



# Annual Report

## 2024



# Table of Contents

President’s Report .....	3
Company Overview .....	4
The Festival .....	5
News & Highlights .....	7
Writer Development .....	8
Year-round Events at TWC .....	10
Achievements of Caribbean Writers .....	12
Lost Literary Icons .....	14
Youth Projects .....	15
Children’s Projects .....	18
Prizes .....	20
Bocas Book Bulletin .....	21
Impact Assessment .....	22
BLT Team .....	23
Metrics .....	24
Financial Report .....	25
Sponsors & Partners .....	26
2025 Outlook .....	27

# President's Statement



Marina Salandy-Brown - Founder & President

As a new year approached, news came of yet more success of Caribbean writers on the world stage and evidence that more of us are writing our memoirs. This Annual Report provides a summary of the many ways in which during 2024 Bocas Lit Fest (BLF) continued to fulfill its mission.

Much changed in 2024, not least the demise of several literary figures and also individuals who journeyed with the BLF from its founding, playing pivotal roles in our early development and remaining steadfast friends. I name just two: Professor Emeritus Funso Aiyejina whose sparkling presence and confident guidance we shall always miss, and Marlon de Bique, the young arts administrator, who brimmed with talent.

There were positives too. Our youth and children's projects are nurturing the next generation of world class writers who have been slowly emerging, while our newly launched Academy offers staged learning for everyone wanting to refine their skills in telling our untold stories. We have also built robust, year-round programming at the Writers Centre, and in collaboration with our in-house café and Paper Based bookshop we provide a home and added value for writers and readers. Our partnerships with COSTATT, the British Library and philanthropic organisations in the UK and Casa de América in Madrid allowed us, too, to create opportunities for literary advancement without scaling expenses.

The festival environment is gradually changing. New, smaller festivals are emerging in the region and Caribbean diaspora, which is good news for literature. BLF, however, remains the standard setter, increasing our audiences, creating innovative projects and visionary programming, all of which is sustained by our experienced creative team, and our robust financial management.

I am proud to be President of the Bocas Lit Fest and of the 2024 record of achievement laid out in this Annual Report. It represents an accumulation of strategic and thoughtful endeavours over the last 14 years. It also demonstrates how this small but high impact non-profit organisation matters deeply to the culture, education, and social well-being of this country and continues to play an important role in the region as a catalyst and vital link to home for those living abroad. It also underlines how much work we must do to preserve all the benefits of those achievements in the years ahead.

I am confident that with the enthusiasm and expertise of our board of directors, the determination of our executive, the generosity of our sponsors and partners, and the energy of dynamic creative Team Bocas we can look forward to the future. I thank them all enormously.

# Company Overview

## Vision

The Bocas Lit Fest exists to develop and promote Caribbean writers and to grow Caribbean readers to realise the full potential of our literature in cultural, social and economic terms.

## Mission

To be the Caribbean's premier literary arts organisation, dedicated to the development of all our people, the broadening of our culture and the expansion of the literary industry.

## Board of Directors

### **Marina Salandy-Brown**

President & Founder

### **Lucy Hannah**

Vice President - Producer of global literary initiatives

### **Thackwray "Dax" Driver**

CEO, The Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago

### **Courtenay Williams**

Treasurer - Attorney-at-Law

### **Stacy Ann Golding**

Principal, S N Golding Financial Services Limited

### **Jacqueline Quamina**

Consultant in Corporate Law, Governance and Banking

### **Leslie Clarke**

Managing Director, Murphy Clarke Financial Limited

### **Julie Harris**

Strategic Planning Director & Head of Creative Services  
Lonsdale Saatchi & SAATCHI

# The Festival

The 14th annual literary festival was a lively and popular affair. The main festival programme featured approximately 100 participants, including writers, speakers, and performers, with two-thirds of them based in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T).

"Stand and Deliver" open mic event attracted 30 participants on a first-come, first-served basis. Additionally, 16 Spoken Word artists competed in the First Citizens National Poetry Slam finals and the children's programme saw an additional 46 individual participants. By including actors, musicians, and masqueraders involved in performance events, the total number of festival participants reached approximately 210.





## In-person attendance

Total in-person attendance for the 2024 festival and pre-festival events—including the Children's Caravan and National Poetry Slam semifinals and finals—was approximately 5,350. This marks a substantial increase from the 2023 figure of 4,300. This growth can be partly attributed to an expanded children's programme and targeted events aimed directly at youth audiences, facilitated by direct marketing to primary and secondary schools. In addition, over 8,000 individuals enjoyed the festival online via live streaming or later, by accessing the archived events.

### Online festival audience

In addition, a significant number of individuals enjoyed the festival online via live streaming or later, by accessing the archived events.


 5,326 views


 2,726 views


Total Online views: 8,052

### Overall festival traffic

The festival resulted in increased levels of engagement across the BLF's social media platforms in the months of March and April.

 **Increase in Reach** 106% **Increase in Engagement** 204%

 106% 204%

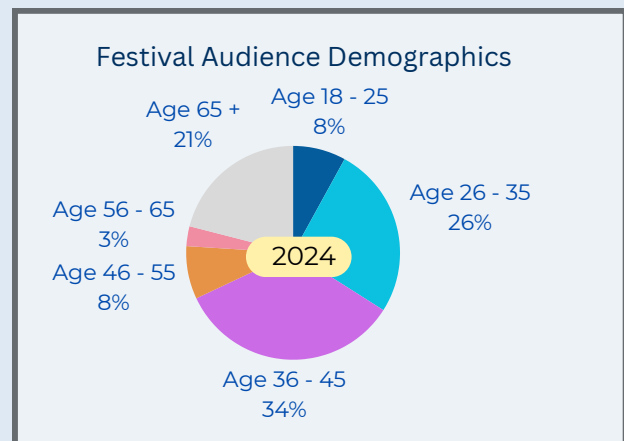
 633% 382%

## Festival snapshots!



## Festival Audience Demographics

In contrast to 2023, where the festival commissioned an audience and participant survey from the UWI, audience feedback in 2024 was collected through an online form. While participation was modest, the demographic data collected aligns closely with information from previous festivals. The data indicates that 60% of adult participants were between the ages of 25 and 44.



81% of respondents identified as female and 18% as male, reflecting a longstanding gender trend among participants in literary events.

All respondents were based in Trinidad, giving the following geographical breakdown:

- North - 30%
- East - 30%
- West - 13%
- Central - 13%
- South - 13%

This suggests a need for geographically targeted marketing in Central and South Trinidad, as well as year-round in-person events outside Port of Spain to engage and expand the Bocas Lit Fest audience farther from the capital.

