out in your service area? Consider other book-centric resources or communities in your service area. Is there a way to engage there, share the workload, co-host a seminar or event that pleases both groups? Look for mutually agreeable situations. Can your members volunteer for a writing-related event near you, in trade for your chapter becoming a sponsor? Check out <http://www.writingdayworkshops.com/event-locations--dates.html> for a series of writing events that often need a squad of volunteers and will trade some perks for your help. Look to writing studios and publishing professionals in your community for opportunities to trade promotional info, or to hype your members as speakers, teachers, or panelists. Host social or other events that are shareable, open to the public, and engage local bookstores or libraries. SinC Chicagoland hosts a “cash mob” holiday shopping event every December with a group of writers and publishing pros called “Publishing Cocktails.” It’s a casual get-together; the chapter helps collect kids’ books for charity and offers raffle prizes for those who donate in the form of gift cards to the host bookstore. “While we do have people from all ages participate, this does tend to bring in a younger social demographic (who might also bring other friends along),” Susanna Calkins said. “In general, we encourage people to bring a friend to a meeting or a session, and this has also worked in terms of building membership.” The chapter also participates in the local book festival, Printers Row, where members can sell their books, and hosts a one-day workshop, as many chapters do. At each event, collect emails for a non-member mailing list; people who have attended your events as guests are likely candidates for membership.
- *New technologies:* If the COVID-19 pandemic has given us a single positive thing, it’s that we now know that getting together with our writing community on virtual platforms is not a bad way to engage our members from home and offer value to those who cannot make the trip to an in-person meeting, for reasons of distance, timing, or disability. Some of our introverts might like to Zoom from home, too. Your chapter may find it intimidating to use new technologies, but there are resources to help you, including the [SinC National Education Team](#). Try some of the free tools to see how easy they can be to use, and watch other chapters who have figured out what works best for them. Figuring out virtual platforms and hosting an online social hour or craft talk might be a small assignment for someone in your chapter.
- *Special value:* One of the methods the Sisters in Crime Chicagoland Chapter used to attract new members was to offer special value for those signing up for membership during a membership drive. (October 1 is a good time to launch new memberships, as they receive membership through the end of the next year at the national level. Your chapter should use this technicality to your advantage.) “We host a membership drive each year, and offer a chance at small raffle prizes to all who join,” said Susanna Calkins. “We offer a free ten-page critique to all new members, which has been a valuable draw.” These critiques come from published members, which is again a way to engage current members. “Most are happy to provide critiques. I think many enjoy the sense of giving back.”

- *Intentional welcome:* Writers seek out Sisters in Crime for help with writing and publishing, but they may be surprised to find a community as generous as the mystery community and Sisters in Crime. One way to make new members feel that generous spirit is to greet new members and introduce them around. Chapter presidents and vice presidents may be tied up with logistics to be the best greeters at a meeting or event, so this may be a small assignment for some of your other board members or other trusted members who can answer questions and make guests feel at home. You may have a standing welcome committee and/or fliers about your chapter on hand for new prospects. Collect email addresses at meetings for that non-member mailing list mentioned earlier; try emailing non-members after a meeting to thank them for stopping by, let them know about any future events they may be interested in, and make sure they know how to join Sisters in Crime.
- *Deep bench:* We not only need to worry about new members, but about developing new voices in our board leadership. Luckily, if you bring in fresh voices to the membership, the ladder toward leadership usually presents itself through, yes, intentional welcome and small assignments. “Those who regularly participate in our meetings are the ones we approach first,” said Susanna Calkins, whose current board is very active and engaged. How did they cultivate such a deep bench of board prospects and those willing to take on a role? Through “personal communications, outreach, and surveys to the membership,” Susanna reported.

Chapter Management

The other area of concern for a chapter should be its management. We’re writers, and may not have the skills to deal with some of the small-business aspects of a chapter. The best course of action is to find skills you need within your current members for board leadership. You may want to trade a membership fee for some help with a small project. For larger projects, you may need to hire a competent consultant.

A few more best practices to consider in managing your chapter:

- *Honest assessment:* If your chapter is struggling, it’s time to figure out why. Take an honest look at your chapter in terms of your membership numbers, your participation, any feedback you can get from members or even potential members who won’t commit to a membership. What do they say is missing? *Who* do they say is missing? What support can you give? What support can you find for those who need it? You will not have all the answers. Engage current members and other chapter leaders in conversation.
- *Real willingness:* Listen to what stakeholders tell you from the perspective of being willing to adapt, or to provide content that meets the needs for others. We can all learn things we didn’t even know we didn’t know, and publishing is changing so much right now, we all need to be nimble to serve our own careers and the needs of our members. Do your best. Admit mistakes. Do better next time.

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- *Hard questions:* If your chapter is coming up against barriers, your board may have to ask some hard questions about the future of your chapter. Get in touch with the Chapter Liaison on the national board for help having these conversations but also look to your members. The chapter is of value to them, too.
- *Open doors:* Whenever an organization starts to think they might close, the answer is sometimes that they should *open*. Find ways to invite in new voices, new leadership, new energy at every step, even when you already have good leadership—*especially* when you have good leadership. Open the doors now, work to be inclusive of all members (see our section on diversity, equity, and inclusion), and let your chapter grow in the organic way it chooses. Anyone can be a Sibling, and our entire community is made better when all are given the tools they need to tell their stories.

Chapter 11: Newsletters and Blogs

by

Lourdes Venard, Guppy Chapter Newsletter Editor

If you have a chapter, especially a larger chapter, you may want to consider a newsletter to keep your members informed. The Guppy chapter, more than 900 members at the time of this writing, has a newsletter that ranges in size from 25 to 40 pages. But other chapter newsletters certainly do not have to be that large! A few pages may be all you need.

Types of News to Include

For chapters, the most important news to include are a calendar of events and member news. You will want to tout the achievements of your members—publications, awards, book signings, conference panels of which members are a part, etc.

Conferences are also good fodder for newsletters. Not all members can attend conferences, so you may want to ask chapter members to submit a small write-up of any conference they attend. These are not only informative, but provide a glimpse into what occurs at a conference and may inspire another member to attend the following year.

Beyond that, a newsletter is a great way of providing information about the craft of writing. The Guppy newsletter, *First Draft*, has articles and columns about forensics, legal matters, marketing, social media, literary agent Q&As, interviews with published authors, a grammar column, and much more.

Staff

A newsletter is *a lot* of work. It should not be a one-person job. The following are roles to consider:

Editor: This person asks for submissions, edits all the articles that come in, and sometimes designs the newsletter as well. If it's a large newsletter, you may want to have co-editors or an associate editor to share the work.

Proofreaders: Ideally, there should be one to three proofreaders. One person can never catch all the errors in a newsletter. The more eyes, the better. *First Draft* has been fortunate to have two eagle-eyed proofreaders for several years.

Designer: In many cases, the editor also designs the newsletter. But if the editor does not have graphic design experience, a separate person might do the design work.

Columnists: It is difficult to ask different members, issue after issue, to write for the newsletter. If you have regular columnists, you know to always expect columns from them. *First Draft* has seven columnists and a couple of other members who are regular contributors. Other articles are also welcome, of course.

Other contributors: Whenever someone joins the Guppy chapter, a welcome letter is sent from the editor, inviting them to write for *First Draft*. This often results in great submissions on topics we have not previously covered. It's also a way for a newcomer to become involved and get noticed.

Setting Deadlines

Your newsletter may come out every month or perhaps only every other month or four times a year (a newsletter every month is *very* time-consuming; if you go this route, you may want to make sure it is only a few pages long).

There should be set deadlines so regular and new contributors always know when an article is due. When setting deadlines, work back from when you want to send out the newsletter. Give yourself enough time to edit the articles, design the newsletter, and send the newsletter to proofreaders. You'll want to give the proofreaders at least a week to read through the newsletter.

And, remember, all of this is a volunteer effort. Those working on the newsletter have other commitments and might not be able to do a rush job.

Designing and Distributing the Newsletter

These days, most newsletters are sent electronically, as the cost of postage and the time to mail out newsletters are two big disadvantages. The two easiest methods for sending out a newsletter are by emailing a PDF or by using a newsletter service, such as Mailchimp, Constant Contact, GetResponse, Moosend, or MailerLite.

First Draft is done using Microsoft Publisher, which comes with some Microsoft Office suites. There are other desktop publishing programs, such as InDesign, or Canva that also work well for newsletters. Once the newsletter has been designed, a PDF is created. Since the Guppy chapter has their own website, the PDF is uploaded to the website, where members can access it. An announcement is sent out with a link to the newsletter on the website.

Microsoft Publisher, as well as other desktop programs, have templates that can be reused time and time again. This makes it easier to plop in articles and art, although some design experience is still necessary. These programs often are not intuitive for those who don't have any design experience.

The newsletter services mentioned above may be easier to use for those with less design experience. These have templates that are more straightforward—often just a matter of dragging and dropping items. These work extremely well with smaller newsletters of just a few pages.

