

ROSA Annual Report | 2015



Message from the Chairperson

Thank you so much to all our members for an amazing first year. I am so encouraged by the support we've had in our first year as an organisation.

We are in a time of unprecedented change in the publishing industry. Writers can no longer write a book, sell it to a publisher, then sit back and wait for the royalty cheques to roll in. With the glut of eBooks on the market, and with print book markets contracting, it becomes harder every day to be 'seen'. So how do we succeed in this new and ever-shifting business?

By working together.

At ROSA, we encourage members to share what they've learned, to work together to improve their craft and promote their books. We welcome you to ask questions, to reach out to other members, to join the online discussions.

During the past year we have also seen an increase of interest in our genre locally, on social media, from new conference attendees, and even in the media. We have received coverage on radio, in magazines and in newspapers, and even a mention on television. I hope that in the coming year we will build on these foundations, improving not only an awareness of ROSA but of the romance genre in general.

I would like to encourage you all to get involved in ROSA and in our mission. If you have any ideas, please suggest them. If you have any useful contacts, please put us in touch with them. Some ideas work out, some don't, but every single one is worth investigating!

Thanks for reading,

Romy Sommer

ROSA Chairperson



Chairperson Romy Sommer

Our Mission

ROSA's stated mission, as per our constitution and our website, is:

- To provide support, encouragement and professional development to romance writers, especially to writers resident in Southern Africa and of South African descent.
- To enhance and promote the various types of romantic fiction and to encourage good writing.
- To support writers of romantic fiction through networking, information, resources and an online community.
- Represent the genre of romantic fiction within Southern Africa.

During 2015 we have furthered these aims through the following initiatives:

Membership

In 2015 we began to sign up our first members to ROSA, at an agreed membership fee of R200 per annum. At the AGM on 5 September 2015 we will discuss how to manage renewals and decide fees for 2016-17.

ROSA currently represents 30 authors (both published and unpublished) in 4 countries. This is still a very small portion of the writers who have shown an interest in ROSA over the years, and who have signed up to our various mailing lists. In 2016 we should therefore focus attention on encouraging members of the Yahoo and Facebook groups, conference attendees and mailing list sign-ups to become registered members of the organization.

Community

In order to encourage networking and the sharing of information, ROSA has several online platforms on which authors are able to engage:

The **Yahoo Group** from which ROSA originated continues to remain a place for discussion by a core group of members. It has been agreed to keep this group as is, and not to encourage new subscribers to join unless they have already undertaken a commitment to ROSA. This is to ensure that the group remains a safe place for open conversation and sharing.

We have a **free forum** available to members, which is seriously under-utilised at present. The forum has both public and private areas, and therefore guarantees members safety and privacy. Going into 2016, we should promote this forum better to our members and encourage its use. The forum can be found at <http://saromance.activeboard.com>.

The **Facebook group** has grown extensively in the past year and now has over 200 members. It is an active online community with a great deal of engagement.

Though it is a Closed group, Facebook continues to promote the group to individuals it thinks might be interested, and as a result we get many requests to join from people who are not truly serious about either writing or romance. We now have a screening process in place and all prospective new members must reply to an introductory message with an explanation of why they want to join. We give most prospective members the benefit of the doubt, without bias to gender or nationality, however we continue to receive requests to join from non- South Africans who can only be described as 'dodgy' and whose requests we deny. The only way to prevent having to do this would be to change the group settings to 'Secret' however genuine new members would then no longer be able to find us, so we will need to live with the current arrangement until Facebook amends the way it promotes groups. Members should however be aware that this means the Facebook group is not private, and personal information should be shared there with caution.

Website

During the course of this past year the website was re-vamped and has been moved from the free hosting we had previously received (but which limited our ability to keep the site regularly updated) to paid service providers. The site, as well as our mailboxes, are now hosted by Hetzner, with the website created using Wix, an online design service which enables regular updating. These expenses are covered by our income from membership fees.