# News & Highlights

## Bocas London, Belfast & Madrid Tour

Taking Caribbean writing to the world is a mission of the Bocas Lit Fest and in 2024 the BLF launched a tour of London, Belfast and Madrid in partnership with the Hollick Family Foundation, Kate Gavron, the British Library, The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Casa de América and the University of Alcalá in Madrid and The Belfast International Arts Festival. The readings and discussions spotlighted Caribbean writers from the Americas and Britain. In London, the British Library event attracted a near capacity audience of literature lovers and allowed the British-Caribbean literary community to connect with writers from the Caribbean and North America, as well as engage with a broader literary audience interested in the "new wave" of contemporary Caribbean writing and the relevance of their ideas in today's Britain.

The Belfast event, held at the Crescent Arts Centre, featured authors Kevin Jared Hosein, Monique Roffey, and Safiya Sinclair, whose latest books explore how the most intimate relations of family and friendship are shaped by the tensions and conflicts of societies under pressure.

In Madrid, the event at Casa de América showcased exceptional Caribbean contemporary writing by award-winning authors and attracted a diverse Spanish audience. It paved the way for future connections with literary professionals and academics and was a step forward in realising the objective of increasing the number of translations of contemporary Caribbean books into Spanish, in order to enhance their visibility and enable our literature to reach a wider world audience.

## Bocas participation in FILSAI 2024

President Marina Salandy-Brown and festival director Nicholas Laughlin were guests of honour, representing the Bocas Lit Fest and Trinidad and Tobago at the 2024 San Andres Book Fair in Colombia in September.

This was a significant opportunity for networking with regional writers and publishers, and a further step towards a potentially long-term partnership, creating opportunities for Caribbean writers in Latin America. It was preceded by a San Andres delegation to the 2024 NGC Bocas Lit Fest, funded by the C entro Cultural del Banco de la Rep ublica de Colombia.



Photo courtesy Filsai Caribe

## Year-round Events at TWC

From January to December 2024, the Bocas Lit Fest hosted eight public events for adults and eight for children at The Writers Centre, with a total attendance of 540. Featuring both T&T-based and visiting authors and speakers, these ranged from book launches and signings to discussion panels, and were all free to the public. Paper Based Bookshop managed book sales for all events.

## The Bocas Academy

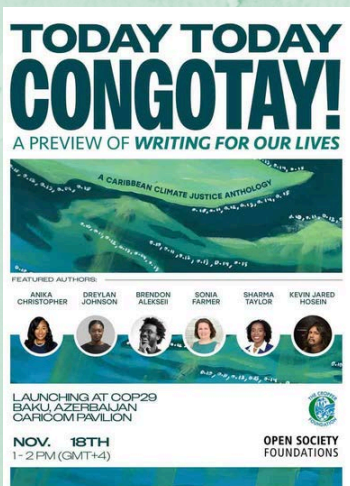
Launched in August 2024, the Bocas Academy offers Caribbean writers an integrated curriculum of workshops, masterclasses, resources, and events, all aimed at helping them realize their full writing potential. "The launch of the Bocas Academy represents a strategic step forward in organizing our training programmes to better serve writers," said BLF CEO Jean-Claude Cournand. Some resources are available for free, while workshops and masterclasses are affordably priced, primarily to cover administrative and facilitation costs.

The 2024 workshops included: - Memoir Writing with Ira Mathur - A Poetry Masterclass with Shivane Ramlochan and guest poet Olive Senior - A Poetry Meets Performance workshop with Elisha Efu Bartels and Wendell Manwarren Both virtual and in-person workshops were provided, and 37 aspiring writers took advantage of the opportunity to learn from leading Caribbean writers.



Elisha Efu Bartels & Wendell Manwarren

## Peekash Press



In 2024, Peekash Press — the Bocas Lit Fest’s publishing imprint — produced one digital and two print publications, with a further seven publications in progress for publication in 2025.

In May 2024, The Cropper Foundation invited submissions from emerging and established, published and unpublished writers across all genres for the region’s first climate justice-themed anthology, to be published by Peekash in two iterations. *Today Today, Congotay!*, a digital preview of the full print anthology, was launched at

the COP29 climate conference in November 2024. The full anthology is scheduled for launch at the 2025 Bocas Lit Fest.

Also published by Peekash were two chapbooks, launched in September 2024, featuring new writing by the two 2022 Bocas Emerging Writers Fellows: *Jurassic Coast*, a collection of poems by Jannine Horsford, and *The Birthday Cake*, an excerpt from a novel in progress by Rajiv Ramkhalawan.

The next Peekash anthology to appear in 2025, *Unstitching Silence: Fiction and Poetry by Caribbean Writers on Gender-Based Violence*. The book assembles new stories and poems and is an output of a multi-year research project based at the University of Leicester, funded by the Leverhulme Foundation.

Also scheduled for publication in early 2025 are five chapbooks by the 2024 Bocas Breakthrough Fellows, the concluding element of this writer development programme.



Finally, 2025 will also bring the publication of *Always Coming Home*, an anthology of fiction, travel writing, and poetry by Caribbean authors, celebrating the 15th Bocas Lit Fest and including many past winners of the OCM Bocas Prize.


## BLF & COSTAATT MOU

In February 2024, the BLF and the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) and the Ken Gordon School of Communication, Creative and Digital Media concluded months of negotiations with the formalisation of a landmark partnership. The partnership will amplify creative writing and storytelling as a key driver of economic growth, and will solidify the collaboration between the parties in facilitating innovation, education and the creation of a creative literary legacy that transcends Trinidad and Tobago.



Photo: (L-R) Jean-Claude Cournand - CEO, Bocas Lit Fest, Dr Keith Nurse, President of COSTAATT.

## The Sleepy Cat Café

 The Sleepy Cat Café, established out of a love for cats, books, good coffee, food, and the restorative power of sleep, became a welcomed addition to The Writers Centre in 2024.

The café has garnered a strong following and boasts a book club with nearly 200 active members. It provides an ideal environment for relaxing with a good book or catching up with friends or working remotely. The café has been the ideal collaborator with the BLF and its in-house bookshop, Paper Based, in hosting book launches, lively discussions and other literary events.

# Writer Development

## Caribbean Writer & Industry Development Programme

Launched in October 2023, the Caribbean Writer & Industry Development Programme focuses on two complementary strands: the Bocas Caribbean Literature Showcase and the Bocas Breakthrough Fellowship programme, both of which had a significant impact in 2024.

