

Tips for Organizing a Book Launch

So you've published a book. Congratulations! Now what?

One way to celebrate and promote your achievement is to host a book launch. The WFNS is pleased to offer the cultural federations' common space to its members for book events free of charge¹. But what to do after you've made your booking with us? Read on for our tips on organizing a successful book launch.

1. **Check in with your publisher** – If you have a traditional publisher, it's likely they might have ideas for how to promote your book, including a launch or even a tour. It's a good idea to ask them in advance of your publication date if they have anything planned. They might have a specific time and space in mind for you, possibly with other writers, though they might be open to you organizing your own launch in addition to their event.

It's also possible that your publisher isn't in the practice of organizing events for its authors, or that they aren't organizing a launch in Halifax. In these cases, they might still have money reserved to help with a launch (for expenses like venue rentals and refreshments). Ask your publisher if such funds are available, and how much you have to spend.

2. **Budget appropriately** – If you have a traditional publisher willing to fund your launch, you can work with the amount they're offering, or you might decide to spend a bit more. If you're using the WFNS space, you won't have any venue fees, but you still might want to spend a bit (or a lot!) of money on refreshments. You can keep costs low by preparing some snacks yourself, or by reaching out to friends and family for their help.

If you're self-published, you're entirely responsible for the cost of your own event. Think about your budget carefully. One way to guide yourself is to consider how many books you'd have to sell to make your budget. For example, if you're selling your books for \$20 each and it cost you \$7 a book to have them printed, spending \$100 on food and drinks translates to the profits from selling about eight books. Thinking about your budget this way might help you determine what you're comfortable with.

BTW, if you want to serve alcohol (perhaps wine or beer) to your guests, you'll need a special occasion liquor license available through the Alcohol and Gaming, Fuel and Tobacco Division of Access Nova Scotia. There's a cost for the license and it takes a few days to process. (For info: <https://novascotia.ca/sns/access/alcohol-gaming/liquor/special-occasion-liquor-licenses.asp#faq26471>)

3. **Sell books** – Again, it's a good idea to check in with your publisher, if you have one, before deciding on how you're going to sell books at your event. Some publishers might encourage you to sell your author copies as a way of making money, while others might prefer you ask a local bookstore to come out to sell books for you. While it's great to make a bit of cash from your event, it might be worth it to develop community contacts

¹ We welcome donations from authors who use our space, though this is not necessary.

through good relationships with local booksellers.

If you've published your book yourself, selling copies at your reading is a way to recuperate some of the printing costs. Set up a table with copies of your book. Don't forget to include a sign with the price of your book listed clearly.

4. **Post your event on the WFNS website** – To help promote your event, post a short blurb with the date, time, location, and other details of your event on the WFNS website: <https://www.writers.ns.ca/event-submission.html> Events posted on the website are also included in our newsletter, *SubText*, which is emailed to all WFNS members.
5. **Make a Facebook event page** – While not everyone uses Facebook, a Facebook event page is an easy way to make your launch details easily accessible online. If you don't have a Facebook account or don't feel adept at using social media, consider asking a friend or family member to make the event page for you. Once your page is up, feel free to share it with programs@writers.ns.ca so that we can post it on our own Facebook page.

Post your event page well in advance of your event—aim for a couple weeks or even a month. Consider updating your event page periodically as a way to engage with those who are interested in your launch.

6. **Invite everyone** – Often first-time authors think that only literary types attend book events. But that's not so! Many authors who've hosted launches at the WFNS have found that most of their guests are from their own networks and are not necessarily writers themselves, or even big readers. One WFNS author who hosted a particularly well-attended event noted that at least half her guests had never been to a book launch before.

Think of your launch as a social event. Invite your friends, family, coworkers, people from your softball team or choir ... and anyone else you think might like to come. Even if you don't think someone is likely to buy or read your book, consider that they might be interested in hearing you read and celebrating your achievement.

Public advertising certainly helps to promote an event, but there's nothing like personal contact. Talk to people one-on-one about your launch, and tell them how much you'd like them to be there. Reach out via email or on the phone, or bring up your event when you see someone in person.

7. **Plan your program** – You'll likely want to read a passage from your new book (aim for 10-20 minutes), but what else? Consider asking a friend to serve as master of ceremonies. Provide them with a short author bio that details your writing experience so they can present you. This person might also be able to ask you a few questions about your book at the end of the reading as a way of engaging the audience. If you'd like, follow up with a general Q&A session with audience engagement.

Sometimes it makes sense to invite others to read with you. If a writing friend of yours has also recently published a book, ask them if they'd like to join in. When other writers

are involved, it's likely they will invite their networks, too. If you invite other authors, make sure they have an opportunity to sell their books alongside yours.

Another option is to reach out to friends who are musicians or performers. Ask them to play before your reading and presentation, or after the reading while your guests mingle. Be mindful of whether you can compensate any artists you ask to work at your event.

Overall, the program can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or so—it's up to you, but make sure to leave some time for mingling, snacking, and book buying!

8. **Stay calm** – Take a deep breath. Hosting any event is stressful, but the stakes can feel especially high when you're celebrating something as noteworthy as a published book. If you think it might help, ask someone you trust to stay by your side the day of your launch. They can help out with tasks like last-minute trips to the grocery store, setting up tables and chairs, and greeting your guests.
9. **Create an inviting atmosphere** – Arrive to your launch venue early to set up, and then prepare yourself to greet guests as they come in. Thank them for coming to your launch and invite them to have a drink or snack. If you don't recognize some of your guests, introduce yourself as the author and ask how they heard about the event. It's nice to express genuine interests in others, but try not to spend too much time with just one person so that you have a chance to engage with as many guests as possible. Consider starting your program just a bit later (10 to 15 minutes should do) than your advertised time so as to give people running late the chance to hear your reading.
10. **Take stock of the event** – After the event, ask yourself a few key questions. Was it well attended? Did you sell many books? Sometimes there are only a few guests at an event, but most of the people present buy books. Sometimes a launch is like a big party, but maybe most of the people in attendance aren't interested in purchasing your book. Almost every author has a story about an event where they sold only a handful of books, or no books at all. So don't be too hard on yourself if your reading isn't quite what you wanted it to be. Promoting a book is difficult, but every effort counts.
11. **Look for other opportunities to read and promote your book** – Your official book launch is just the beginning. Be open to other opportunities to read in your community and elsewhere—like literary festivals or other book launches associated with your press. If you feel like your launch wasn't the success you expected, what could you do differently next time?