

2024 Review of the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards Summary

Overview of the Awards

The Western Australian Premier's Book Awards are managed by the State Library on behalf of the Government of Western Australia. The annual awards support, develop and recognise excellence in Western Australian writing. The awards have existed in various formats since 1990. Winners are announced at an annual awards ceremony hosted by the State Library.

Five categories were awarded in 2024 with a total prize pool of \$120,000:

- Premier's Prize for an Emerging Writer (\$15,000)
- Premier's Prize for Children's Book of the Year (\$15,000)
- Premier's Prize for Book of the Year, sponsored by Writing WA (\$15,000)
- Western Australian Writer's Fellowship (\$60,000)
- Daisy Utemorrhah Award for Unpublished Indigenous Junior and YA Fiction (\$15,000). This award is administered and funded by Magabala Books with support from the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries and the Copyright Agency.

Industry Review

In 2024, the State Library conducted an industry review of the awards to inform continuous improvement and ensure they best promote and support the Western Australian writing sector through developing and recognising excellence.

The review had two components:

1. **Desktop research:** environmental scan and benchmarking against similar awards in other jurisdictions across Australia.
2. **Industry survey:** collection of feedback on the WA Awards from stakeholders who have an association with and interest in the Western Australian writing sector.

Desktop research benchmarking exercise

There is very little consistency across Australia regarding total investment by State and Territory governments and philanthropic funding. Western Australia currently has the second-lowest prize pool in the country and the fewest award categories overall.

Awards	Managed by	Total prize pool	Number of categories
Prime Minister's Literary Awards (ACT)	Creative Australia	\$600,000	6
New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards (NSW)	State Library of New South Wales	\$500,000	25
Victorian Premier's Literary Awards	The Wheeler Centre	\$292,000	10
Queensland Literary Awards	State Library of Queensland	\$291,500	18
South Australian Literary Awards	State Library of South Australia	\$175,000	10
Tasmanian Literary Awards	Arts Tasmania	\$141,000	4
Western Australian Premier's Book Awards	State Library of Western Australia	\$120,000 (\$105,000 govt)	5
Northern Territory Literary Awards	Library and Archives Northern Territory	\$5,700	7

Table 1: Summary of state and national literary awards, 2024

Survey findings and responses

246 individuals responded to the survey between April and May 2024, to share their feedback on the Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. 61% of respondents identified as a writer or a previous or current awards entrant. Seven clear findings emerged from the survey results:

1. The State Library should explore partnerships and initiatives to increase the total prize pool for the Awards

Comments in the survey argued for a prize pool on par with other states in Australia, a call for the Government of Western Australia to better support the sector and a push to seek corporate sponsorship and philanthropic funding, including from the resources sector.

2. There was strong support for 4 new categories: Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry, Young Adult

Support was also expressed for Indigenous Writing, Digital Narrative and Unpublished Manuscript. These could be considered further in future years.

3. The value of the Fellowship in providing writers with time and funds to develop their work is greatly appreciated by the sector

It was acknowledged that any decrease in the monetary amount allocated to the Fellowship would significantly diminish its value to the winner and their ability to dedicate time to their work. However, it is noted that the Fellowship accounts for fifty percent of the current prize money. Some comments in the survey suggested the Fellowship duplicated DLGSC culture and the arts funding, and others called for a reduction in the Fellowship to fund new categories.

4. Writers should be able to enter a category and the Fellowship

Many respondents supported a change to the guidelines to allow entry into the Fellowship in addition to another category, in recognition that the Fellowship funds new work while the other Awards categories recognise published works.

5. Eligibility for the Awards should continue to be limited to Western Australian writers, substantively living in Western Australia for 12 months prior to entry

With a limited prize pool, the majority of survey respondents argued to limit the eligibility to ensure the Western Australian sector is supported and recognised.

6. More publicity and promotional opportunities should be provided for shortlisted writers

The shortlist announcement for the Awards is a great publicity opportunity for writers and publishers, but more promotional activity driven by the State Library was requested to support shortlisted authors.

7. The size, diversity and expertise of the judging panel should be expanded

A judging panel with the required expertise in specific categories who represent the diversity of the Western Australian community is essential to ensuring a fair and impartial judging process.

Changes to be implemented for 2025 Awards

Following consultation with the sector, the following changes will be introduced for the 2025 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards:

Categories	Four new categories (Fiction, Non-Fiction, Young Adult and Poetry) in addition to Emerging, Children's and the Daisy Utemorrah Award. The Book of the Year sponsored by Writing WA will be chosen by the independent judging panel from the category winners (i.e. a "winner of winners" rather than an open category).
Fellowship	The WA Writer's Fellowship will be discontinued. While the funding is valued, there is more impact in reallocating the funds to four new category prizes. Writers are encouraged to apply for project grant funding through DLGSC and fellowship opportunities available as part of Creative WA.
Judging	The size of the judging panel will be increased. There will be increased promotion of the EOI call out to attract potential judges. Eligibility for judges will be opened to interstate applicants.
Promotion and Publicity	The State Library will increase focus on promotion and publicity of shortlisted and winning writers including media partnerships, public programming and other publicity opportunities.

The State Library will continue to investigate and advocate for opportunities to increase the funding and profile of the awards in future years.

Enquiries

Western Australian Premier's Book Awards

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