### Bocas Caribbean Literature Showcase

Following the 2024 festival and the visit of six delegates to Trinidad, several initiatives bore fruit, creating tangible opportunities for the Caribbean literary sector:

- *A BLF partnership with the British Council facilitated a mentorship programme for three Trinidad and Tobago writers aged under 18, writing commissions connecting Caribbean-based speculative fiction writers with peers in the UK, and facilitating participation by Caribbean-based writers in UK literary festivals.*
- *The 2024 OCM Bocas Prize winner, Safiya Sinclair, was invited to participate in the 2024 Bangalore Literature Festival in December.*
- *The BLF and the NBO Lit Fest in Kenya are exploring a writer exchange, which will include a Caribbean literary showcase at the 2025 NBO Lit Fest and a corresponding African literary showcase at the 2025 Bocas Lit Fest.*
- *A delegation from the Colombian Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago, along with the Banco de la República de Colombia, visited Trinidad from the Department of San Andrés, Providencia, and Santa Catalina (a Caribbean territory that is part of Colombia). Consequently, Trinidad and Tobago was named the official guest country at the 2024 Feria del Libro de San Andrés (FILSAI) in September, attended by two representatives of the BLF. This showcase programme has significantly enhanced the BLF's status as a key regional literary entity, providing critical networking opportunities for the literary sector.*

### Bocas Breakthrough Fellowship

The primary objectives of the fellowship programme are to support the five fellows in completing book-length manuscripts with potential for commercial publication and to build a professional network for the cohort that can assist in developing successful international careers.

Outcomes are subjective, as each writer works at their own pace, and results will need to be measured over the medium term, i.e., over three to five years. During this period, each fellow is expected to publish their debut book.



Stephanie Koathes

June Arming

Heather Barker

Amilcar Sanatan

Rhea Manley

Caribbean writers named Breakthrough Fellows...

# *Bocas picks* 5

Photo courtesy the Express Newspaper

According to the fellows, the mentorship component of the programme has been particularly valuable. Their feedback includes:

***"It has been phenomenal so far in terms of the ideas and feedback from my mentor."***

***"The time I spent with my mentor was priceless; she helped me identify areas in my work that needed attention."***

***"My assigned mentor facilitated one of the most generative experiences in my writing career. She built my confidence as a writer and as a Caribbean citizen."***

As of November 2024, two fellows have completed full book manuscripts and have begun the process of seeking publication. The other three are still working on their manuscripts and are on track to complete them in early 2025.



# Achievements of Caribbean Writers

The Bocas Lit Fest's multiple initiatives over the past 14 years continue to bear fruit, as recent successes by Caribbean writers reveal. Here are some highlights:



**Self-Portrait as Othello**, the sophomore book of poems by Jamaican Jason Allen-Paisant, was named the winner of the **2023 T.S. Eliot Prize** at a ceremony in January 2024, taking a cash award of £25,000.



Trinidad and Tobago's **Portia Subran** won the **2024 Commonwealth Short Story Prize** for the Caribbean region. Regional winners of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize each receive £2,500. Stefan Bindley-Taylor and Celeste Mohammed (both from Trinidad and Tobago), Ark Ramsay from Barbados, and Heather Archibald from St Kitts and Nevis were also contenders for the prize.

## Speaking Tiger Books acquires publishing rights to

### *Ira Mathur memoir*

SPEAKING Tiger Books has acquired the Indian publishing rights to *Love the Dark Days*, a memoir by India-born, local writer Ira Mathur, from Peepal Tree Press (UK), the world's foremost publisher of Caribbean writing.

The book is a gripping and moving autobiography of a girl born to a Muslim-Hindu couple—and related to the Nawabs and Begums of Bhopal—who moves to the Caribbean and struggles for years to find emotional stability and love.

Ravi Singh, publisher, Speaking Tiger Books, calls *Love the Dark Days* "compelling; an utterly distinctive memoir that we believe will deeply resonate with audiences here in South Asia."

The book will be available in bookstores and online from 5 June 2024.

Set in India, England and the Car-

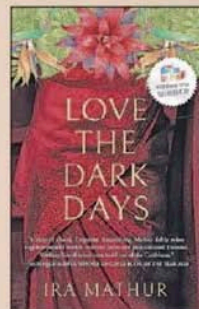
ibbean from the 1970s to 2017, *Love the Dark Days* is a remarkable memoir that follows the story of a girl, Poppet, born of mixed Hindu-Muslim parentage, from post-Independence India to postcolonial Trinidad.

Growing up in Bangalore with her mercurial maternal grandmother, Burrinummy, member of an aristocratic Muslim family whose history is one of having colluded with the British, Poppet unconsciously imbibes Burrinummy's prejudices of class and race. As the darker-skinned child in her family, uncertain of her place in her glamorous mother's affections or her grandmother's, she feels she does not belong. The feeling of unbelonging is repeated when she migrates with her parents to multicultural Trinidad, where she encounters Indian people, several generations away from India, who have a very different sense of themselves—they

are critical of what they perceive as her upper-class airs and graces. She marries into one such family, earning both love and pain. Lonely and confused, she begins writing about her experiences as a way of trying to make sense of them. In her darkest hour, she meets Caribbean poet Derek Walcott, Nobel Laureate, who encourages her to leave the past behind and reinvent herself.

Raw, unflinching, but not without threads of humour, *Love the Dark Days* is an intricate tapestry about class, race, gender—and the love-hate web of family—that has at its centre a woman's struggle for identity, love and emotional stability.

A newspaper columnist and multimedia journalist, Mathur was short-listed for the Bridport Short Story Prize, the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition and the Small Axe Literary Competition in 2018. The fol-



**Love the Dark Days**, a memoir by Ira Mathur.

lowing year she longlisted for the Johnson and Amoy Achong Caribbean Writers Prize and in 2023, she won the OCM Bocas Prize for Literature (Non-fiction).



Ira Mathur, author of the book *Love the Dark Days*.

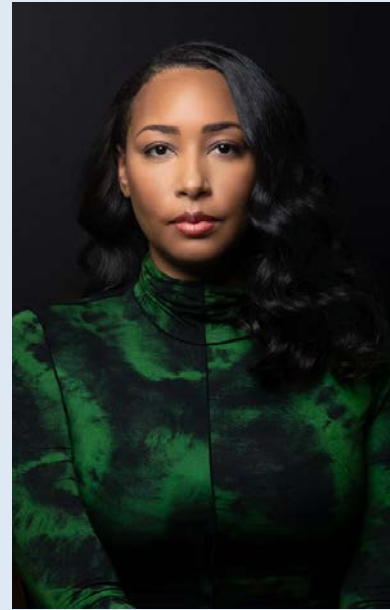
Speaking Tiger Books acquired the Indian publishing rights to Ira Mathur's memoir, *Love the Dark Days*.



Kevin Jared Hosein's novel *Hungry Ghosts*, winner of the 2024 OCM Bocas Prize for fiction also won the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction and £25,000, and was longlisted for the 2024 Swansea University Dylan Thomas Prize.



