

The Writers to Work Plan

The WGA can take one of two forms. Either a bureaucracy devoted to basic functions -- collecting dues and paying residuals -- an afterthought in our working lives. Or it can become a dynamic network, a club able to improve a writer's career, a league of creative professionals enriched by the collaboration of each of its members. I envision a Writers Guild as vibrant and useful as it once seemed from the outside, years ago, when we dreamt of joining its elite ranks. This transformation will demand our will and support. Under recent years of leadership, we have started down this loftier path. In this election we must make the choice to continue.

I propose a Writers to Work Plan -- a set of programs and goals, grouped into four broad categories, which will help the Guild empower its members and fortify our working lives. As a Board member, I will devote myself to seeing this plan realized. Through the effort, we will build a Guild that is truly indispensable to its members, one that actively enables each of us to reach our highest potential as a writing professional.

Hollywood Inter-Guild Solidarity

As long as the Hollywood guilds -- WGA, DGA, SAG and AFTRA -- remain divided, the studios will continue to undercut us in contract negotiations.

1. Engage in President-to-President Collaboration
 - Relations between the WGA and DGA, in particular, remain strained. Efforts at strategic dialogue even on the leadership level have been rebuffed. The WGA should continue seeking discussions with our sister guilds' elected leadership and staffs, and turn more forcefully to the actors if the DGA balks.
2. The Inter-Guild Salon
 - Guild relations are weak on the member level as well. The division cannot be healed overnight. Better relations require a cultural shift. Just like America's relationship with China grew through Ping Pong Diplomacy, the WGA and its sister guilds should organize regular cultural and educational events, allowing members to mingle and advance their industry knowledge together.
3. The WGA Director/Producer Training Program
 - Ultimately, the most effective way to improve ties between guilds is to multiply the number of shared members. The WGA should create a director/producer training program -- akin to its TV showrunner training program -- that will offer 30 applicants a year a master class in directing and access to writer/director mentors. A preliminary version of this program already exists. It should be expanded, made permanent, and funded by the AMPTP through contract demands, as is the showrunner program.

The WGA Community

The number of members who interact with the WGA -- in Guild events and elections -- hovers around 15 percent. Nearly 6,000 members have no involvement beyond paying dues and receiving health care. The WGA should actively improve member engagement by removing barriers and providing new incentives to participate.

1. Overhaul Communications
 - The Guild's internal communications system is broken. We need to overhaul the Guild website to provide useful information and increase functionality. The Guild needs to make more efficient use of email by reducing unwanted communications, especially during election season, and by creating an opt-in procedure for writers who want event notifications. Finally, we should poll our members annually to determine what information they consider most valuable, and set communication efforts accordingly.
2. Improve Member-to-Guild Communications
 - For the Guild to meet its members' needs, leadership must learn our concerns. We should achieve this through the most effective means: an annual scientific survey of membership, led by an outside polling firm, to assess general working conditions. The Board is already investigating this strategy. It should be implemented.
 - The Guild should also solicit members' concerns through the existing strike captain system. We can encourage member interaction and create networking opportunities by grouping writers along lines of common genre, studio, or producer.
 - The Guild must tear down any barrier to members reporting contract violations. Since employer retribution remains a legitimate concern, the Guild should include an anonymous reporting option online.
3. Focus on Member Activities and Training
 - The first exposure new members have to the Guild must be a positive one. We should continue the planned overhaul of the new member meetings, so that they encourage ongoing participation and create opportunities for mentoring between new members and established writers.
 - The Guild should establish an annual "Career 101" program, offering seminars to improve well-being in a writer's working life. Subjects should include: financial insights for the working writer, transitioning to other mediums, and how to manage the writer-agent-manager relationship.
4. Improve the WGA Discount Program
 - The Guild already has a limited program offering members discounts at select merchants, such as a 15 percent savings on AT&T cellular contracts. This is a minor but valuable program that should be expanded and better publicized.

Flex Our Political Muscle

Screenwriters contribute millions every year to political campaigns, individually or through industry events hosted by studio heads. If members instead channeled even some of that money through the WGA Political Action Committee, we could support legislation that protected writers ahead of studios, and earned us a more prominent role in the national spotlight.

1. Set a Goal of \$200,000 Every Two Years in PAC Donations
 - Poor funding has hamstrung our PAC, limiting the candidates and issues we can support. The PAC needs to encourage member involvement by soliciting \$5 and \$10 donations, not just large donations by a few rich donors.

2. Host More Political Events

- The PAC should host not only high-ticket fundraisers, but also affordable events with Congressional, state, and local leaders. The PAC should offer salons with policy and political experts, free of charge, to bolster members' political knowledge. Politicians WANT to meet screenwriters. We all benefit from these exchanges.

Make the Guild a Powerful Advocate in Business

The most important function the Guild can provide is to improve working conditions.

1. Improve MBA Enforcement

- The Guild loses far too much ground in contract negotiations defending rights we already have. By better enforcing against contract violations -- such as pre-writes and free rewrites -- we not only improve working conditions, but strengthen our negotiating stance. The Guild can improve monitoring by encouraging agents, managers, or lawyers to submit all contracts to the Guild and to report breaches. Placing the burden on representatives instead of members will help protect writers from recrimination.
- To facilitate increased enforcement, the Guild should devote more resources to its contract department.

2. Continue the Planned Studio Report Card Initiative

- A decade ago, an annual "report card" on each studio's compliance with creative rights -- such as Film By credit and on-set visitations -- led to jealous competition amongst studio heads and a resulting improvement in behavior. A similar report card system has been proposed for new creative rights issues -- such as sweepstakes pitching, free rewrites, and late pay. By gathering this information through scientific polls and sharing it with writers, we can objectively measure a studio's behavior and motivate compliance.

3. Expand the CPSW to Improve Dialogue With Our Business Partners

- The CPSW initiative was established in 1988 to motivate better working conditions through dialogue with studio heads. Its record has been grim. The Guild can improve the program by expanding the meetings. They should be targeted not only at studio heads, but low-level creative executives -- to build a culture of writer collaboration -- as well as corporate executives above the studio-head level -- to help deflect unrelenting pressure from the top.
- The Guild should include agents and managers in CPSW talks. Several large agencies have already requested to join this effort. Agents can offer hard evidence of MBA compliance in talks, and by further airing our concerns with agents, they will be better informed of their clients' needs.

4. Create New Producers and Dilute the Strength of the AMPTP

- Finally, as a long-term initiative, the Guild should encourage new production entities by offering favorable contract terms to companies like Netflix, Google, and DirecTV in exchange for improved writer ownership and control. With more competition between producers, the Guild will wield greater leverage in negotiations with the AMPTP.

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