

Information about Proposed Changes to IAFA Book Room

At its meeting in June 2016, the IAFA Book discussed the role of the Book Room in IAFA operations. Responding to decreased attendance in the Book Room and fewer sales in recent years, as well as increased difficulty in securing enough volunteers to do the physical labour associated with the Book Room, we decided that it was time to revise the way we operate the Book Room in the hope that it can better serve our members. The Book Room in its current configuration was founded by Marshall Tymms, President between 1986-1988, and so reflects a very different moment of both conference culture and the publishing industry.

The relevant facts are:

- A considerable portion of IAFA registration fees and other resources are spent to run the book room in its current mode of operation, which include annual fees paid to rent a storage locker that holds many books that remain unsold year after year; complementary conference registration, meals, and in some cases accommodation for people who volunteer substantial hours that go toward its operation; and the costs of continuing to purchase books to have them available for sale at the conference. We have also provided airfare for the Book Room Director to travel to the conference.
- As noted above, the volume of sales to conference attendees and the amount of foot traffic through the Boom Room has decreased in the last 3-5 years, leading us to believe that many conference attendees prefer to purchase their books at other locations. We hypothesize the increased fees for airline baggage may play a role in this shift in book buying patterns, as well as the increasing use of ebook formats.
- The IAFA Book Room has never been very successful at forging relationships with the publishers of academic books, meaning that the works of a large portion of our attendees have never been available in this venue. To the degree that academic books have been available, it has been from a narrow range of possible publishers.
- While the Book Room used to make a profit for the conference, making it worthwhile to invest as much as we have in its operation, in recent years this has steadily declined so as to be a case of basically breaking even.

At the same time as we examined and sought to respond to these difficulties, the Board also recognizes that there is a significant service that the Book Room does for our attendees by making available fiction books of attending authors for purchase at a venue when members are able to meet and talk with these authors, and where many attending authors hold autograph sessions.

We thus propose the following changes to how the Book Room will operate:

1. We will significantly reduce the amount of stock that we continue to hold, to move toward a model of stocking books only by attending authors and to reduce the length of time that we retain copies that are not selling. Those books which do not sell within the designated window will be first offered for free to IAFA members and then, if not claimed, donated to Better World Books, an organization dedicated to global literacy.
2. We will replace the current Book Room Director position with a revised Book Room Liaison position, that will be advertised shortly. The successful candidate in this position will still receive some financial aid from the conference in the form of complementary accommodation and the like, but the overall costs will be reduced with because we will need to thus compensate fewer people with a smaller model of Book Room operations.
3. We will continue to purchase and sell books by attending authors, the function we deem is the central benefit the Book Room provides to association members. The smaller volume of book stock will decrease both our storage costs and the labour required to unpack boxes to set up the Book Room and repack any unsold stock.
4. In addition to this IAFA Book Room, beginning with the 2017 conference, we will also partner with Scholars Choice, who will curate and set up their own display of academic books that will also be for sale at the conference. These two initiatives will run in parallel.