Jamaican writer and Booker Prize winner Marlon James reached new heights of success with his critically acclaimed debut TV series *Get Millie Black* which premiered in November in the UK and USA.



Safiya Sinclair's *How to Say Babylon*, winner of the 2024 OCM Bocas Prize for Non-Fiction, won the 2023 National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography

- Jamaican poet **Ishion Hutchinson's** *School of Instructions* was shortlisted for the **2024 Griffin Poetry Prize**, the world's most generous prize for a poetry collection written in, or translated into English. It was also shortlisted in the poetry category of the 2024 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature.
- **Breanne Mc Ivor's** novel *The God of Good Looks* was longlisted in the **55th NAACP Image Awards**, in the category of "Outstanding Literary Work — Debut Author".
- **Karen Lord's** *The Blue, Beautiful World* was among titles longlisted for the **2024 Women's Prize** for fiction.
- **Vaneisa Baksh's** *Son of Grace* (Fairfield Books) was shortlisted for **The 2024 Cricket Society and MCC Book of the Year Award**, one of six titles in the running for the overall award.
- **Sharma Taylor**, Jamaican novelist and winner of the Bocas Lit Fest's 2019 Johnson and Amoy Achong Caribbean Writers Prize, received an **Institute of Jamaica's Musgrave Medal (Bronze) for Literature** medal, for her contributions to Caribbean literature.

## Lost Literary Icons

In August 2024, at the age of 75, the literary world lost the former Dean of Humanities and Education and Professor Emeritus at The UWI, Funso Aiyejina. In the words of Marina Salandy-Brown, Founder and President of the BLF, "I know everyone who knew him and worked with him will know the extent of our loss, personal and professional...we all loved and deeply appreciated him as a friend and mentor. He was always honest and generous



*"I know everyone who knew him and worked with him will know the extent of our loss, personal and professional...everyone loved and deeply appreciated him as a friend and mentor. He was always honest and generous."*

Nigerian-born Aiyejina was also a poet, short-story writer and playwright. As a firm believer in the vision of the BLF, he was a founding director and deputy festival director for the first decade of the BLF. He was a steadfast advocate, mentor and facilitator of many writer development and other initiatives of the BLF and he played a critical role in the development of the First Citizens National Poetry Slam.

Although Aiyejina lived and worked in Trinidad and Tobago for over 30 years, he held firmly and proudly to his African heritage. During his lifetime his achievements included being himself a prizewinning writer, serving as a UWI Press Editor, leading the residential workshops for the Cropper Foundation and starting the MFA at the UWI, St. Augustine.



Aiyejina's work and legacy will endure in the lives and words of the countless emerging and established writers who had the privilege of his mentorship and expertise.

The eminent US-based Trinidad and Tobago-American writer, **Dr. Elizabeth Nunez**, died at the age of 79. She was a formidable voice of Caribbean literature who wrote 11 novels including *Bruised Hibiscus* and *Prospero's Daughter*. She was the co-founder of the National Black Writers Conference which supported the careers of many emerging writers.

Photo Credit: [www.hurston/wright.org](http://www.hurston/wright.org)

# Youth Projects

## WE LIT



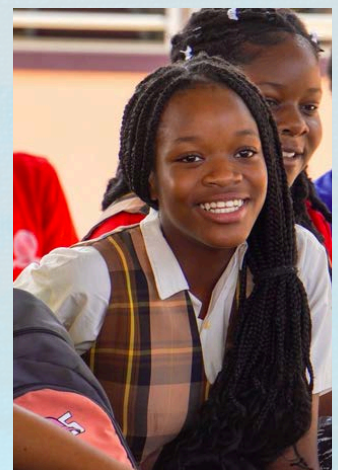
The JB Fernandes Memorial Trust sponsored a second year of the impactful **We Lit** project that introduces young people to the power of reading, writing and sharing stories, in tandem with supporting their academic development. Twenty-one schools nationally were visited in the first term of the academic year reaching 3,000 school students in forms 1 - 5.

Additionally, over 110 students in Forms 4 to 6 attended the English Language, English Literature and Communication Studies lessons classes. Forty-two students from 25 schools attended online writing workshops and learned how to write and edit works of fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

The stories were published in a chapbook entitled 'The Travelling Journal', which was launched at the NGC Bocas Lit Fest's Fantastic Friday and We Lit Showcase, at the National Library, Port of Spain. One hundred and sixty five students represented 12 schools across Trinidad and Tobago and took part in a series of free writing workshops and panel discussions facilitated by authors Kevin Jared Hosein, Karen Lord and Premee Mohammed.

## Youth Fest School Tour and Career Caravan

In 2024, the third edition of the **We Lit School Tour** took place from 2-10 October. The 'Bocas Youth Fest School Tour & Career Caravan' visited 11 schools, saw more than 1600 students and featured career talks from professionals, Q&As and Spoken Word performances. Together, we inspired storytelling, discipline, success and self-expression.



## Scotiabank Write Away!



Much of the impact and benefit of the 2023/24 Write Away! programme was realised in 2024. Data shows that 16,410 students accessed the online workshop series and over 6,000 were exposed to the specially curated video content. Several students were beneficiaries of internships and found the experience to be life-changing.



***“Ultimately, students gained a comprehensive toolkit for effective written expression, preparing them for success in various academic and professional pursuits.”***

**West Siparia Secondary School Teacher, Zohara Ali**

Write Away! will continue to add value to literature students for years to come as the resources created to support students with writing fiction, poetry and non-fiction will remain accessible via the Ministry of Education’s YouTube channel and the BLF’s website.

