

Editor

Editorial changes

- Sophie Jin was the interim editor of Briarpatch from January 2023 to June 2024 and Meera Eragoda was hired as the new Briarpatch editor in May 2024.
- Tannara Yelland was the Sask Dispatch and RWDSU Defender editor for September–December 2023 and Amielle Christopherson was hired in January 2024.
- Briarpatch published far fewer [online-only](#) articles this past fiscal year (April 2023 to May 2024). Instead, Sophie published the [Black radicalism special issue](#).
- Erin Baird joined the fact-checking team and, along with Emma Schultz, has been providing consistent fact-checking support.

Editorial successes

1. We published the Black Radicalism special issue.
2. Briarpatch updated its look thanks to the design prowess of Kevin Lo and, as of September 2023, has a fresh (type)face. Kevin also designed a template for the layout which, in addition to giving Briarpatch a bold, punchy look reflective of its content, streamlined the design work required from the editor.
3. We were able to take advantage of a mentoring opportunity from Truthout, an established and highly resourced independent journalism outlet based in the U.S. They are flexible and varied with the support they provide and are committed to nurturing and capacity-building smaller leftist indie outlets. They have already provided advice for building up our newsletter and how to better support marginalized writers.

Editorial challenges, and recommendations

Much of the editorial challenges come down to high workload and lack of resources which have resulted in a pattern of past editors being overextended and burnt out. To pinpoint and address specific issues, the Briarpatch Board of Directors, along with Ivy & Dean Consulting, undertook a survey of past Briarpatch staff and current Briarpatch community members/supporters.

The result of this is a [Strategic Plan](#) meant to address the roots of the following recurring problems flagged by Saima Desai and Sophie Jin in past AGM staff reports:

1. **Increasing editorial capacity.** It is currently untenable for editors to take vacation or time off. Briarpatch's thoughtful CBA policies along with its commitment to labour rights needs to translate materially.
2. **Paying contributors fairly.** \$150-\$350 isn't remotely close to fair, considering how much work many writers and artists put into their contributions.
 - a. Briarpatch should increase its contributor fees.
3. **Pitches/circulation.** Sophie flagged last year that we've been receiving far fewer pitches than in previous years. They flagged that the meta news ban means it'll be even harder for Briarpatch to circulate calls for pitches. The magazine's

announcements, calls for pitches, and articles are still not getting as much attention. Our labour issue which used to be our most pitched issue has also taken a hit on pitches. While Briarpatch has relaunched an [Instagram page](#), the risk that we will be flagged once again is ever present.

- a. Briarpatch needs to focus more on building up a practice of utilizing our digital newsletter, especially given the high number of subscribers.
 - b. Briarpatch should create a plan for outreach with organizers, writers, and artists to find alternative ways of circulation.
4. **Fact-checking standards.** While Briarpatch fact-checks most articles, we do not fact-check as rigorously as possible, because of constraints on time and money.
- a. The editor should hold more rigorous training for new fact-checkers.
 - b. The editor should develop clear guidelines that encourage more intensive fact-checking on potentially libellous articles.
 - c. Briarpatch's website should include a webpage that communicates our fact-checking standards to our readers and contributors.
 - d. The editor should establish a better plan and budget for fact-checking online-only articles.
5. **Publishing investigations.** Briarpatch readers have told us in reader surveys that they appreciate investigations, but Briarpatch doesn't have the budget to pay writers/researchers fairly for time-intensive investigations and to cover the associated costs (travel, FOI/ATI requests, database subscriptions, etc.).
- a. Briarpatch should create a budget line for costs associated with investigations and communicate with writers that Briarpatch will cover these costs.
 - b. The editor should pursue professional development on investigative techniques and editing investigations
 - c. Briarpatch should develop a legal defence plan

Contests

[Writing in the Margins contest](#)

2024 is the 14th iteration of Briarpatch's Writing in the Margins contest. The contest takes a massive amount of staff time to coordinate (an estimated 150 hours/year), and brings in negligible revenue.

The 2023 WITM contest saw 50 entries, lower than previous years, and a minimal number of photo submissions. We now accept submissions through a Google Form, making contest administration simpler. In previous years, Board members have been involved in creating the shortlist for the contest, reducing staff workload.

Briarpatch staff and board members were previously working to change the contest for 2022 to make it more sustainable and useful to Briarpatch's community; this could include funding/sponsorship, administrative support, and partnering with other creative writing or photography organizations. This work has stalled, but (barring minor improvements) the issues with the contest remain. This work should resume.