All of these templates automatically select the font and font size. Unless you have design experience, I recommend sticking with the templates—they were created to be visually appealing and professional looking.

When creating newsletters, don't forget photos and other graphic elements. Publications that are all type will look like a wall of gray. Readers—even those who are authors themselves—may be turned off. Ask your contributor to take a photo if they are at a conference or event—a cell phone photo is good enough. You can also use free photo services, such as Flickr or Unsplash, to illustrate your articles. Many newsletters also feature a headshot of the writer, along with a short

bio.

One graphic element you will need is a banner, or header, with the title of your newsletter—*First Draft*, for instance. If you have a chapter logo, you can also include it in the banner. You can create headers using graphic design programs such as Canva or Stencil.

As a member of Sisters in Crime, you have access to the SinC newsletter, *inSinC*. Take a close look at the elements involved. It may spur some ideas for your own chapter newsletter!

Blogs

Some chapters find that occasional blog posts are the way to announce and discuss chapter happenings. Chapter website software may have an embedded blog feature. Depending on the member's interests in graphics and collecting stories for a newsletter, a blog is generally a less time-consuming communication tool, than a newsletter.

Chapter 12: Public Relations and Social Media for Chapters

by

Alec Peche, Chapter Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

Chapters can use social media and a variety of other tools to grow their chapter and keep their local writing community informed about special speakers or programs. Social media can also be a way to bring the spotlight to local libraries and bookstores.

Most Sisters in Crime Chapters have a Facebook group and page. Some also have a private Facebook group that they use to communicate with members. Other chapters are also posting on Twitter and Instagram.

Ideas for posts:

- pictures of chapter members' writing spaces
- pictures of members' writing companions (cat, dog)
- guest speakers
- chapter meetings including on Zoom or other technologies.
- new book releases from chapter members
- book signings or readings
- writing quotes
- summer or other seasonal reads by members
- meeting dates, times, and how to access
- anthology announcements
- features on new Board members
- spotlight members recognized by other organizations, newspapers, or the news
- spotlight where you meet – library or cafe, etc.
- if you have a book club as part of the chapter announce your reading list
- share any jewels of information from a guest speaker

Stay upbeat in your publicity and inclusive in your language. Share your upcoming meetings and speaker announcements with local media or arts calendars. Cross-promote with other writer organizations and independent bookstores in your community, and post fliers for your events at the local library and coffee shop. Share the information where writers are struggling to finish their first works; many beginning writers have no idea there's a community for writers—and make sure readers know they are welcome, too.

Chapter 13: Technology for Chapters

by

Barbara Ross, Web Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

Our chapters use a wide variety of technologies to recruit new members, inform current members, process new and renewing members, collect dues, and facilitate online or virtual meetings.

Many chapters will be ahead of or behind your chapter on the technology curve. Whenever you undertake a new initiative, it is a great idea to check in with your fellow officers on the [Chapter Presidents Group](#) to see what expertise they have to offer.

This chapter covers the following topics:

- [Member Management Systems](#)
- [Building and Maintaining Websites](#)
- [Contact Management \(E-mail\) Systems](#)
- [Virtual Meeting and Classroom Systems](#)
- [Online Forums](#)
- [The SinC National Website](#)
- [Recruitment Systems](#)

Member Management Systems

Member management systems are all-in-one solutions for member organizations. They can manage your member database, support your website, allow you to collect dues, send emails, register people for events and maintain blogs and forums.

It usually makes sense for a chapter to reach a certain size before investing in the learning curve for these systems. However, once they are set up, they can make chapter management much easier.

Here are some examples of member management systems. If your chapter is reaching the threshold of unmanageable using other solutions, you may want to check them out.

- The Guppy chapter uses [Wild Apricot](#).
- The New England chapter uses [Club Express](#).
- SinC National uses [Your Membership](#).
- Next Wave Group, SinC National's management company, has expertise in [Member Clicks](#).

There are a variety of other products available. Each chapter must assess its own needs.

Building and Maintaining Websites

The chapter website is your stable presence on the World Wide Web—the place where members and recruits can always find you. A website provides a place to promote meetings, the organization, and chapter authors. There are a variety of free and inexpensive software packages that make it fairly simple to start a website. Wordpress, WIX, Weebly, and Squarespace allow users to create a website without understanding how to code. Even if your chapter hires someone to create the website initially, be sure to pick a platform that allows a chapter officer to easily update and manage it.

Here are some examples of chapter websites.

- Canada West <https://sinc-cw.ca/>
- Northern California <http://www.sincnorcal.org/>
- Los Angeles <https://sistersincrimela.com/>
- Florida Gulf Coast <http://flgcsinc.com/>
- Chicago <http://www.sincchicago.com/index.html>
- North Dallas <https://www.sistersincrimenorthdallas.com/>

Contact Management (E-mail) Systems

An email system is important for managing your email list and sending information and newsletters to members. Some chapters also do mailings to non-members, for example to lists of librarians or bookstores that your chapter has collected.

There are several services that offer no or low-cost entry. Common email systems include MailChimp and Constant Contact. There are several others. If your chapter uses a Member Management system (see above), the contact management system will be built-in.

Virtual Meeting and Classroom Systems

For a variety of reasons, it makes sense to hold some meetings online. Some of our chapters cover entire states, or even multiple states, some are in areas where traffic, parking and meeting space present challenges, sometimes weather happens, and on rare occasion, there's a pandemic – all issues that make it hard to meet in person. These technologies provide a way to meet face to face, conveniently from your own home.

Examples of meeting and classroom technologies include

- Zoom
- Crowdcast
- Skype
- Facebook Live

In 2020, SinC National is offering Chapter Grant monies to support chapters that wish to use this kind of technology. For more information, contact our [Chapter Liaison](#).

Online Forums

In addition to virtual meetings and classes, many chapters use online forums, also called groups or listservs, to stay in touch. It is possible to have a group for the whole chapter as well as, for example, a group that allows the chapter board members to easily stay in touch.

SinC National, the Guppy chapter, and a number of other chapters use [Groups IO](#) for this purpose.

The SinC National Website

The SinC national website provides chapters with the capability to use its event management, calendar, email, messaging, blogs and forums at the chapter level. For more information see elsewhere in the handbook on [Optional Features](#).

Recruitment Systems

MeetUp – Meetup is a social meeting software wherein a chapter can advertise itself as a writing group and potentially gain membership. Some chapters have reported success with it.

Chapter 14: Chapter Classes

by

Elaine Douts (E. B. Davis), SinC Guppy Chapter Class Administrator

When I first started our program of classes ten years ago, I had the support of the Guppy Steering Committee, including the treasurer and our web administrator. We also had the funds to support the program garnered through chapter dues and the low overhead of an Internet chapter and administrative volunteers. I did not have the qualifications or experience to evaluate platforms for our use as a group or for classes and was assisted by our web administrator. One person cannot do everything if a chapter wants to present an extensive program of classes to its members. It is a group effort.

We had two parameters limiting our classes. First, the Guppy Chapter is nonprofit. We don't make money from our classes. In fact, we subsidize every class from \$5-\$20 per person, per class. Those funds helped get our program off the ground, which I will explain in the Instructors section, below. Second, in accordance with our Bylaws, no member can profit from the chapter, which means I cannot hire any member to instruct us. Our members have from time to time given free classes to our membership using our groups' email system. We have their written documentation in the files section of our website that members may access for free. I know many of our now published members could give us wonderful classes in a myriad of topics, but they cannot due to our Bylaws. Check the Bylaws of your organization before you decide to hire anyone.

Instructors

Because the Guppy Chapter was unknown to many of the instructors I approached and because our class program was new, some wanted a minimum guarantee for payment. I felt like a used car sales person selling our membership and its potential. It was a gamble because I had no idea how many of our members would sign up for classes. Often, and this was ten years ago, instructors wanted at least \$600 to conduct a two-week class. I guesstimated the number of members that would register for the class and divided \$600 by that number. Somehow it worked without us losing a lot of money. I was then able to establish a rate we paid instructors for two or four-week classes, which became the standard lengths, and as we've progressed, those rates have risen modestly.

Anytime you inquire about an instructor's courses, get a written course description with at least an outline of the lessons they will present, including homework for those lessons, prior to agreeing to anything. Submit the materials to your leadership for their opinions and get a consensus. Given the topic, there should be two to three lessons per week. Make sure the homework assignments allow students enough time to participate and submit homework, especially if many have full time jobs or manuscript deadlines. Feedback from instructors is essential for members. It's often why they take classes. Make sure the instructor knows what the chapter's expectations are concerning student/instructor interaction and written feedback.

Contracts

When finalizing the deal, make a boilerplate contract that specifies:

1. Course dates, payment per student, how payment will be made, and when they can expect payment. Our treasurer sends instructors a check on the first day of class, which means we do not issue refunds to students thereafter.
2. Class policies for both instructor and students, including not contacting students by private email or using members' email addresses for their newsletters.
3. For craft classes, include a provision requiring instructors to respond and provide feedback to all members' homework assignments and to answer questions. Whether or not they want to address revised homework resubmitted by students should be up to them. In a course that perfects synopses, cover blurbs, or agent letters, revisions will be a necessary part of their job.
4. The date when you will delete the class website. This step assures instructors their materials won't be up on the Internet forever, making pirating less likely.