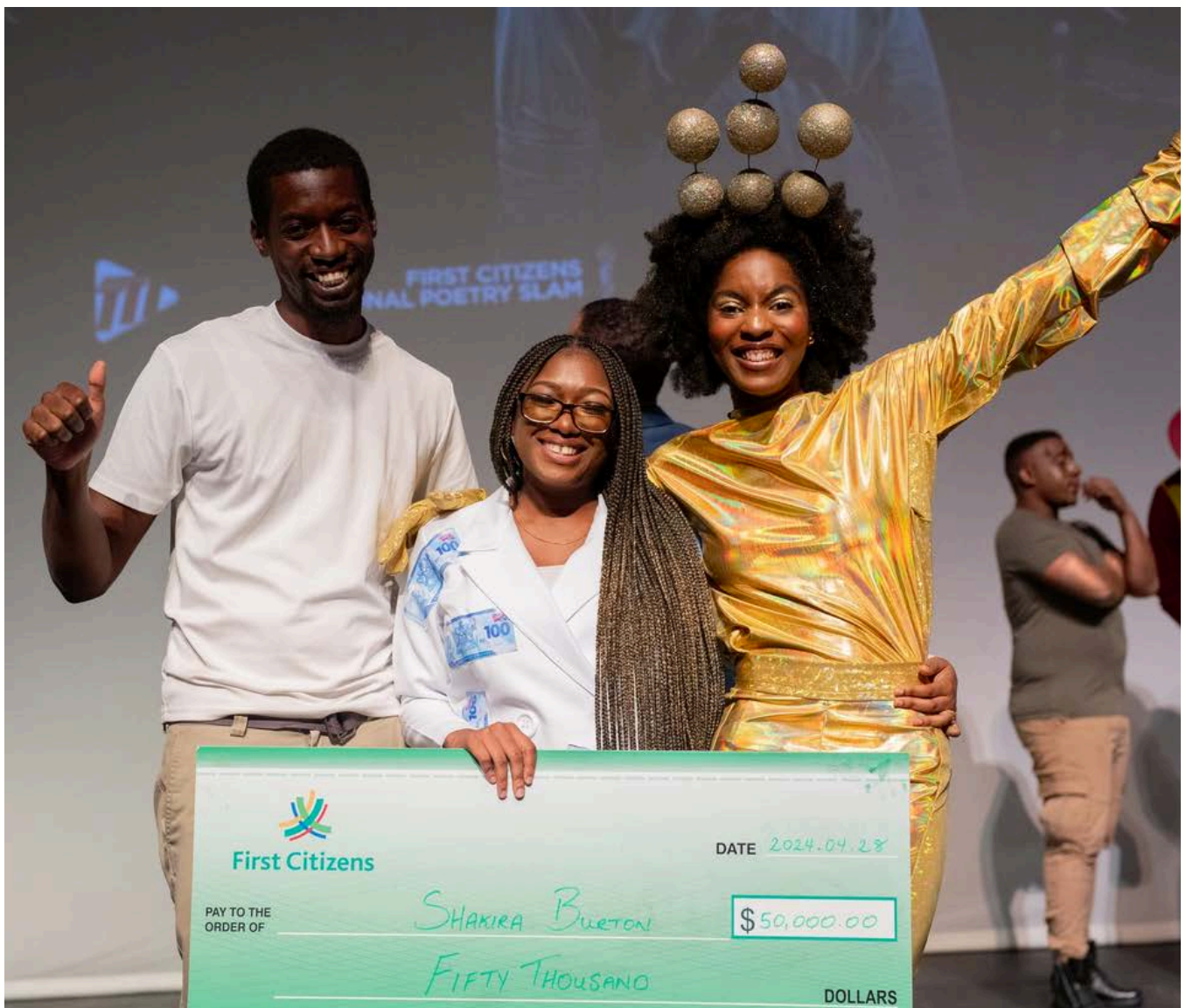


# First Citizens National Poetry Slam

The 12th edition of this epic event themed “Enter the Dragon’s Mouth” was launched at the end of 2023 and finalists were selected by April 2024. In all, 82 poets were auditioned over 3 days in north and south Trinidad, and Tobago. The judging panel of Arielle John, Richard ‘Chromatics’ Rajkumar, Patti-Anne Ali, Victor Edwards and Evelyn Caesar-Munroe had the unenviable task of finding a winner among the incredibly high bar of performances. Thirty-four poets advanced to the semifinal round and 16 finalists went head-to-head with the reigning champion, Kyle Hernandez.

The Grand Slam took place before a sold-out crowd on 28 April at Queen’s Hall. Patrons were treated to electrifying performances, with Shakira Burton carrying away the crown as the 2024 First Citizens National Poetry Slam Champion and TT\$50,000. Previous champions Alexandra Stewart won \$20,000 in second place and Seth Sylvester placed 3rd for a \$10,00 reward.

In addition to the sold out venue, the First Citizens National Poetry Slam attained unprecedented reach of 1,497,747 across the BLF’s social media platforms and 2,007,517 video views.



# Children's Projects

## Storytelling Caravan

The 2024 NGC Bocas Lit Fest Caravan ran from March 7 - April 20 at nine locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It concluded on April 27 at the NGC Bocas Children's Lit Fest at NALIS, Port of Spain. A new feature of the 2024 Caravan included tours to primary schools during school hours, allowing children in more remote areas to enjoy the storytelling and participate in the story creation workshops. This strategy enabled the Caravan to successfully reach Cedros, Moruga, Matura and Salybia.



## NGC Children's Bocas Festival

The 2024 NGC Children's Bocas Lit Fest was held from April 25-28 at Port of Spain City Hall, the Old Fire Station and the Children's Library at NALIS, Port of Spain.

The theme for this year's festival was 'Imagine The Future: New Voices. New Stories. New Ideas'. This was in alignment with Bocas Lit Fest's strategy to discover and develop new Caribbean voices to play an important role in the global conversation.

Over the 4-day period, The NGC CBLF attracted and engaged over 1,000 children and teachers in live readings, performances and workshops. Ayoung-Chee along with a translator.



In the effort to present multiple forms of storytelling, the programme included not only traditional writers, but also the oral elements of Carnival - Calypso, Baby Doll and Pierrot Grenades; Spoken Word; Dramatised Readings and Puppets. Two children - Coryn Anaya Clarke and Aija Jerome also hosted the first day of the NGC CBLF at City Hall; Puppet Anansi hosted the second day. 2024 also saw the introduction of Zelly (Dragonzilla's sister), a new mascot for the children's festival, who intrigued and delighted children and the media.

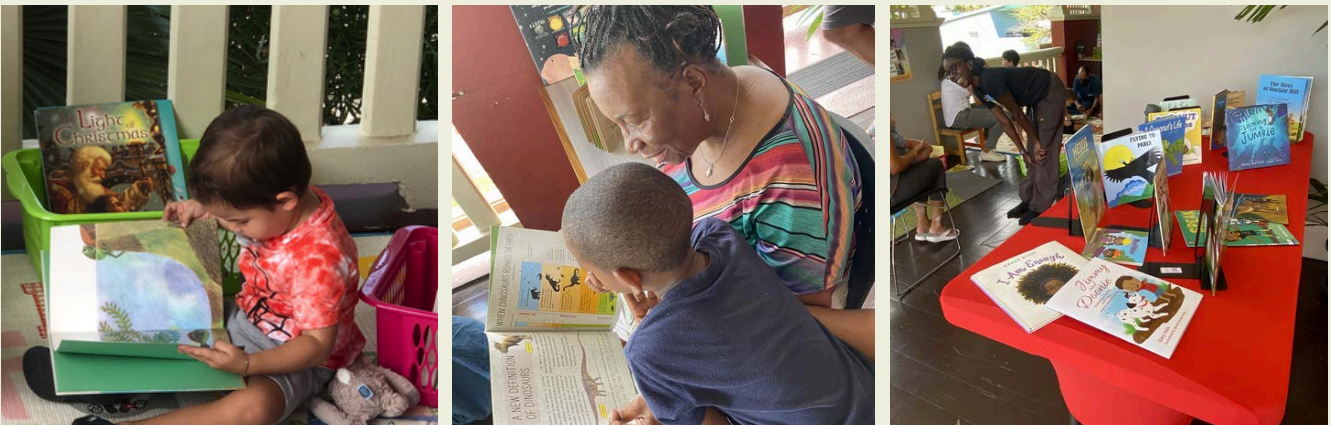
In the spirit of inclusion, the NGC CBLF partnered with the UNHCR to host a special event for refugee Cuban and Venezuelan children. The event hosted 57 Spanish speakers and 83 English speakers, exceeding the initial target of fifty children from each group. The children were brought together in one space for a bilingual, interactive storytelling session to promote cultural awareness, tolerance and exchange. The UNHCR also provided a book of understanding the refugee situation, which was presented as an interactive activity by Anya Ayoung-Chee along with a translator.

