

Final report

City of Concord grant to New Hampshire Book Festival, 2024

With the help of the City of Concord's generous grant, the inaugural New Hampshire Book Festival brought a wholly new cultural event to Concord, a celebration for book lovers of all ages.

The free Saturday festival brought 57 authors from all over the country (New Orleans, San Diego, Ann Arbor, MI, northern Virginia, New York City, Ottawa, Canada, various points in New England, to name some locations), who brought their diverse backgrounds and experiences to the festival. These authors shared their stories with festival attendees, and these stories ranged from small-town Maine to 1950s Iran, from rural Alaska to World War I-era France to current-day Nepal-Bhutan, and many places and times in between. Festival-goers, in turn, had the chance to talk with authors, ask questions, and get their books signed and personalized. (For more details: <https://www.nhbookfestival.org/authors>)

As festival planners, we were thrilled with how all the author panels and conversations went: The conversations' moderators were well prepared, creating expansive and engaging conversations about these books' themes and the writing life. Adult, children's, and poetry conversations were remarkably well attended, with full houses for almost all the sessions. And perhaps most important, audiences were enthusiastic throughout the day, enjoying programming that was as welcoming to brief drop-ins as it was to the many all-day festival-goers. The festival exceeded our high hopes and expectations.

The festival's subsidized Friday-morning program brought nearly 1300 schoolchildren to the Capitol Center for the Arts to see beloved children's author and two-time Newbery medalist Kate DiCamillo. We were lucky to witness a packed theater of schoolkids transfixed by an author who talked directly to them about the power of stories to connect us. DiCamillo spent an hour answering their many questions, and it was powerful to see every kid in the Chubb Theater with a hand raised to ask a question. These students came from elementary schools in the Concord region and various corners of the state, including under-resourced schools who were able to take part with the help of the festival's transportation grants. (We knew we were onto something when tickets for the schoolchildren's keynote sold out in a day and a half.)

The festival received 166 responses to the post-festival survey, and we were struck by how positive and enthusiastic the feedback was. Ninety-eight percent of respondents referred to the festival as excellent or good, and a majority said the panels stimulated new ideas, new conversations, and the desire to read the authors' books. As to the geographic and demographic makeup of respondents, the majority hailed from the Concord region and central NH, with significant attendance from southern, northern, Seacoast NH, and MA, with smaller numbers from further-away locations. And while the majority identified as white, a significant percentage (a little over 10 percent) identified as Hispanic, mixed-race, Asian American, or Native American. For a bit more festival feedback, see below.

In some cities, book festivals have grown into longstanding community traditions, but for Concord, a book festival was a new concept. The overall festival turnout, around 5,000 attendees (combined number of keynote attendees, panel attendees, and outdoor festival attendees), showed that a book festival is something that New Hampshire was ready for and excited about. What's more, with its outdoor, street-festival component, the book festival also benefited

Concord-area businesses, including The Centennial Hotel, Hotel Concord, Duprey Hotels and catering service, Constantly Pizza, The Works Cafe, Lakes Region Tents, Batulo's Kitchen, Hackleboro Orchards, and festival partners Capitol Center for the Arts and Gibson's Bookstore (Gibson Bookstore's Cafe had its busiest day ever during the festival), among others.

In years to come, we hope that the New Hampshire Book Festival can reach even more people with a second day of panels, conversations, and writing workshops. We'd also like to livestream some of the author conversations to make the festival truly accessible to all.

We want to thank the City of Concord for its financial support and for the continuing help from city staffers right up to festival weekend. As cofounder Emilie Burack noted recently, "from the beginning, our festival mission has been clear: to bring authors together with readers to celebrate literacy, conversation, and community. We are very proud of what we were able to achieve, and look forward to continuing this mission in years to come."

Selected feedback from the festival survey, below:

- "Absolutely loved the event! It felt well organized and was super rewarding with rich conversations."
- "I am clearing my calendar, looking forward to next year!"
- "Hope this event continues in Concord for years to come. Enjoyed the author panels very much!"
- "You all did such an excellent job! I wouldn't have known this was the first year because it was so well organized!"

- “Extremely well thought out and organized on all levels. There was always someone available to answer questions or provide direction. Introduced me to new local authors as well as nationally known ones.”
- “The venue was perfect and the street activities well planned out.”
- “Well organized. Panel discussions were excellent. High quality!”
- “This festival was AMAZING.”
- “We will come back next year for more!”
- Wonderful! Can’t believe the result for a first-year festival!!! The authors I talked to were amazed at how well it went!!”
- “This was fantastic! We very much miss going to the Brooklyn book festival yearly and this really filled the void.”
- “PHENOMENAL EXPERIENCE!!”