I will not address what to include in contracts for webinar instructors since we've never done one, but I would think having the right to archive the video for members and all handouts would be necessary.

Administration

- Timing—When choosing classes/platforms, take into consideration where your members are located. Most chapters cover a geographic region, but our chapter is global. Having webinars or classes that have specific class times doesn't work. But it may work for your group.
- Costs—if you handle registration, website creation or video production, and method of getting members into the classroom/webinar site, the cost of classes should be much less than what instructors charge for classes hosted on their own websites.
- Control/Ownership—Taking over administration of classes enables your chapter to control the policies that govern your program.

Members

The Guppy Chapter (also known as The Great Unpublished) focused on helping its members get published, and now many are published. Our primary focus is on providing courses that increase the writing skills of our membership. As more of our members became published, their needs expanded past craft to mystery specific topics and to marketing/book promotion. Defining your membership's needs is fundamental in determining what classes you give and what platform you choose, which may end up being a complement of platforms. See Classes, below.

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As our program and membership increased, it became apparent that class policies had to be established. We found our instructors being privately hounded by members to read their manuscripts and recommend them to the instructors' agents. Or they wanted individual rather than group lessons. We also found that classroom decorum had to be established for a working relationship between instructors and students. Below is a list of our policies. Yours may differ, but for classes in which students and instructors cohabit for a minimum of two weeks, the development of policies was imperative. We will not register members for classes until they sign a statement that they have read and will abide by our policies, which are:

Conduct

Often students use their own writing to fulfill homework assignments. We employ the honor system to protect and respect each other's work. Similarly, all lessons are the property of instructors and are subject to copyright law. They are for the students' use only. Course materials cannot be reproduced or distributed by students in any way.

Please do not contact instructors outside of class using their private email addresses. Respect instructors' privacy by not using the email address they provide to class. When you reply to an email, you must do two things. Reply to the group, and be sure to trim (delete the previous emails) especially if you get digest mail to prevent resending the entire digest with each message.

These courses are taught on a group basis. Do not expect private lessons or feedback outside the group.

If you have an issue with the instructor, website, or files, please contact the class administrator.

Instructors will email lessons to the class and upload the lessons to the Files Section of the website so members can download lessons.

Infractions

We ask that you read all of our policies and abide by them. You will be put on moderation if you:

Contact an instructor using his/her private email account. We ask our instructors to report offenders. These are our rules, not theirs.

Flame another member's work.

Waste instructor time by asking them questions outside the scope of the class.

Reproduce or electronically copy an instructor's lessons or other material to an outside source such as another website or publicly accessible document. Materials downloaded are owned by the instructor and are for private use by the member only.

Types of Classes

At the end of every class, we send a survey to members from SurveyMonkey to get their assessments. I provide a link to the survey and send a class-wide email to all of those who registered for the class. SurveyMonkey allows for text box answers, which I choose, so members can feel free to write their thoughts and concerns about the class and instructor.

- **Craft**—pacing, dialogue, voice, plotting, humor, scene building, characters, editing, PR writing (blurb, synopsis, agent/acquiring editor letters)
 - **Instructors**—Published authors, professional editors and educators
 - **Platforms**—having email and files, like Groups.io, Yahoo Groups, or Google Groups. Most of these platforms are free given a small member group of under 100. There are other free classroom sites, like Google Classroom, but these platforms are used by schools with grading systems and are more complex than necessary.

Members learn by doing and practicing. Craft classes benefit members the most when they are given written lessons in a given topic, asked to submit homework demonstrating their grasp of the presented lesson, and provided feedback by the instructor. The dialogue between the students and instructor is conducted via email. Some students don't like submitting their work in front of a class, but it is beneficial for students to see others' work and instructor feedback. It also ends the instructor answering the same questions repeatedly.

One of our instructors embeds links to YouTube in his lectures, which provides a mix of media and gives students a personal address that is often beneficial, but not necessary for craft classes. **The most important aspects of craft classes are receiving written lessons, which can be referred to long after the class is over, being able to write homework to practice, and getting feedback from the instructor. To be cost effective, classes must be for the group, not for the individual.**

- **Mystery specific**—crime scene analysis, forensic psychology, serial killers, cybercrime, police procedure, weapons, specific agencies (FBI, CIA, Homeland Security)
 - **Instructors**—Police officers and detectives, forensic specialists and psychologists, security specialists, and agency agents, and any of the previously mentioned combined with fiction writing.
 - **Platforms**—having email, files, and visual aids, like Groups.io, Yahoo Groups, or Google Groups, which provides for the uploading of photos. Although webinars might be beneficial in demonstrating how weapons are

handled or showing blood splatter or bullet trajectory, photos can be just as effective. Many of the webinar-type platforms provide for handouts. If the course is designed to be an overview of agency jurisdictions, webinars can be effective with downloadable printouts. **Often in mystery specific classes, members want feedback on passages of their writing to ensure authenticity and correct use of language, lingo, and slang. To accomplish this, using a platform that has an email system is important so the instructor can provide guidance.**

- **Book promotion/publicity, and marketing**—Book launches, Interviews, Social Media, Advertising.
 - **Instructors**—Publicists, authors, social media experts, PR experts, marketers.
 - **Platforms**—having a visual class, such as a webinar, is the best format for promotion classes. **Due to the very nature of promotion, having a publicist or other marketing profession explain concepts while demonstrating public speaking and body language is effective using webinars. Most of these platforms, like Zoom, allow for handouts, PowerPoint outlines, and lists to be downloaded. Platforms like Zoom also allow for conversation among participants and enable questions to be answered by instructors.**

Questions for Chapter Leadership to Address Before Starting a Classes Program

There are factors to consider if your chapter wants to provide classes to its members. The answers to these questions will determine the type and frequency of classes you want to give, the media platform to use, and the management of such a program.

- What is your financial goal for the class or classes? Will you subsidize member attendance, attempt to breakeven or attempt to generate revenue you will use for other chapter activities?
- How many classes do you want to give per year? The more classes your chapter gives, the more practiced your leadership becomes in the administration of classes and the development of policies.
- What is your objective for the classes?
- Do you have someone that will take administrative responsibility for the classes? Having someone dedicated to just this task is important for continuity and so members have someone to contact if there are problems. Having a specific person will help communication with instructors.
- Do you have administrative software in place for class registration/payment? You

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have members who pay dues through some payment system. Will this system be adequate for class payments?

- Do you have members who are well versed with various Internet platforms for classes? It's helpful to have someone with professional experience evaluating platforms for classes. Our web administrator chose Groups.io for our larger group after assessing its technical capabilities and cost. It also works well for classes.
- Will your treasurer be able to do the extra work that classes entail? Having an automated system like Wild Apricot decreases the workload for the treasurer when receiving payments from members for classes. Some instructors allow payment via PayPal, but often the treasurer will still have to send checks to instructors for payment of classes.

Although it has been a lot of work providing classes to our membership, we've seen our members grow as writers and become published. By helping them, I think we have fulfilled the aims of our chapter. Of course, it hasn't just been classes that have helped achieve that goal, but also providing a non-threatening and noncompetitive environment in which newbie writers can thrive and become accomplished authors. If you have any questions about this chapter or need help, please let me know. I am in the SinC directory or at classguppy@sincguppies.org.

Chapter 15: Special Events – One Day conferences, Writer’s Workshops, etc.

by

Tracee de Hahn, Membership Development Liaison, Sisters in Crime National

Special Events provide an opportunity to bring together active chapter members and draw in other members of the writing community. SinC chapter special events typically revolve around writers and readers and might include workshops and conferences. Within that, a chapter might host a one hour gathering, a daylong event, an event with multiple forums/panelists or one organized around interaction with a special guest. While each event is unique, there is a great deal of expertise available – reach out to organizers of events similar to what you are considering and ask for their advice and recommendations. They can provide assistance critical to initial decision making and later provide more detailed tips for a smooth outcome.

Before Your Chapter Commits to an Event

Some steps are common to any event and should be considered before a commitment is made.

- What is the purpose of the event? What is the desired outcome? Is it imagined as a one time forum or the start of an annual event? Manage expectations. It is rare for any special event to make money outweighing the costs and time needed to host it. Even major fundraising events resulting in large contributions are typically more about raising awareness for a cause than about the actual dollars (the hope is that the event will result in more dollars raised/support through the rest of the year). Therefore expectations for most major events are increased awareness. For Sisters in Crime this might include education and growth of local support. Last gut check: Is the event what you Need or what you Want? (You may want a black tie gala, but need a bare bones workshop.)
- Who is available to lead/chair the event? Is there adequate support to form a committee and necessary volunteers for the scope of the event? Adequate support must include a back up to the lead/chair in case of emergency in the weeks before or day of.
- Evaluation of additional resources needed. These might include physical space, on-line resources, financial resources (deposits, speaker fees, etc.)
- Lead time for the planned event. (Arrangements for speaker, reservation for required space, advertising to members and non-members)

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- Other things to remember: date selection (keep in mind other local/national conferences, holidays, etc.) While you have a target audience in mind (i.e., don't conflict with other writer's conferences or workshops) your audience has other interests and pulls on their time, so don't discount other conflicts: local sports events, the beginning of the school year, non-writer's festivals, etc.