The contest is usually mostly promoted through social media, and though Briarpatch has relaunched an Instagram account, fewer entries are expected this year due to the overall

impact of the Meta ban and as we are just rebuilding our Instagram following which currently sits at ~15% of what we once had. Additionally, X users are slowly switching to Bluesky so our numbers are dwindling there (though very glacially at the moment and our overall follower count is quite high). Depending on the quantity of this year's submissions, Briarpatch board and staff should consider partnering with other magazines/arts organizations to promote the contest. Given the number of other publications that have extended their contest deadlines, this may be a viable route.

[Northern Writing Prize](#)

Every year, we struggle to get the word out about the Northern Writing Prize, and to receive a significant number of high-quality pitches. Even so, we published an [excellent article in 2023 by Rachel Cluderay](#). Briarpatch should undertake more outreach in Northern communities, and consider partnering with Northern organizations like the [Dechinta Center](#). Having a board member based in the North with connections to grassroots groups and arts organizations would help to increase outreach in the North and reporting from the North.

Sophie did not advertise the prize in 2023 due to worries about circulation because of the Online News ban. In 2024, Meera did not advertise the prize due to adjusting to the steep learning curve and high responsibility of this job, alongside relocating provinces. There is one more year left for the NWP, and in 2025, Briarpatch should make a plan for circulating the prize with minimal reliance on social media.

Growth metrics

E-newsletter

We've been utilizing Action Network as a platform since 2022. Our audience has grown steadily and we need to make better use of our email lists. Truthout has provided valuable advice on how to do so but that advice will only be useful with more staff capacity to implement this advice. From April 2023 to March 2024 our email list grew from 8,371 to 12,193 subscribers. Our open rate is an average of 31%, slightly below the industry standard rate of 34.2%, and our click-rate of 1.9% is below the industry standard click-through rates of 4.4%. Our unsubscribe rate is 0.7% (industry standard is 0.09%) and our bounce rate is 0.6% (industry standard is 0.35%).

Briarpatch website

Briarpatch website Our web traffic spiked in 2020-2021 thanks to the Land Back issue, then returned to a relatively normal rate this year. Still, it indicates a lack of growth in people reading our articles online between 2020 and 2022. We need to use our email list to drive more people to the website, and come up with other means of reaching new readers.

Pageviews

- 254,720 sessions in 2023-2024 (July 1, 2023 - July 1, 2024)
- 212,480 sessions in 2022-2023 (July 1, 2022 - July 1, 2023)
- 365,060 sessions in 2021-2022 (July 1, 2021 - July 1 2022)
- 522,689 sessions in 2020-2021

- 367,131 sessions in 2019-20
- 295,881 sessions in 2018-19
- 269,673 sessions in 2017-18
- 275,407 sessions in 2016-17

Other insights (April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024):

- 40.4% of people browse the site on mobile (a slight growth from last year), 57.3% on desktop (slight decline from last year), and 1.4% on tablet.
- The top cities where people browse from are Toronto (11.5%), not set (7%), Vancouver (3.7%), and Ottawa (2.6%). Regina users have declined from 1.3% to 1.2% in the last year.
- We have an average session duration of 1 minute.
- Most readers find the site through organic search, despite the fact that we could better optimize our articles for SEO.

Social Media

Social Media

Briarpatch social media

Facebook: out of commission

Twitter: 12,200 followers

Instagram: 1,033 followers

Sask Dispatch social media

Facebook: out of commission

Twitter: 1,412 followers

The Sask Dispatch

Updates:

- Tannara Yelland was the Dispatch and Defender editor from September to December 2023.
- Amielle took over in January 2024 and has been increasing the amount of online content.

The Dispatch continues to grow slowly and haltingly, though its mandate is still a powerful one. Limited money means we can only employ an editor part-time, which means the Dispatch publishes few articles and does little promotion or outreach. We are exploring options to increase the Dispatch's growth, including making the editor a permanent employee, and running consistent fundraisers.

The RWDSU Defender

In 2019, Briarpatch was contracted by the union that represents Briarpatch staff, SJB-RWDSU, to write and produce the RWDSU's newsletter, the Defender. Emily Klatt produced and laid out the Defender until the July 2023 issue, and Tannara Yelland produced the October and December 2023 issues. Amielle has been producing them since April 2024. RWDSU seems happy with the product, and renewed our contract this year.

Publisher

Publisher successes

1) We completed a long-overdue magazine redesign courtesy of the Business Innovation Fund grant and Loki Design, led by Kevin Lo out of Montreal. This was accompanied by a website redesign by our longtime web developer, Derek Hogue of Amphibian Design. We've heard tons of positive feedback about the new look over the past year. This design gives us plenty of new marketing assets, potential marketing opportunities, and more.