## Children’s Storytime at President’s House

The BLF was delighted that the President of the Republic continued the Children’s Storytime initiative started in collaboration with the BLF in 2023. The office of the President fully took over the reins in 2024 and opened up the official residence to primary school students on International Women’s Day. The children read inspirational stories about women from around the world and Camille Wardrop Alleyne, Trinidadian aerospace engineer at NASA and tennis legends Venus and Serena Williams were among the women featured. The programme designed to foster a love of reading accommodates children from schools across the nation and it is hoped that it will continue to inspire generations to come.

## Family Reading Circle

The BLF welcomed young readers back to the Writers for its Family Reading Circle. Volunteers from COSTAATT and Let’s Read assisted in hosting the 44 children who participated in the two sessions held in 2023.



## Storytime on YouTube



The BLF’s YouTube channel, Storytime now has 406 subscribers and features 84 videos which have attracted thousands of views. Trinidad and Tobago’s creative and musical icons continue to give their unwavering support to this initiative ensuring that our children are exposed to their cultural identity, stories and traditions.

# Prizes

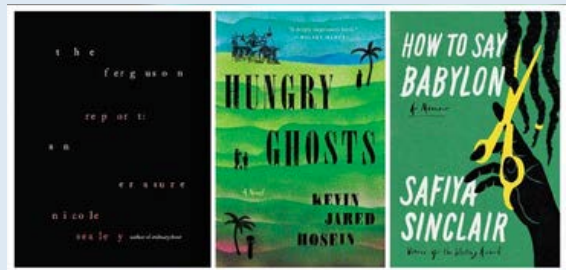
## OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature

Safiya Sinclair's *How to Say Babylon* (Fourth Estate, UK; Simon & Schuster; US) won the overall 2024 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, announced at the NGC Bocas Lit Fest on 27 April. The prize confers a cash award of US\$10,000, sponsored by One Caribbean Media. *How to Say Babylon* was described by the prize judges as "a moving work of intense power ... demonstrating a remarkable command of narrative, from the minute level of the sentence to the seemingly effortless management of a story arc of epic scope."

Fiction winner Kevin Jared Hosein and poetry winner Nicole Sealey received US\$3,000 each from One Caribbean Media for their category wins.



2024 award winning authors of the OCM Bocas Prize



2024 award winning books of the OCM Bocas Prize

## Bocas Henry Swanzy Award

The 2024 Bocas Henry Swanzy Award for Distinguished Service to Caribbean Letters was announced at the festival media launch, and went to the Guyanese-British publisher Arif Ali, founder of Hansib Publications.

Although Ali could not attend the festival due to his age and health, the prize ceremony included a tribute to his work, and the actual award will be presented to him in London in October.