It is essential to manage goals and expectations among the organizing committee/chapter. It is also essential to keep the scope of the event within the resources of the group. It is far better to have a well run, successful event which may expand in the future than to overreach and stress the group's capabilities. Part of this means expecting problems (bad weather, power outage, speaker cancelations, significant unexpected news/activity that cuts into participation) - this may range from a weather event, to last minute participation by a local team in a national championship game, to a host of other unexpected problems. Know that this will happen and be prepared to make adjustments as needed. The attitude of "it will work out," helps. Special event organizers are swans, serene above the water and paddling furiously beneath.

In addition to hosting a writer's conference or convention a SinC chapter may also host less complicated field trips to places of interest to crime writers (for example, morgue or coroner's office, police station or training academy, firing range where members can handle weapons, crime lab, police dog training school, trial in progress, tour of jail or prison).

These field trips are rather straightforward and are easily managed. The benefit of a field trip is that it gives the group a focused activity. The content is provided by an expert associated with the location and the relationship of the event to outcome is straightforward: educational.

Special Event Details

Even a small special event takes time and planning. The following points apply to events ranging from small to large, from a morning to several days. They assume that you have already considered the first five points and have a clear purpose/outcome, committed leadership/committee members, and have done a preliminary evaluation of available resources. Now you will go a step further and pick a specific date, place, and move on to the other details.

Committee

An enthusiastic committee will remain enthusiastic if they feel supported. This means matching the size of the committee to the desired event. Success breeds success, which can lead to growth and healthy turnover. Preferably the committee will be formed at least 9-12 months in advance. The group needs a clear structure to facilitate ease of decision making. In addition to a chair (or co-chairs), other members will handle finance, advertising/publicity, etc. Think through the event experience and assign a "person in charge" for each necessary component. This might include venue, speakers, registration, bookstore liaison, volunteers, etc. The structure will resemble a tree with the chair as the trunk and significant components as the main branches. The volunteers who have specific responsibilities the day of are the tiny tips of the branches. The more complex the event, the larger the committee. For example, there might be a Food Chair for

an event with a box lunch. This person is the liaison with the caterer, responsible for that budget and for communicating menu choices (if pre-ordered) to the Registration Chair, the final estimate and payment details to the Finance Chair, and for working with the Speaker Chair to make sure any special guests/speakers have appropriate meals and to coordinate distribution of meals with the Volunteer Chair. A larger event might be structured with a Chair for each portion (one for the author's breakfast, another for the keynote lunch, and yet another for the evening awards dinner) instead of one person in charge of all meals. Committee structure is flexible as long as the committee has thought through all elements at the outset and assigned the roles, ideally with clear lines of decision making and coordination. Certainly additional committee members may be added as the event develops. At the onset, and again as a check, a group "talk through" of the event experience is critical. Think it through from various angles: When members first learn of it. When outsiders do. How do they learn about it and what happens next? When can someone actually sign up? What is that experience? What happens if the attendee has to cancel? What happens if the event is canceled? Continue through the day of the event. What happens when an attendee arrives who is pre-registered, when someone walks up (if that's possible, should it be?), when the guests of honor arrive? The volunteers? When these details are noted, the tasks may be divided up and assigned.

Establish at the outset what decisions can be made without involving the Chair/Finance chair. Who can commit to expenditures? A predetermined budget based on solid estimates is key. Good communication is important, but shouldn't overwhelm the members who are, after all, volunteers. Make committee meetings (whether in person or virtual) move along briskly. A round-the-table account of progress will make everyone feel included but the committee likely wants to avoid getting down in the weeds with every decision. Trust your committee chairs for the various component parts after initial discussion about the look and feel of the event, which also involved budget outlines. Remember that both committee members and volunteers are an invaluable asset. The volunteers might have enough fun to want to serve on the committee the next year. Their tasks entail very little pre-event work, leaving them free to show up and do their bit. They might assist the Registration Chair at the sign in table, serve as runners, help distribute box meals, keep time for panels, greet and escort special guests/speakers, etc. You need enough people to make sure everything runs smoothly, but don't have volunteers show up and have nothing to do. Volunteers want to be necessary and busy.

Size of Event

Once you've determined the type of event, you must determine the size. Let's take a writer's workshop as an example. Is the event built around one author serving as instructor? How many people do they believe is appropriate for their teaching method? Large lecture hall, small workshop? If you host a conference, think through venues and associated costs, then pair this with available panelists. Let's say you have free access to space, but you want to use only *New York Times* bestselling authors as panelists (maybe the theme is A Day with *New York Times* Bestsellers). Depending on your locale, you may have access to dozens of appropriate authors to choose from (perhaps requiring a day long conference) or three authors, which might mean creating one fantastic panel (perhaps bookended by remarks by the authors). Be creative but realistic. Tailor the events to your location, needs and goals. Learn from other events, keeping them as a pattern then tailoring them. Budget, time to plan, and availability of committee

members will play a key role in your decision making.

Speakers/Panelists

Be creative. A well-known author might be willing to keynote if the event is in conjunction with his or her book tour. This might lead to a partnership with a bookstore. A large store might be interested in co-hosting. When inviting speakers or any special guests, be clear about any fees. Many large conferences don't pay travel expenses, so they are not expected. However, the author is doing it for publicity, so a large audience might be key to participation.

If your event has a workshop leader, keynote speaker, author talk, etc., it will improve your attendance greatly if the speaker(s) has a following. Think about a publicity angle – what will appeal to a local TV or radio station for a short segment? (Tie in to people who love CSI or a certain book series, etc.) Even a small event needs to stand out. What's the hook?

Don't rely only on local speakers if possible. While it sounds easier to have locals, and can keep costs down, most places 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 event. Be creative. Who do your members know outside the geographic community? Turning to authors on tour might provide a solution. This doesn't only apply to cities. An author driving between large cities might agree to an event between places. Or they might agree to an event before/after their book store appearance across town.

At the other end of the spectrum, don't rely entirely on the draw of a well-known name. Authors are paid to write and not all are engaging public speakers. They shouldn't have to be since these can be two separate skills. It helps if someone on the committee has met and/or seen the person you are inviting speak in public. It is imperative that the speaker's personality and delivery engage the audience to ensure good attendance at future events. Remember that you aren't limited to authors. Think about speakers from related fields: 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).

Once you choose your speakers, get a firm commitment from them so that publicity can begin. Assign one person (the Chair, or the Speaker Chair, etc.) to maintain contact. You need to clearly communicate details, be enthusiastic, and keep them committed. Encourage them to promote your conference through blogs, websites, email lists, etc. Send them brochures and fliers to share at appearances.

For a larger event, you might have a local guest of honor as a way of generating goodwill and publicity. This might be a local author, bookseller, expert in the field (a police chief who loves reading crime fiction), famous forensic dog (and their handler). They might make it on TV/radio to talk about your event! They might simply sit at a head table. Perhaps they introduce a keynote speaker, etc. This might be a way of broadening your audience – however you can't expect members of the public to come to a writer's workshop if they don't want to write. This applies mainly to more general conferences where reading and writing play a role.

Local editors/agents might be willing to offer critique sessions in conjunction with the event. Participants might have to pay an extra fee for this. Access to agents and editors can drive up

attendance; these sessions usually sell out.

Venue/Food

Cost, location, specifics of facility, parking. These elements are all important when considering the venue. Places range from community centers to university facilities, libraries, restaurants with special event rooms, churches and hotels, among other places.

Hotels can be turn-key, meaning they take care of many details once the contract is agreed upon. (Although you must have someone assigned the day of the event to ensure that the hotel is delivering on expectations). If you hold the event in a hotel, you will likely have to include “extras” in the contract: meals, coffee and water service for break, etc. Meet with the hotel’s event planner before signing a contract to be clear on costs including fees, taxes and tips.

Hotels may provide a room for your speaker(s) at a discounted price. And, of course, a discounted block of rooms can be reserved for attendees traveling in for the event.

A hotel venue should also be able to provide technical support (for a fee, of course). Power Point projectors, screens, etc. You might be able to provide your own equipment, but then you will have to rely on attendees (or an assigned committee member) for technical support.

Hotels are certainly not the only option. When considering any place, weigh all of the elements before making a decision. A hotel or large venue bill may sound like a lot, but paying for each element separately may end up costing as much or more and require more individual committee members to take on tasks (for example, arranging for AV equipment delivery and assembly, food delivery and service/clean up). Detail everything and compare before making a decision. Ask plenty of questions and think through how accessible the venue is. Will the venue attract your expected crowd? Will use of university facilities draw students? etc.

