

## **City of Concord Event Arts Grant**

### **Final Report of the 2025 New Hampshire Book Festival**

With the help of the City of Concord's generous grant of \$20,000, the New Hampshire Book Festival returned for a second year, a two-day community celebration for book lovers of all ages.

This year, the free Saturday festival opened with a children's parade. Led by Lollipop the clown, kids in storybook-character costumes paraded down Main Street, past festival vendors, food trucks, and sponsor tents. Author panels and conversations for all ages began at 9:30 sharp, with 60 authors from the country and beyond, who brought their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Saturday featured a full day of author conversations and book signings at the Capitol Center and a large tent on Main Street, with an expanded poetry and creative nonfiction track upstairs in the CCA's Kimball House. Festival-goers 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 that 2025's author panels and conversations met or exceeded what we saw in 2024. Moderators led thoughtful, entertaining conversations, sometimes genre-based (suspense, romance, picture book, memoir, poetry headliner), and sometimes more thematic (Family Portraits, Caldecott Spotlight Conversation, World-Changing Women), and the authors were dynamic and engaging. As with last year, audiences expressed

their enthusiasm and asked thoughtful questions. We added more seating for all panels this year, and once again saw full houses for almost all sessions. Also new this year: to accommodate attendees with hearing loss, the festival offered ASL interpretation for all sessions.

The festival's subsidized Friday-morning program brought nearly 1,300 schoolchildren to the Capitol Center for the Arts to see beloved children's author Tui Sutherland in conversation with NHPR's Taylor Quimby. As with the 2024 festival, we were once again so pleased and moved to witness a packed theater of schoolkids transfixed by an author who talked directly to them about the power of stories to connect us, and of the long process of learning to write fantasy fiction. These students came from elementary schools in the Concord region and all corners of the state, including 418 from Broken Ground, and were able to get to Concord with the help of the festival's T-1 school transportation grants. In addition, the festival purchased a special edition copy of Sutherland's latest book for every child to bring home.

As with the 2024 festival, the 2025 NH Book Festival featured an overall festival turnout of around 5,000 attendees (combined number of keynote attendees, panel attendees, and outdoor festival attendees). We were thrilled that our efforts to get the word out about the festival, through local and regional media (*Concord Monitor/Insider/Around Concord; Boston Globe; NHPR; NHPBS* and other entities) resonated, and led to a terrific turnout.

The geographic and demographic makeup of 2025 festival-goers (based on survey responses) was similar to 2024, with the majority hailing from the Concord region and central NH, with

significant attendance from southern, northern, Seacoast NH, and MA, and smaller numbers from farther-away locations. The majority identified as white, with a significant percentage (~10%) identified as Hispanic, mixed-race, Asian American, or Native American.

As with the 2024 festival, we were struck once again by the positive and enthusiastic feedback from festival-goers, authors, and volunteers. Here are some examples:

*It's a wonderful event that enriches the community.* **Megan D., Concord**

*Being able to hear directly from authors and ask questions at a panel and then get their autograph as well as buy from a local independent bookstore right nearby is a valuable experience and I can also tell you try to bring in a wide representation of voices.* **Lauren G., Concord**

*Fantastic job of bringing great authors to our little state and promoting our hometown authors. Loved seeing all the diversity.* **Mary S., Concord**

*Books are as essential as oxygen.* **Dave R., Concord**

*We love books and the stories they hold. They are the cornerstone to understanding and compassion, escapism and adventure; all the things we need to stay open minded and engaged.* **Steve and Sue B., Canterbury**

*Literacy and life go hand in hand!* **Pam M., Durham**

*"Thank you for making the book festival a reality, for bringing these amazing authors to visit our students, and for ensuring that the trip is possible for schools. I appreciate it more than I can say."* **Librarian, Belmont Elementary School**

*"It is always an exciting experience to ride down to Concord, visit a theatre, and see a famous author. It is not something all of our students would be able to do without transportation support...We truly appreciate all that you do!"* **Teacher, Groveton Elementary school**

*"Wow!!!!...We are so appreciative of this [transportation assistance]!"* **Jane D., Broken Ground School**

This clip from ConcordNHTV ["What is Concord Reading at the NH Book Festival"](#) gives a great flavor for how the festival resonated with its Concord attendees.

This year, one hundred volunteers were on site to help with festival setup and takedown, greeting festival-goers, answering questions, keeping panels organized and on time, staffing the author and volunteer lounges, and more. As the NH Book Festival is entirely volunteer-run, we could not be more pleased with this event-volunteer turnout.

And not least, we were thrilled with NHBF's street festival; one of our vendors, The Beaded Sheep, said they sold more book accessories in one day than they typically sell in an entire season. The combined outdoor and indoor aspects of the book festival also benefited Concord-area businesses, including The Concord Public Library Foundation, Hotel Concord, Duprey Hotels, Constantly Pizza, The Works Cafe, Lakes Region Tents, Concord TV, The Concord Monitor, NHPR, Batulo's Kitchen, and festival partners the Capitol Center for the Arts, Gibson's Bookstore (Gibson's sold out of many of the festival books), and the NH State Library's NH Center for the Book, among others. Once again, we're gratified to see that a book festival is something that New Hampshire is excited about.

As we mentioned last year, we're looking forward to building on what is becoming a much anticipated annual event by possibly expanding to a second day of panels, conversations, and writing workshops. We'd also like to record more of the author conversations to make the festival truly accessible to all. Of course, this future wishlist, and the festival itself, will depend on future funding.

We want to offer our gratitude to 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.”