Arif Ali - Photo Credit  
Blackhistorymonth.org.uk

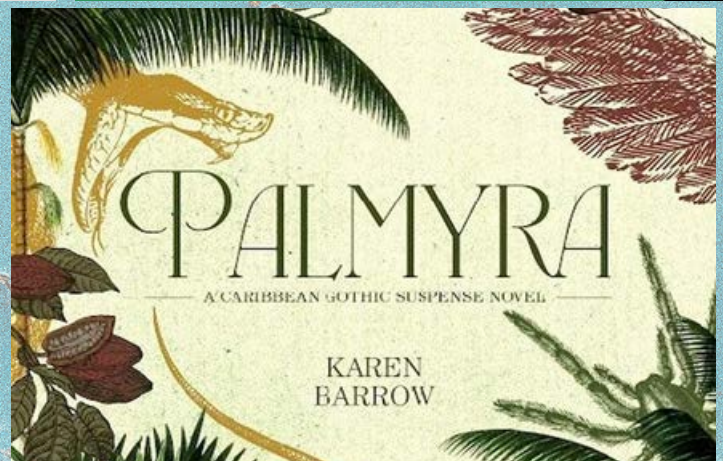
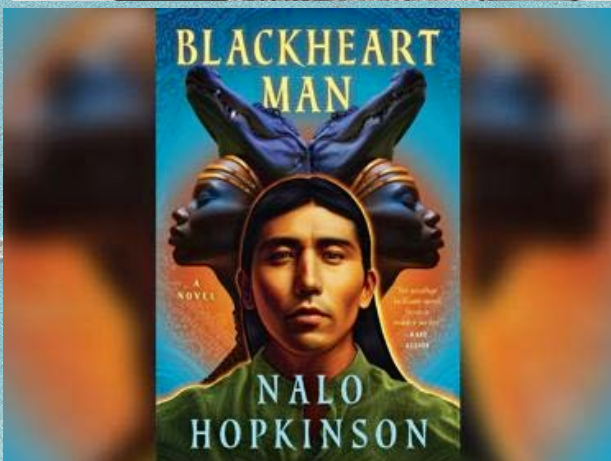
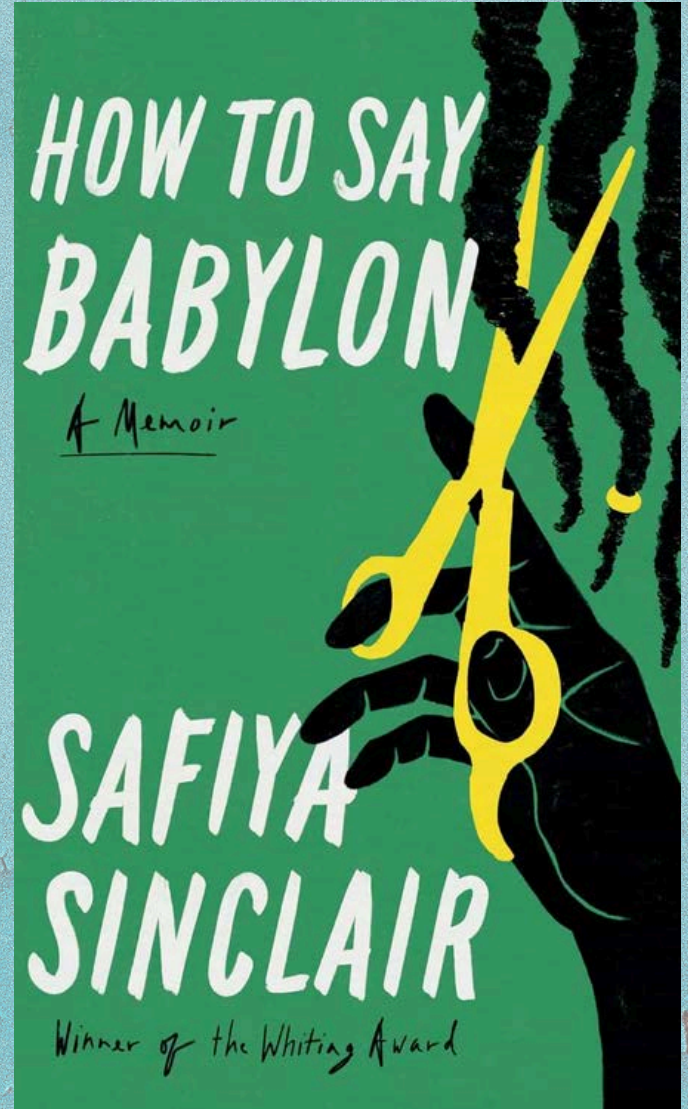
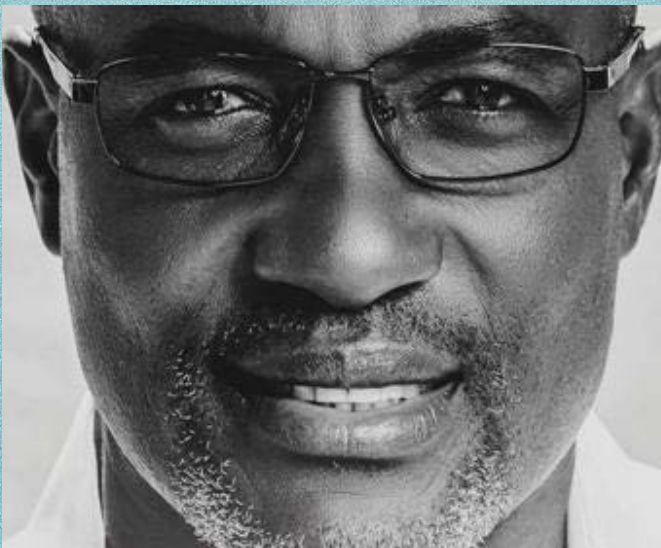
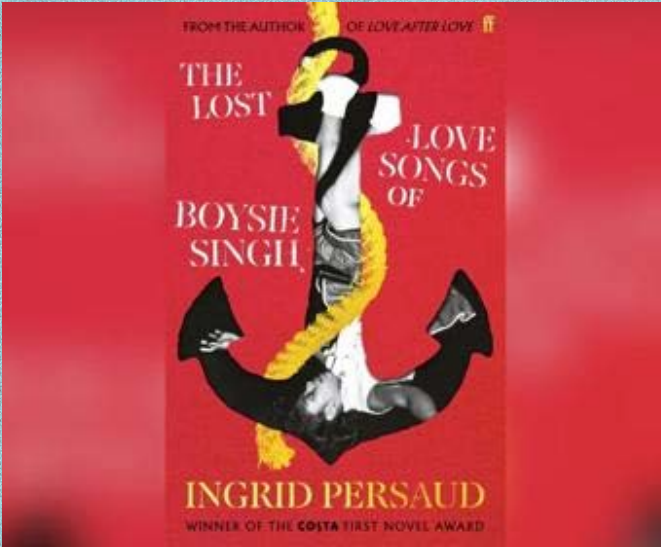
## GCCA+ Bocas Ways of Sunlight Youth Writing Competition

The winners of this writing prize named after the late Sam Selvon's book, were announced in 2024. Emerging victorious was Samara Dolabaillel of Providence Girls' Catholic School, in second place was St Joseph Convent student, Marie Giles and in third place was Rebekka Murray of Bishops High School in Tobago.



## Bocas Bulletin

Undoubtedly the region's best resource for news about books and the achievements of Caribbean authors, literary festivals and agencies, the monthly publication is a staple to keep everyone in the know. It appears monthly on the first Sunday in the Sunday Express.



# Impact

## 4 QUALITY EDUCATION



- Write Away!, WeLit, Youth Fest provided resources and education to support secondary school literary students
- Launch of Bocas Academy to support writers

## 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



- Writing, mentorship and facilitation opportunities for writers through workshops, festival events and writer development initiatives
- Caribbean writers won international literary prizes, secured agents and attended international festivals
- Ira Mathur's *Love the Dark Days* to be published in India

## 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



- 14 consecutive annual literary festivals
- Paper Based Bookshop thriving at TWC
- Sleepy Cat Cafe finds a new home and brings a strong following
- BLF Board of Directors increased to 8 and with 3 active board committees

## 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



- MOU signed with COSTAATT
- Consistent T&T sponsorships
- Office of the President of the Republic of T&T nurturing young readers
- Several long-term international partners

# BLF Team



**Jean-Claude Cournand**  
CEO



**Nicholas Laughlin**  
Festival & Programme Director



**Marielle Forbes**  
Youth & Hospitality Manager



**Alette Williams**  
Marketing & Media Manager



**Shivanee Ramlochan**  
Festival & Programme Manager



**Melvina Hazard**  
Children's Programme Manager



**Neala Bhagwansingh**  
Social Media Manager



**Stefan Rampersad**  
Digital Administrator



**Maria Tappin**  
Prize & Festival Administrator



**Chinyere Herbert**  
Youth Programmes Coordinator



**Maria Bleasdel**  
Marketing & Media Assistant



**Dwayne Dubarry**  
Office & Financial Assistant



**Jayden Phillip**  
Youth Programmes Intern



**Destineee Blanc**  
Creative Programmes  
Co-ordinator Trainee

## Key Metrics

**39k**

REACH FROM 45 WELIT  
POSTS

**£ 25,000**

IN PRIZE-MONEY  
AWARDED TO  
JAMAICAN WRITER

**JASON ALLEN-  
PAISANT**

BLF FEEFEATURED IN

**285**

ADVERTISEMENTS &  
NEWS ARTICLES

**8,052**

TOTAL ONLINE VIEWS OF  
FESTIVAL LIVESTREAM

**2,007,517**

VIEWS OF

**FCNPS**

VIDEO

**16,410**

STUDENTS ACCESS  
THE WRITEAWAY!  
WORKSHOP SERIES

FCNPS ATTAINS A REACH OF

**1,497,747**

ACROSS BLF'S SOCIAL MEDIA  
PLATFORMS

WELIT! PROJECT  
REACHES

**3,000**

FORM 1 TO 5  
STUDENTS

**633%**

INREASE IN REACH VIA  
X/TWITTER PRE  
FESTIVAL  
(MARCH & APRIL)