Food shouldn’t be ignored. Even if food is only coffee and water, food makes an impact. Good food (doesn’t have to be fancy, but good) might mean a repeat participant the next year. Bad food leaves an even more lasting impression and might be the first thing mentioned when the attendee is asked about the event. Decent coffee, hot tea and water can keep a crowd happy during break!

A final note is about liability insurance. Smaller venues may not provide insurance as part of your contract, and the cost of coverage might tip the balance toward using another facility. When seeking insurance, consider Firemen’s Insurance online. They provide good coverage at a good price.

Timing of the Day(s)

Attendees may want time to mingle, but that shouldn’t interfere with the sense of a packed morning/afternoon/day of activities. In other words, don’t give attendees time to drift away with a too long break. However, do include enough bathroom/beverage breaks that people are comfortable. The venue will play a role in this. A smaller place will have limited restroom facilities and lines might get long, so take this into account. This is another key reason to provide beverages. It keeps people where you want them, rather than making a dash down to a local shop for their caffeine.

Publicity/Advertising

Publicity is free whereas advertising is paid for (unless it is donated, usually as an in-kind sponsorship by the magazine or newspaper). Publicity is, for example, appearing on local TV or news programs to talk about your event (perhaps on the early morning or noon segment). Radio can be an excellent outlet, as are local podcasts. Book well in advance since you want to time your publicity with the registration period for your event.

List your event in conference calendars, newspaper event calendars, online event calendars, and radio community announcements. Prepare a simple Media Release with the pertinent information for ease of sharing correct details. 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.

Advertising might be fliers posted around town (appropriate to local custom and ordinance – think of places where your audience will see them: bulletin boards in libraries, grocery stores, restaurants, or community gathering places). Ads may also be placed in local newspapers and magazines. Don't forget smaller community magazines. Costs add up, so pick any paid placement carefully. For a large event a newspaper or magazine might agree to serve as a "presenting sponsor" and carry the cost of the ads in exchange for their name to be displayed at the event. These details are worked out on a case by case basis. Sponsor structure is another flexible component which is decided based on the size of the event and the customs of the locale.

Social Media: Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels work best when using an established channel. Social media also has different appeal to different age groups. Additionally, while social media may feel like instant access, it works best when developed as a strategy. Which social media network is best suited to your event/audience? Do you have a large enough network in place (perhaps build it up in conjunction with the lead up to your event starting months out)? Is there a multi-pronged strategy - early hashtags to build interest followed by a call to action?

Your members: alert your internal circle, members, former members and, when appropriate, past event attendees by e-mail or a newsletter if you have one.

Branding: Does your event have a title? (Surely.) Possibly a theme (for a longer event). How will you present it? Design a poster (and a brochure for a larger event, even if only presented on line) that clearly tells what will happen, where, when, and who should attend. Again, what's the hook?

Registration

Think through the user experience. What do you, as organizers, need to know about attendees (contact information, payment information, food preferences, panel preferences, author/reader, etc.). What does the attendee need to know (where it is, when, is food provided, where/when is the final schedule available). If you are hosting a workshop do participants need to bring materials? What are your cancellation policies, etc?

Keep the information as simple as possible, however make sure you gather all of the

information, and share all of the information necessary for a successful event. Today, registration will almost always be online, with a mail-in option. An online presence for your schedule is also helpful. This might be simply a .pdf on your group's Facebook page, allowing attendees to do a last minute search when they forget their materials the day of and can't remember the location.

If you aren't using a program that collates information for you, consider creating an Excel spreadsheet to record all attendee information. Name, email contact, and all other details you need for each attendee (food choices, are they are a complimentary guest, pay-at-the door, etc.).

Decide on registration packet contents. It may be as simple as a name sticker. It might be a name badge and printed schedule. From there it can grow to pen and notepad, free books, etc. If you have a big event with a high-profile speaker, the publisher might provide something. It can't hurt to ask. Perhaps a copy of the recent paperback to the first 20 registrants? Or a slim "first chapter booklet" created for an upcoming book?

Finance/Budget

Someone should be assigned responsibility for the money. This person makes sure the bills are paid. The budget should be determined in advance, with guidelines for all of the chairs about entering into contracts. Typically only one or two people have the ability to actually sign a contract; this measure protects everyone. Determining the budget is also a key element in determining the type and size of event. If the event must pay for itself, estimate all expenses, then estimate the number of attendees. This is a sliding scale, and can be tricky for a first time event. For example, price per person may go down because some fees are "per delivery." Think about renting AV equipment. This cost would be divided among 10 people or 1,000. Food is per person, however, a caterer/restaurant/hotel has certain fixed costs that will be apportioned differently the more meals served.

A small event, a workshop for example, might be paid for out of the chapter's treasury free of charge to members. (Your chapter should consult Sisters in Crime National about a Chapter Grant for your event.) However, a small fee sometimes helps people feel the value, and assists with planning. Even \$5 or \$10 dollars feels like a commitment. This takes an event from "sure, I'll come" to "I've reserved my space and will go."

When planning expenses, keep in mind the timing of deposits and final bills. Then look at when you will collect registration monies. Some deposits are required months in advance, whereas local events typically require an RSVP no more than a month out. This varies depending on local custom and the particulars of the event, but people may hesitate to sign up too far in advance (a month, six weeks maximum is typical for a local event). It is imperative to advertise/publicize before this so your core group will have it on their calendar as a save-the-date item.

Don't leave small items out of the initial budget. Think through all aspects of the event and assign costs. The small things can add up, so start with the obvious larger items (venue, food, speaker fees) and go all the way down to the cost of name badges, pens and pads of paper for workshop attendees, etc. If you are paying a speaker fee, be clear. Is this a flat fee and they have responsibility for all other expenses? Or are you paying for hotel rooms only? Hotel plus food they charge to room service and cost of valet parking? Be clear up front and avoid embarrassment later. (You only have to reimburse for one international first-class plane ticket

when you'd budgeted for economy to not make that mistake again.)

Be conservative when estimating attendance for income. Better to be pleasantly surprised than to fall well short of paying for the event. And be flexible. If you've planned for 300 and reserved a hotel ballroom but find the reservations are coming at around 75, see if the hotel will work with you to move to a much smaller room. Remember that you determine the measure of success – particularly in public. Paste on a smile and be grateful for each person who came. Those who show up shouldn't hear the woes of small attendance (or any other problem). You depend on them feeling good to make the next event even better. Any groaning should take place with the committee after the event!

Extras

Bookstore/Book Sales

Depending on the scale of your event you may be able to entice a local bookstore to handle sales. At a minimum you need to provide a table to authors to sell their books to attendees. Clearly communicate this to the speakers/panelists when they agree to participate. Authors may have to arrange for books to be shipped, etc.

Giveaways

Giveaways advertise the organization. However, think carefully before investing in them (bookmarks, notepads, etc.) What is the purpose? Will it join the myriad other freebies in a drawer? Are the freebies about advertising (on going and too late for this year's event)? Cost and eventual use are key to deciding whether or not to invest in these items. Larger items such as tote bags or mugs/insulated cups might be offered for sale. Again, keep in mind that the enthusiasm of the committee for the items might not reflect the enthusiasm of the attendees to purchase, therefore be cautious when committing to costs which may be difficult to recoup. (On the other hand, if you have a core group who commit to purchase theirs and therefore pay for the order, the extras would be pure profit. Similarly a local store might be willing to support and co-brand. Always the final decision should be made in a spirit of achieving goals rather than from an abundance of enthusiasm!).

Raffles and Silent Auctions

Raffles and Silent Auctions should be considered only after checking with local and state laws regulating gaming. Locals authors might donate books.

Most important

Have fun. If the committee has a good time, they project that to the attendees! Things will go wrong, so expect it and think plot twist! Maybe this will lead to something better!

Chapter 16: Anthologies

Chapters will find two excellent sources for instructions on how to compile a chapter anthology on the Sisters in Crime [website](#). We have [set guidelines](#) on how to propose and create anthologies which may be a great fundraiser for a chapter. There is also an article from former [National Chapter Liaison, Karen Pullen](#), on her chapter's experience creating an anthology.

THE ROAD TO AN ANTHOLOGY

Elizabeth Zelvin

Adapted from three-part article that first appeared in *InSinC*
(Sept 2019, Dec 2019, Mar 2020)

The road to an anthology? What road? you say.

The editor sends out a call for submissions. She picks the best stories that come in. Is the prose fresh? The plot twisty? The pace brisk? She checks the spelling and punctuation, then runs the changes by the authors. Off the manuscript goes to the publisher. Hey, presto! It's a book.

The writer sees a call for submissions. She sends a story in. Months later, first contact: an email telling her the story has been accepted. Second contact: the manuscript, margins awash in requested changes. She has a week or less to make them. Third contact: a copy of the book in the mail. And that's that.