In addition to showcasing ROSA to the general public, the website also features a page displaying the most recent releases by our published members. This feature, and the opportunity to promote books on the ROSA blog, are available exclusively to registered, paid-up members of ROSA. The website is available to view at www.romancewriters.co.za.

Local Chapters

A **Johannesburg chapter** has existed for many years, long before ROSA became an organisation. During the 2014-15 year there were fewer get-togethers than in some previous years due to the lack of a dedicated chapter leader.

Get-togethers included hosting Mills & Boon author Lucy King in July 2014, a couple of dinner evenings or coffee mornings, a baby shower for ROSA deputy chairperson Rebecca Crowley, and an advance screening of the movie *The Rewrite*.

The mailing list for this chapter has 51 emails addresses listed, however (with the exception of the free movie screening courtesy of Ster Kinekor) we struggle to get more than 10 attendees to any one get-together. Usual numbers vary between 5 and 8. We welcome suggestions on how to improve attendance and engagement within this chapter, as well as a volunteer to plan and coordinate events to attract attendance.

During 2015 a **Cape Town chapter** was started, under the leadership of author Angelé Wells. The chapter has now had several get-togethers and hosted guest speakers Natasha Boyd and Rae Rivers. We anticipate this chapter to grow considerably in the wake of the conference being held in Stellenbosch in September 2015, and similarly look for ideas on how to improve local interest and engagement with this chapter.

Author Marie Dry has also created a **Pretoria chapter** during this past year. This is still very small, with four interested writers meeting for get-togethers, but we anticipate that this chapter will grow in coming years as ROSA's exposure increases.

Newsletters

ROSA currently uses the free online Mailchimp service for newsletter distribution. There are Mailchimp newsletter lists set up for the conference (currently 61 subscribers), for Johannesburg residents (currently 51 subscribers), as well as for those members who have officially joined the organisation. We urge everyone to sign up to the applicable newsletters (and please check your spam filters, and open and read the newsletters!) as this our first line of communication.

Registered members of ROSA now also receive a quarterly newsletter containing news on members' new releases, industry-related articles and links, book reviews etc. Two newsletters have gone out so far and feedback to these has been good. All members are invited to contribute to the newsletters.

To sign up for the newsletters, please follow the links below:

ROSA Conference Updates: <http://eepurl.com/MXoj1>

Johannesburg mailing list: http://eepurl.com/Wp_P

Newsletters for the Cape Town and Pretoria chapters are managed by the respective chapter leaders.

Professional Development

We are currently in a period of unprecedented change in publishing, with changes happening at an ever-increasing pace. We therefore see education and professional development as a cornerstone of our organisation.

Through our various online communities as well as local chapters, we encourage the sharing of information on both the craft and business side of writing in order to keep South African writers informed and up to date.

We also encourage the local chapters to host guest speakers and workshops, where possible, and we hope to develop more of this as well as possible online webinars in the future.

However, our primary project aimed at the professional development of South African authors is the **annual conference**.

The **first conference** was held in Johannesburg on 25-26 October 2014 at Melrose Place Guest House, attended by 30 delegates. Speakers covered a range of topics, including craft and promotion as well as exploring some of the many options available to romance authors. Pitches were held via Skype with HarperImpulse, Harlequin Mills & Boon and US literary agent Laurie McLean. The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive, and the conference even made a small profit.

The **second conference** takes place on 25-26 September 2014 at the Devon Valley Hotel in Stellenbosch. This conference features more guest speakers, a greater presence of Afrikaans guest speakers, and double the opportunities to pitch. We have not yet achieved the number of registrations we had hoped for, but as we discovered last year, many leave registration until the last minute. Also, as media coverage of the event is increasing, we hope that increased awareness will result in additional delegates registering.

The **third annual conference** will take place in Johannesburg in September 2016. The dates, keynote speaker and (hopefully) the venue will be announced at the close of the 2015 conference. Following the upcoming conference in Stellenbosch, we welcome suggestions and feedback on how to improve the conference experience.