**60%**

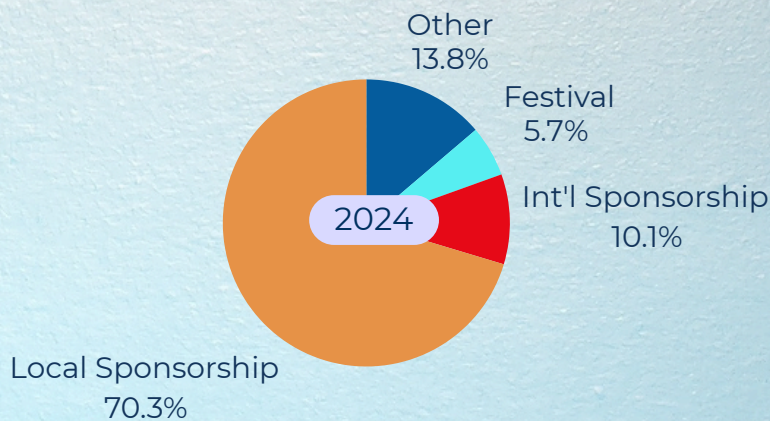
OF BLF ATTENDEES AREBETWEEN THE AGES  
OF 25 TO 44 - A GROWING YOUNGER  
DEMOGRAPHIC!

# Financial Report

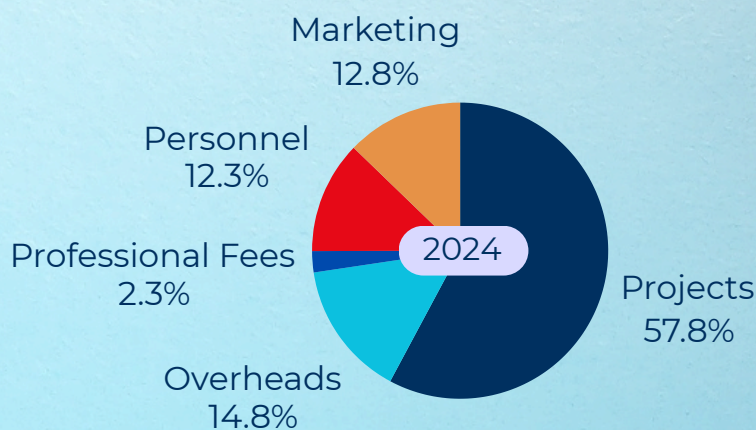
In the past year, the Bocas Lit Fest showcased remarkable adaptability in income generation. Despite recalibrating international donations to align with shifting global funding landscapes, the organization achieved impressive growth across key revenue streams. A standout success was the strategic relocation of the annual slam event to Queens Hall, which significantly bolstered festival income. Additionally, the organization's diversified financial strategy yielded substantial gains, with "other income" flourishing through successful ventures such as the Paper Based Bookshop, the Bocas Academy, branded merchandise, and the appreciation of Bocas' investments. Paired with the enduring stability of local sponsorship, this robust financial growth highlights the organization's ability to navigate change and leverage diverse revenue opportunities.

On the expenditure front, the Bocas Lit Fest maintained a steadfast commitment to fiscal responsibility and operational efficiency. Strategic investments in marketing, personnel, and overheads ensured smooth operations and upheld the organization's commendable standards, reinforcing its dedication to sustainable growth. Notably, the organization refined its accounting practices with a strategic realignment of professional fees, enhancing transparency and illuminating its project-focused approach. This adjustment, which slightly increased project fees, reflects a more precise allocation of resources—effectively fueling the festival's mission and its impactful programmes.

## INCOME



## EXPENDITURE



# 2024 Sponsors & Partners

## Title Sponsor



## Main Sponsors



## Sponsors



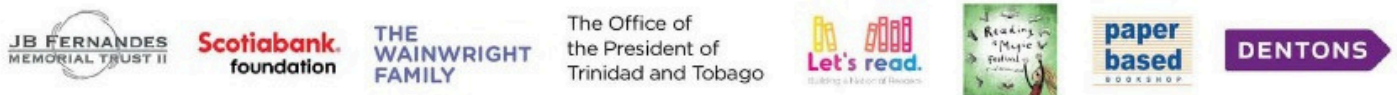
## Caribbean Literature Showcase and Breakthrough Fellowships Sponsors



## Festival Programme Partners



## Non-Festival Partners and Sponsors



## Sponsors in kind



## Media partners



# 2025

## Outlook

In 2025, the Bocas Lit Fest proudly commemorates its 15th anniversary, marking a decade and a half of inspiring literary growth across the Caribbean and beyond. This milestone celebrates not only the organization's rich legacy but its continued evolution as a beacon for regional literary development.

Our 15th festival will be a momentous occasion, honoring the past winners of the prestigious OCM Bocas Prize, spotlighting the incredible Earl Lovelace in his 90th year, and embracing the resonant theme, Always Coming Home. Poised to be one of our grandest and most anticipated festivals yet, it promises to leave an indelible mark. Year-round, the Bocas Academy will elevate its offerings, introducing an exciting writing challenge and hosting monthly literary events for children and adults at The Writers Center—our hub for creativity and connection.

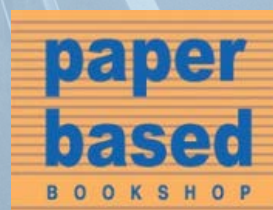
Through our publishing arm, Peekash Press, we will aim to publish up to 10 new titles while championing Caribbean authors with dynamic book launches in collaboration with Paper Based Bookshop. Additionally, the Bocas Lit Fest will deepen its commitment to youth development, engaging over 30 secondary schools and delivering impactful English Literature, Language, and Caribbean Studies lessons.

As we step into our busiest year yet, 2025 will be a testament to the transformative power of literature, amplifying our impact and shaping the future of storytelling.

## Connect with us

The Writers Centre

14 Alcazar Street, St Clair, POS, Trinidad and Tobago



[www.bocaslitfest.com](http://www.bocaslitfest.com)



[info@bocaslitfest.com](mailto:info@bocaslitfest.com)



1-868 222 7099