That's it? It doesn't have to be. The secret of the road to an anthology is exactly the same as the proverbial secret of life: the journey can be as marvelous as the destination. The destination—the book—is worth celebrating. But along the way to publication, abundant rewards are available to both editor and writer.

Overview: What's In It for You

For the editor

1. You won't have to do it alone—you're selecting a team of writers to be your companions on the journey.
2. You'll get to say exactly what you want to say—it's your anthology and you're the boss.
3. You'll hone your skills in editing and revision—and realize that your own writing benefits too.
4. You'll network like crazy. You'll become more visible in your writing community, make new friends, and be amazed at how many people want to help.
5. Your skills in online communication and connection will develop until you and your authors become a community with a common purpose—to share this book with readers.

For the writer

1. You have a golden opportunity to get published—with a work that took two weeks to

write, not two years.

2. You're practicing priceless journalism skills when you write short fiction for anthologies—writing a set length on a set topic to meet a deadline.
3. You have a golden opportunity to learn—as long as you and your editor both see the dialogue between you as essential to the journey.
4. Your story will get better if you can work with your editor on informed and constructive suggestions—you don't have to take all of them.
5. Your ability to take criticism, even appreciate it, will get stronger—a bonus if you plan to keep writing for publication.
6. You're not in it alone. Network with the other writers whose stories have been accepted. You can make friends and allies, maybe even critique partners, promo partners, and/or loyal readers down the line.

The Submission Process

For the editor

The theme must be clear not only in the editor's mind, but also in the call for submissions. If it's not, writers will be confused. Why is that a problem? Because when a butterfly stamps, it can create an earthquake—or at least a speed bump—down the road.

I have two examples from my own experience. I've edited two anthologies, so it's happened 100 percent of the time. The first was a Sisters in Crime anthology by members of the New York/Tri-State Chapter. The group decided that this New York anthology, the fourth in a series, would focus on "landmarks." I was thinking of tourist attractions. But some writers interpreted the term as sites designated as historic landmarks—an overlapping but not identical category. I thought the main character of each story would be a visitor to New York. But the guidelines didn't make that clear. As a result, not one accepted story featured an out-of-towner. I could ask seventeen writers to rewrite their stories. Or I could be adaptable and change the theme. What *did* the characters in these stories have in common? A widely varied but unmistakable New York identity. Our new theme: "What makes a New Yorker New Yorkish?"

My second anthology's original title *was* the theme: *Me Too: Crimes Against Women, Retribution, and Healing*. This project had an emotional element for everyone who submitted. What wasn't clear enough was that we needed genuine short stories, not fictionalized testimony of abuse and assaults on women, however powerful and moving. Well crafted short stories that went beyond the harrowing experiences and gave abused women a voice made this anthology special. It was the editor's job, not an easy one, to say yes to some stories and no to others. Belatedly, we clarified the theme by changing the title to *Me Too Short Stories: An Anthology*. The new title fit better on the cover and left us with a log line that we improved to "Crimes against women, *tales* of retribution and healing." If only I'd put that in the call for submissions! Luckily, we were able to use it in all our promo materials.

Organization needs to start immediately. I'm an organized person who processes very quickly and prefers to invent the wheel for every project, because it's *my* wheel. I set up two Excel spreadsheets, heading the columns with categories of information I thought I'd need. (If I found I didn't, I deleted those columns.) Use any method you like, and have someone else do it if

you prefer to delegate. But *do* record every bit of data, and *do* respond to every email and submission right away.

As each submission came in, I recorded the author's name, story title, and contact info; and separately, name, pen name (writing as), story title, word count, a column for me to "grade" the story (from 1 to 5 works for me), and a column for comments.

I also emailed each submitter back *immediately* to thank her for submitting—for submitting promptly, for the early ones. I said it would be a while before they heard and thanked them for their patience. This established the tone of the relationship that I would form with the contributors. I was also networking with submitters whose stories eventually didn't make the cut. I hoped they would become future readers and friends of the anthology.

Story selection varies with the number of submissions received. The editors of the premier print mystery magazines get thousands a year and can choose the stories they love best from among those that are so well written that they don't need any editing. Most of us don't have that luxury.

Is the story editable? It's gratifying to an editor when a writer makes a leap in understanding how to improve her story by deleting redundancies, improving pace, or distinguishing fresh images from clichés. But in some stories, that kind of fix isn't possible. The writer doesn't understand the concept of point of view or know what you mean by scenes. Dialogue consists of pages of expository writing. In short, the writer needs to learn to write fiction before submitting for publication. You can't be her teacher. You can be impersonal or kind, but you have to reject her story.

Can you work with the author? Editing an anthology is intense and labor intensive. You don't have time or energy for power struggles. You may know a writer personally or have heard on the grapevine that she's a control freak—or clingy, with poor boundaries, which can be just as enervating. Or you may have an instinctive sense from her initial emails that she may be demanding, which could also mean she might argue about your revisions, refuse to make requested edits, fail to make deadlines, and be unavailable in times of tight turnaround. Don't accept her story. Even if it's a potential Edgar winner, it's not worth it.

Selecting stories for a Sisters in Crime chapter anthology is fraught with challenges. If you're the editor and also a chapter member, you probably know every writer who submits personally. You don't have complete autonomy. A panel will volunteer or be appointed to select the stories. If you want a book of consistently high quality stories, you may have to deal with a small pool of submissions—and then not only do an inspired job of editing every story but inspire every author to keep revising her story until it's the best it can possibly be.

For the writer

Read the submissions guidelines, and follow them to the letter. If you are new to submitting for publication, you may feel intimidated or impatient with requirements for formatting. These are the nuts and bolts of the writer's trade in the 21st century, and a single short story is a good practice ground. Here's the simple formatting I asked for on submissions for the *Me Too*

anthology:

Use standard manuscript format: Times New Roman 12 point, double spaced, use Format menu to indent first line of each paragraph 0.5".

Center title and author's name at top of ms, formatted without indent.

Number pages at top right, format author and title as header at top left.

Format section breaks with # centered without indent.

At the end, format ### centered without indent.

If this looks like gibberish to you, open a Word doc or docx and either figure it out or get someone to help you until you understand it and can do it yourself.

Make sure your story meets the requirements for word count, genre, and theme. Send it in well before the deadline if possible. It may help, and it can't hurt.

Don't do anything *else* during the submission period. Don't pester the editor with follow-up emails. Read the submission guidelines carefully to see if they invite follow-up at a particular time or if they reply to all rejected submissions. If your manuscript is not accepted, don't ask for critique or attempt to engage in a dialogue with the editor.

If your story is rejected, review it carefully and make any revisions you think improve it. Then run it past a critique partner, workshop group, or professional editor. When you're sure it's a stronger story than it was when you sent it to the anthology, submit it elsewhere.

If your story is accepted, thank the editor and ask her what the next step is. You're on your way!

The Editing Process

The middle stage of the journey toward an anthology can be challenging for editor and authors alike.

Having picked the best of the submissions, the editor can do a flyover, fixing only gross errors of spelling and grammar. Or she can e-scribble in the margins, expecting compliance, not a substantive response. A dialogue between editor and author? What's that?

The author may assume that now the story's been accepted, her work's done. Overconfident, she may dismiss the editor's comments. Or fearful, she may make changes that instinct tells her are wrong for her story or her voice. A dialogue between author and editor? What's that?

For the editor

The goddess Internet, who is infinite and can be everywhere at once, and her handmaiden, track changes, have transformed the editorial process from an authoritarian patriarchal model to one in which editors and authors are all sitting in a virtual circle and communication takes place continually. Thus community is formed.

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Don't worry, you're still the boss. It's your anthology, and you know what you're trying to accomplish. You have a vision. You have skills. You know how to help an author make the three legs of her story—storytelling, characterization, and prose—stand as sturdily as possible on solid ground.

But you don't have to do it alone. When you tell the author, "It's your story," you're not being disingenuous. You're inviting her to be your ally and companion in the editorial process, so that she's *willing* to make the changes you propose. You're also committing yourself to an open mind about *her* vision of the story. You invite her to think more deeply about *why* she used certain phrases or plot twists and explain it. You can go back and forth as often as you like in Track Changes. And when her way is sound, do it her way. It *is* her story.

Once the authors feel as if they're all in it with you, you can ask more of them. I do my best to adopt a collaborative strategy in suggesting changes. I treat the authors and their stories with the utmost respect. This is a good attitude for any editor to cultivate. When I had to ask the *Me Too* authors to revise what in some cases was emotionally charged material, it felt safe to ask, and they were willing to cooperate, because we were already sitting in our virtual circle together.

If you're working on a Sisters in Crime anthology with chapter members who have been your friends and peers for years, it may take more tact to get some of them to accept editorial authority, which occasionally must be exercised on matters such as deadlines and style decisions. The best course is to be conscious that you will need to use relationship skills that you have already built not only in your personal life, but also with the publishing industry and within the mystery and crime fiction community. It's a journey that promotes growth and can be richly rewarding.