Quality Control and the Pursuit of Excellence

As stated in our Mission Statement, ROSA aims to encourage good writing. Until now our focus has mainly been on providing information and training via the annual conference, but in 2016 we would like to take this a step further by introducing an award for excellence. How to manage this, and what entry criteria will need to be met, will be discussed at the organisation's first Annual General Meeting on 5th September 2015.

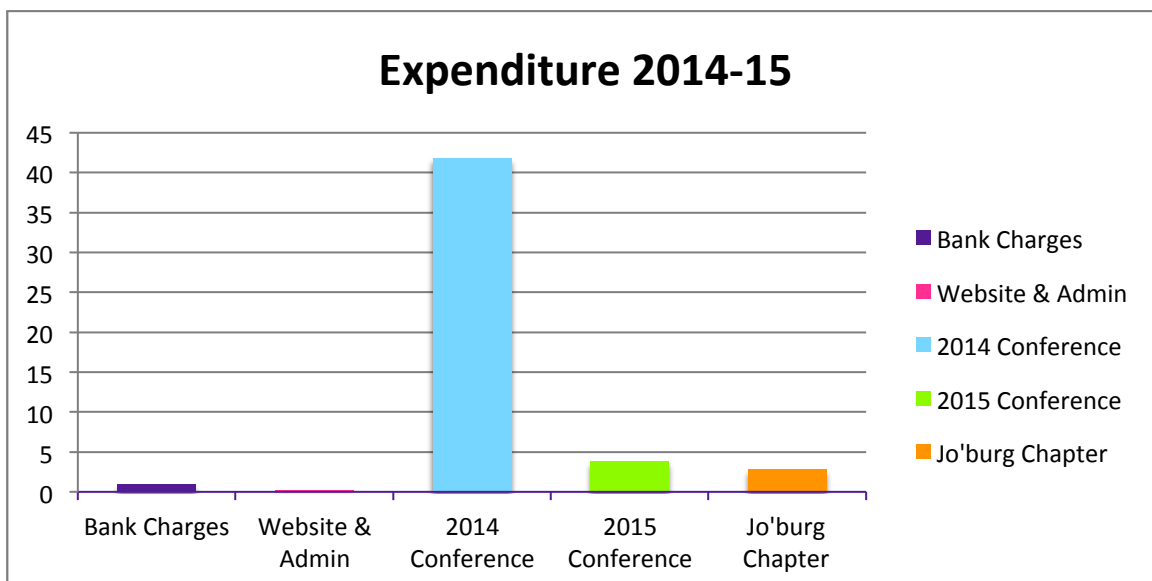
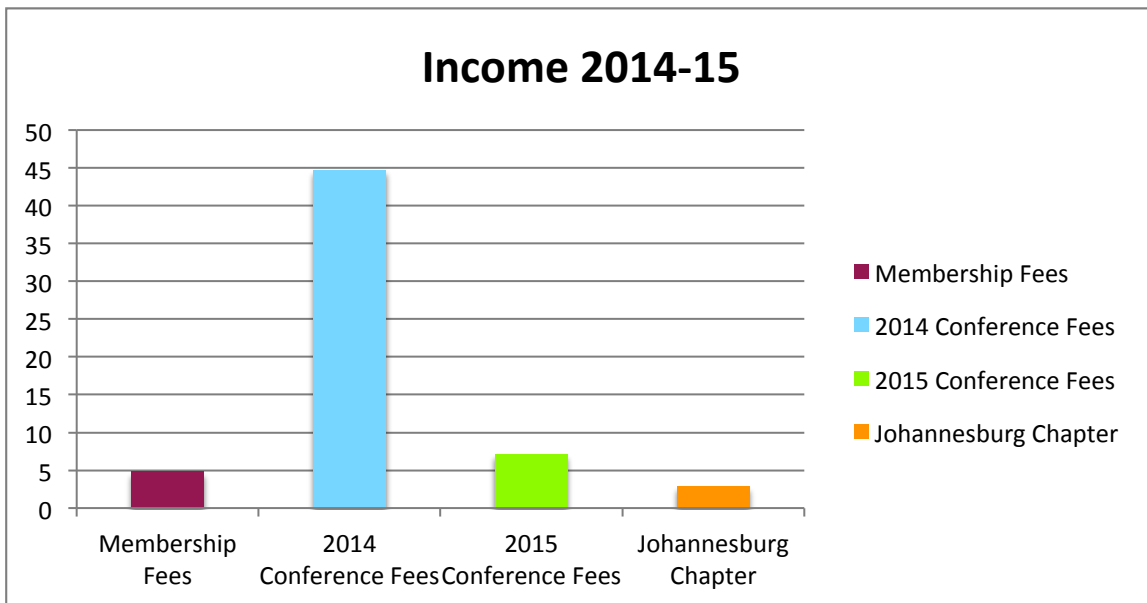
Outreach