For the writer

Let's assume the editor has a good reputation, or you wouldn't have submitted your story. Or if she's previously unknown to you, you haven't been turned off by anything she's done in the selection process. Given this positive beginning, treat the editing process as an opportunity to ask questions and a chance to learn.

Depending on your experience as a writer of short stories and your ease with 21st century electronic editing tools, you may have a little or a lot to learn.

There's no better way to plumb the mysteries of MS Word Track Changes than to go back and forth a few times with an editor who can help you use it—though please don't expect her to tutor you. Once you're at ease with Track Changes, it's a terrific way to self-edit as well as work with an editor.

If you're a novelist breaking into short stories, an editor can help you step up the pace and "kill your darlings" when you need to. Subplot, elaboration, descriptive writing, and secondary characters are staples of long fiction, but they may have to go if you have only 3,000 or 5,000 words to tell your story.

I've heard from authors at widely varying levels of experience that I helped them make their

stories stronger. I suspect this is mostly due to what I've learned about pace in my own work, both by trial and error and by listening to wiser writers along the way. One of my favorite things a workshop leader ever said to me was, "Liz, you don't need to say three or four clever things in a paragraph. One or two are enough." Saying something once vs twice or more (e.g., in narrative and again in dialogue) also improves pace. You may miss it, and an editor may spot it. Another rule of thumb I offer writers that helps keep their stories tight and down to a required word count is to delete what I call stage directions: *I walked. He ran. She turned. I laughed. He nodded. She shook her head. I smiled.* They slow the pace, and they're neither fresh nor necessary.

Remember that the editorial process is collaborative, not adversarial. It's okay to let the editor make suggestions that may enhance your work. It's also okay to stand firm when your gut tells you that a suggestion changes meaning, is false to your voice, or is not just a killable "darling" but essential to your story. Most times, your editor will be interested in your reasoning and respect your decision.

The Promotion Process

Whew! It was a long road. The anthology is finally published. Are we there yet?

A long time ago, in a publishing industry far, far away . . .

Today, the answer is a resounding *No*. Or an ambiguous *It depends*. On the resources of the publisher. On the publisher's contract with the editor and the editor's with the contributors. On whether it's a SinC chapter anthology, which comes with its own set of guidelines.

In the 21st century, promotion is essential for anyone with a stake in a book doing well. But it's complicated, because the "stakes" are not easily defined. Do we write for fame and fortune? To be published? To be validated? To channel our inner voice onto the page or screen? The editor of an anthology may have the same agenda as the contributors but different motives and rewards. Let's assume that the editor wants the book to do well, and at least some of the contributors want to help.

When promotion begins, the road of an anthology branches off from that of a novel, especially a thriller or mystery that's part of a series. A lot of information is available these days about the many steps the novelist can take to optimize her chances of success. For example, she can build a brand; accumulate followers on Twitter to drive traffic to a newsletter; offer the first book in a series free to entice e-book readers to buy her whole backlist and subsequent books.

Are there anthology series? Yes, but the stakes are usually held by neither editors nor authors but by publishers. In the not-for-profit-on-principle environment of Sisters in Crime anthologies, pushing a series, if your chapter has one, may or may not be more than your membership wants to tackle. There's still plenty you can do to promote your anthology. And to repeat the refrain of this journey's theme song, you don't have to do it alone.

For the editor

The best time to start promoting an anthology is as soon as possible. For me, that was as

soon as I had signed contracts with my publisher and my contributors, seven months before the publication date. I set myself the task of taking at least one small promotional step every day. And I applied myself to thinking creatively about promotion, the same way I do as a writer of fiction.

They say the most effective way to sell a book is buzz. How and to whom can you spread the word? And how can you sustain it without losing the interest of readers and what is currently called “influencers” during the period of several months until they can buy the book and read it?

If you’ve transformed your contributors from a table of contents and list of bios into a collaborative community during the editorial process, you can now call on that community to pitch in. Their readers, networks, social media skills, and bright ideas may complement yours. Even if not all of them want to be part of the promotional process, some will share your enthusiasm. They may even appreciate it, as they did your editorial work with them, as a learning experience in the art of promotion. For that to happen, you have to lead by example.

“First, make a list of everyone you know.” I got that advice long, long ago, not about promoting crime fiction, but during my disastrous and very brief career selling life insurance. You already know that not everyone reads crime fiction and that the most avid mystery lovers are your peers, who have the same hundred books that you do on their “she’ll be so happy if I buy it” list. But you do have a network in the crime fiction community and lists of readers who love your work. Maybe they subscribe to your newsletter or follow you on Twitter. If you haven’t already connected with a network of short story lovers, do it now, and don’t dawdle. Some short story readers, who may also be writers or editors, read *thousands* of stories each year. They will be interested in your anthology.

The real challenge is finding markets beyond the usual readers. What makes your anthology different? My *Me Too Short Stories* anthology was fueled by my belief that there was no suitable market for a story with an abused child as the protagonist. Writing about child abuse—and animal abuse—may be crime fiction’s only taboo. But in my opinion, the taboo doesn’t deter perpetrators; it only silences the children and the women they become. I turned my theme, “crimes against women, tales of retribution and healing,” into a focus for promotion by targeting academic women’s studies programs and domestic violence advocacy organizations.

Anything you can do, your contributors can do better with regards to promoting the anthology. Or something you never thought of. On the other side of the country. For example, one of mine organized a fundraising event in conjunction with her state’s coalition against domestic violence that included not only a discussion by distinguished panelists with expertise in the field but also performance art by survivors of domestic violence.

For the writer

Take an active part in the promotional process. Share the enthusiasm. If you can, set up signings and panels at local bookstores and libraries. If you can make contact with groups whose interests align with the anthology theme, seek them out. As a contributor, you may have been paid nothing, a single copy, or only a small honorarium for your story. But the opportunities for networking and meeting people outside the usual rounds of mystery conferences and Sisters in

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Crime events are unparalleled. If your editor and/or some of your fellow contributors are creative and experienced promoters, you may learn a lot that you can use in promoting your own books in the future.

If there's a launch party, attend it if you can. Your story has been published, and it *might* be widely read. It's a credit that you can use next time you're looking for an agent or a publisher. If the party's at a mystery or indie bookstore in a big city, that's an adventure and a contact you can tuck away for future reference. Above all, the more actively you participate, the more fun it is.

If your anthology is a SinC chapter project, you can work together as a group to host tables at book fairs and other lively venues and maintain a presence on social media, eg Instagram and Pinterest, that features the anthology as well as members' individual work. Libraries are almost always interested in creative programs. Many have mystery book clubs. Your theme may suggest additional topics. Having all the contributors located in a single area, as they usually are in a SinC chapter, is an advantage in planning promotional activities.

Since the pandemic, there are a host of online promotional resources. Book launches and readings on Zoom and CrowdCast, sometimes partnered with bookstores, virtual panel discussions at libraries, and videos on YouTube replacing face to face appearances have become part of "the new normal." Planning sessions for such events can also take place online. Active participation in promoting your anthology is more than fun, more than earning a little money for your SinC chapter, if it's a chapter anthology. It's a wise investment in your future as a writer.

Chapter 17: Grants and Funding Sources

by

Stephanie Gayle, 2020-21 Vice President and President Elect, Sisters in Crime National

Chapter Grants support events hosted by chapters that meet the following criteria: benefiting members, attracting potential new members, and promoting the Sisters in Crime brand. The events must be open to every SinC member, and to members of the public.

Qualifying events can be reimbursed up to \$1,000 on allowable expenses. The grants are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, so it's best to apply as early as possible.

Before you apply, please make sure your chapter is in compliance with all bylaws (such as having all elected positions filled and making sure all chapter members are members of national).

You'll also want to prepare a budget and check that the expenses you're requesting be supported are reimbursable. Examples of reimbursable expenses include: booth rental fees, entry fees, banners, speaker fees or travel costs for speakers, facility rental, event insurance and marketing materials including event advertising costs.

Non-reimbursable fees include food and drink, chapter marketing or promo materials, and certain door prizes.

You must submit your application 90 days before the event. You'll hear if it's been approved within a month (usually much sooner). Within 30 days after your event, you must submit receipts for reimbursement and complete the online form – see [reimbursement request form](#).

From time to time, the National Board may make special grants available to chapters for specific purposes. You can always contact the Grants Liaison to find out if there are other funding options.

If you have questions, please contact Valerie Burns, SinC National Grants Liaison at grants@sistersincrime.org.

Chapter 18: Best Practices

Collaborations with other writing groups – In many of the locations of Sisters in Crimes chapters, one can also find MWA (Mystery Writers of America), RWA (Romance Writers of America), and SCBWI (Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators). Connecting with these other writing groups for the purposes of craft writing experts, one-day conferences, or guest speakers is a great way to reach other writers in your community.

Coastal Cruisers chapter survey of the membership – Are you wondering what your chapter members want from your chapter? Here is a questionnaire that you can use to survey your membership. [Member Survey Questions from Coastal Cruisers](#)

How a chapter can build relationships with local libraries and bookstores – One of the easiest ways to build a relationship with local libraries or bookstores is to stop by and introduce yourself and Sisters in Crime to the establishment. You can then encourage the librarian or the bookstore owner to apply to one of our free grant programs – [We Love Bookstores](#) or [We Love Libraries](#). National has materials that you can request to share with them.

Another popular program is a scheduled book reading by multiple chapter members that have recently published within a named timeline. Coordinate with the bookstore to make sure they have copies of the attending authors or arrange consignment contracts for indie authors. These readings bring sales and people to a bookstore.

New England chapter speakers bureau – Every chapter should have a ready list of authors ready to speak to interested groups. This brochure demonstrates on how our New England Chapter does it. [New England Chapter Speakers Bureau Brochure](#)

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Member Survey Questions from Coastal Cruisers

This survey was created by Roi Solberg, Coastal Cruisers Membership Chair

SinC Coastal Cruisers is a newly formed Sisters in Crime chapter serving Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey Counties in California.

Our chapter is open to all ages, genders, genres, sisters, misters, and folx.

We welcome suggestions for increasing our membership to a full and diverse group.

We've been scouring the three counties for lower cost locations. If you know of a low-cost or zero-cost meeting location, please enter it with your contact information.

We'd love to talk to you about the fun, benefits, and responsibilities of joining our leadership team now or in January 2021 when we'll elect a whole new slate of officers.

Please write your contact information below:

- Name:
- Email:
- Phone #:
- Suggestions for Local Meeting Place: _____

I am a member of:

1. Sisters in Crime National
2. SinC Coastal Cruisers
3. I am a published author
 - Traditional
 - Self-published
 - I have a work in progress

My genre:

1. Caper
2. Cozy mysteries
3. Investigator
4. Noir
5. Procedural
6. Romantic suspense
7. Supernatural/Paranormal
8. Suspense
9. Thriller
10. True Crime

Please complete the survey to assist us in creating a chapter that serves you best.

Coastal Cruisers' meetings rotate each month to these three areas.

Which area is the closest to you?

- Santa Clara County
- Santa Cruz County
- Monterey County

If a meeting is not in your area, are you:

- More likely to attend
- More likely to not attend
- Unsure
- Other_____

Choosing to attend a meeting out your area depends on:

- Speaker
- Travel time
- Weather
- Other_____

How can we assist you in attending all the meetings?

Speakers & Programs

**Is there a particular speaker you'd like to hear from or topic you'd like presented?
What program or programs would you like to see us offer next:**

Please rank in order of importance to you:

- Police procedures
- Advice from member authors
- Programs plotting, synopsis writing, promo writing
- FBI and CIA speakers
- Outings to police departments
- Crime lab
- Socials with Coastal Cruisers members
- Round table discussions
- Social Media
- Publishing—traditional/self-publishing
- Critique groups/mentoring
- Individual critiques from published authors
- Craft Workshops
 - In-person
 - Online sessions
 - Half Day
 - Full Day
- Opportunity to speak to the public (library panels, AAUW, book store events, etc.)

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- Book signings
- Other: _____

What is the best way for us to share news of our meetings, programs, events, and updates with you?

- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Website
- Postcard
- Telephone

For further information about our chapter:

www. Sinc-coastalcruisers.com

Facebook.com/coastalcruisers

Instagram: sinc_coastalcruisers

Twitter: @coastalsinc

Meetup: meetup.com/sisters-in-crime-coastal-cruisers-chapter

Thank you for participating!

New England Chapter Speakers Bureau Brochure
Page 1 of 2



“The best panel we have ever sponsored. Our audience was in awe of these authors. Thank you Sisters in Crime New England.”

Sisters in Crime New England Speakers Bureau

Libraries, bookstores, schools, and community groups have **discovered the rewards** of offering mystery fans programs from the Sisters in Crime New England Speakers Bureau. Increased **patron traffic and satisfaction**, and a more **engaged community** are some of the benefits of hosting an author panel.

From Woonsocket, Rhode Island, to Boothbay Harbor, Maine, across New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and to the shores of Lake Champlain in Vermont, mystery writers speak to packed houses about all aspects of plying the mystery craft, **from inspiration to publication** and more. Whether it's a library's book club or a regional literary festival, our authors travel to all corners of New England.

Do you want to reach more young readers? Does your community have a certain passion they want to know more about? Our Speakers Bureau can **create a panel around a chosen topic**. If May is Cozy Mystery month, or October is filled with thrills and horror, or if February is when love gets complicated by crime, our authors can help your organization with events targeted to your needs.

Sisters in Crime is a robust organization of mystery and thriller authors. Our speakers span **New York Times bestselling authors to emerging greats**. Each engages and entertains your audience while sharing their experiences in the fast-changing world of publishing.

Typically, a panel of **three Sisters in Crime New England** authors addresses a topic chosen by the sponsoring organization, but individual or pairs of speakers are also available. Do you have a local mystery author you'd like to celebrate? Ask us for an experienced author to create an interview to help make your local choice shine.





Our Most Popular Speakers Bureau Topics

Our Speakers Bureau has over 20 years of experience in creating and providing panels for a variety of events. Below are some suggested panel topics. If you don't see what you want here, feel free to inquire. We are happy to share our expertise with your organization to guarantee your event is a success.

Details

Contact: For more information or to schedule an event, contact Leslie Wheeler, our Speakers Bureau Coordinator, at speakersbureau@sincne.org.

Fees: If your library or organization normally offers honoraria, our writers appreciate them. Whenever possible we ask for \$50.00 per author, and many organizations are able to offer more.

Books: We also appreciate the opportunity to sell signed copies of our books, which can be done by the authors themselves or by a local bookstore.

Mystery Making: In this interactive workshop, four mystery authors representing different sub-genres, including cozy/traditional and thriller/suspense, will brainstorm on their feet to create a brand new mystery using suggestions provided by the audience. Fun, fast-paced, and fascinating, this improv game offers important insights into mystery writers' minds and the conventions of the genre.

We're Not Making This Up: What's the story behind the story? Hear how authors combine personal experiences and events ripped from the headlines to create compelling mysteries. From that first idea, to research and their daily writing schedule, authors discuss their creative process.

The Modern Heroine: Single mothers, cops, attorneys, journalists—today's heroines balance relationships and careers, leap over sexist obstacles, and rescue themselves from danger. Women authors are redefining the genre. Find out how authors create strong women characters.

Pathways to Publication: Mystery authors today not only have to write a good book, they must help it get into the hands of readers. Today's authors have multiple choices to bring their book to life. From getting an agent and a large press offer to deciding to go with a small press or to self-publish, hear how authors decided upon their unique publication path.

Stealing from the Dead—Ideas and Where We Get Them: You don't need to be an international spy to write a page-turning thriller, or a law enforcement professional to write a police procedural. This discussion shows how authors put new twists on old plots, research facts and settings, and discover potential stories right in their own neighborhood.

Using What You Know to Write a Mystery: Been a housewife? A domestic worker? Single parent? Lived in a creepy old house? You think your life's been boring—but exciting plots can be buried in your own experience. In this discussion, audience members will find the clues to the novel only they can write.

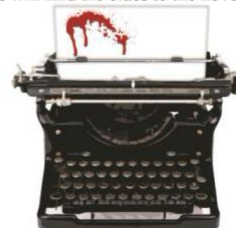
The Modern Historical: The new historical mystery is set in the twenty-first century; writers are using the techniques of the historical to look at their readers' history, and their own.

Death in Shorts: Many mystery novelists also write murderous short stories. Learn how writers plot, construct, and populate the short mystery, from the light-hearted to the noir tale.

More Information

Website: To learn more about our authors, books, Featured Speakers, and the New England chapter of Sisters in Crime, please visit www.sincne.org.

To make inquiries or to schedule an event, contact us at speakersbureau@sincne.org



Sisters in Crime
NEW ENGLAND

Chapter 19: 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. All Chapter names, Bylaws, and logos must be approved by the National Board. Contact the [Chapter Liaison](#) to gain approval.

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 and urge non-renewers to send in their national dues if they want to remain in the chapter. Instructions for [How to Keep Your Member Roster Up-to-Date on the National Website are here](#).

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 extremely expensive and 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 may cover any mishaps. Consult an insurance 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 \$25 to \$40 per year. Chapters do not 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 President@sistersincrime.org), 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

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Sisters in Crime name.

2. We will respond to your letter in writing giving your chapter permission to use the logo or name. The requests should include all proposed 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. You may use your chapter name without this step.
3. The Sisters in Crime name must always be followed or preceded by the name of your chapter.
4. 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. All email accounts, bank accounts, and social media accounts must include your full chapter name.

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. [Information on Chapter Event Grants is here.](#)

What display materials does SinC provide for chapters?

Your chapter may request SinC banners, podium signs, bookmarks, membership pamphlets, and other materials based on availability by contacting Admin@sistersincrime.org. Try to give a month's notice.