During our first year, ROSA's focus has been on establishing itself as an organisation. Looking forward however, we hope to extend our focus beyond ourselves. In addition to attracting new members and increasing public awareness of ROSA, we hope to extend our outreach into disadvantaged communities. If any members know of any literacy foundations or initiatives or other social outreach programmes we could support, please contact the executive committee.

Financial Management

ROSA’s first financial year ended on 30 June 2015. Upon approval of the financial statements attached to this report (the Asset & Liability Statement, as well as the Income & Expenditure Statement), these statements need to be checked by an accounting officer within two months, then submitted to SARS.

ROSA does not yet have an accounting officer, so all suggestions will be greatly appreciated.



#ROSACon2015

The costs for the 2015 conference were calculated based on a minimum attendance by 20 paying delegates, though we hoped for much higher numbers. At the time of this report, however, we are still 3 short of that minimum target. In 2014 quite a few delegates registered in the last few weeks before the conference, so we hope the same will apply in 2015.

At the 2014 conference in Johannesburg, we had 30 paying delegates attend, even though we were still an almost unknown organisation and had very little exposure. This year, with the additional media exposure we have received, we hope to surpass that number of delegates. If this does not happen, we may need to re-look the idea of alternating the conference between Johannesburg and the Western Cape and rather keep it in Johannesburg where our largest support base is, until the Western Cape membership numbers warrant another conference in the region.

2016 Budget

No formal budget for ROSA has as yet been drawn up for the 2015-16 year as the organisation is still in its infancy, and we need to take what we have learned from our first year in order to implement a financial plan going forward.

In ROSA's second year we aim to keep costs low, using membership fees to cover the operating costs of the website and bank charges. All other expenses, such as those incurred for the conference, are to be recovered directly from attendees.

At ROSA's first Annual General Meeting on 5th September, the members will discuss the fee renewal structure of the organisation, as well as determine the fees for the 2016-17 year. Once these have been determined, a budget should be drawn up for the 2017 financial year. For this, we would appreciate a volunteer to act as Treasurer, who can liaise with the Executive Committee in drawing up a budget.

Our organization needs your help

At the close of our first year as a registered non-profit organisation, our greatest need is for volunteers to help run the various initiatives outlined in this report. Until now, all of this work has been done by a very small group of volunteers and our ability to grow and progress the organisation is hampered by the time constraints of those few who do all the work. We welcome volunteers for all aspects of the organisation, from chapter management to financial management, newsletter creation, contest administrations or for the conference committee.

What you put into ROSA is what you will get back, so please consider giving time and effort to the organisation.

Looking Forward

These are the projects we would like to initiate as we move forward:

- Membership drive
- Increased social media engagement
- Improve the conference experience and increase conference engagement
- Encourage local chapters to host guest speakers and workshops
- Improve engagement with local chapters
- Investigate online workshops and webinars
- Continue to promote romantic fiction in the media, with the aim of dispelling many of the myths about the genre
- Promote ROSA members as guest speakers
- Grow the quarterly newsletter content
- Encourage good writing by instituting awards for excellence and for milestones
- Community outreach – libraries, schools, literacy programs

Thank you for your time and your support.

The End.