2) We ran a number of successful events, both in Regina and out of town. Lessons learned from these will, we hope, let us successfully program events remotely in the future (and have already helped us run events and tabling better in FY2024-25).

3) We've been working more closely in collaboration with other publishers, especially through Unrigged, a network of like-minded independent Canadian publications. With the left media landscape in Canada continuing to shrink, working on cross-promotion with other publishers will likely be necessary for our ongoing survival.

Publisher challenges and recommendations

1) Large declines in subscription numbers. We are back down to pre-pandemic lows around the 1600 subscriber mark. Some of this can be attributed to a vastly reduced reach online, courtesy of the Meta ban, which has throttled our traffic (and therefore our potential subscriber base) by nearly 30 per cent. As well, we're currently facing a tougher economy, and it's harder than ever to get people to spend on print media subscriptions, or media subscriptions in general.

In FY2024-25 we have a planned mail outreach campaign directed at subscribers whose subscriptions lapsed between 2022 and 2023; we're hoping for a 20% response rate to bring old subscribers back on board and bring our subscriptions back up to a serviceable level.

2) Lots of tasks, not a lot of capacity. Grant work took up a ton of extra time this year, as did work on the January 2024 Black Radicalism special issue. As well, the barebones nature of staffing means that when one staffer is ill or takes a vacation, there's work that's not likely to be adequately covered. With much of staff energy devoted to the basic tasks of keeping the magazine going, it's hard to take on additional but necessary tasks, including those that drive magazine growth like collaborations, special issues, and circulation campaigns, or those that contribute much-needed external resources to the magazine like undertaking grants and strategic partnerships, without risking additional burnout.

Continue to grow and engage the board. We've got a lot of tasks in the future thanks to our strategic plan and our existing board members are enthusiastic. Since moving to a remote board, it has proved difficult at times to maintain engagement. Having an ongoing project will

help, and board support on projects has often resulted in staff having the time and space to do the core work properly.

3) Growing sustainable revenue streams. While Briarpatch's revenue streams have remained largely static with minor upward growth in donations and subscriptions over the past five years, it's hard to grow those streams the way we need to in order to grow capacity- and it's hard to grow those streams without increased capacity, creating a kind of deadlock. Carry out the strategic plan. Not much to say here - we have some goals for this, and with the board's work, we should be able to at least make some headway.

Finance

This report is to come in a Special General Meeting some time in the near future.

Our longtime bookkeeper, Arlene Janzen, passed away in November of last year. We are in the (long) process of working through the year with our new bookkeeper, Jennifer Kehler, and will have FY2023-24 complete and headed for an overdue financial review by the end of November.

Circulation

Print subscription levels for 2022-23 were between 1737 at their peak and 1491 at their lowest.

Issue Circulation

May/Jun	July/Aug	Sept/Oct	Nov/Dec	Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr
1737	1710	1600	1536	1521	1491

Revenue from sales of subscriptions - to come along with financial documents at Special General Meeting

Advertising

Our numbers are fairly consistent with last year's. Unfortunately, two longtime advertisers - Between the Lines and Fernwood Books - have scaled back their ad sizes, though they've continued to advertise in each issue. Some organizations, like Oxfam and NUPGE, are back in the advertising fold. We expect growing advertising numbers to be a challenge in the next fiscal year as organizations do some belt-tightening.

Staff

Briarpatch operates with a core full-time staff of two: interim editor Sophie Jin and publisher John Cameron. Saima Desai is on a one-year leave from the editor position. We once again contracted about 100 people to write articles, make art, contribute photos, fact-check, copy edit, and proofread. These contributors included the Black writers and artists who contributed to our Black Radicalism issue in January 2024.

In addition, we have a contract editor producing the Sask Dispatch, a free print publication distributed to all Saskatchewan Briarpatch subscribers and (pre-COVID) in select locations around Regina, and the RWDSU Defender newsletter, for an annual contract value of \$11,576.40. Emily Klatt left the Dispatch role in August 2023. Tannara Yelland took on the role from September to January of 2023, and Amielle Christopherson has been in the Dispatch editor role since.

Fundraising

We continue to do two print appeals per year to subscribers (except sustainers). The appeals raise around \$3,000 each.

Unfortunately, our annual marathon fundraiser was disrupted due to poor skating weather conditions at the start of the year.

An ongoing contract with RWDSU to produce the Defender newsletter continues to subsidize the production of the Dispatch by covering the costs of having the staffer on contract.

Events

We are trying to focus on putting on events that: spark community organizing conversations that wouldn't otherwise happen, strengthen Briarpatch (visibility, subscription sales, donations, etc), and/or strengthen the political analysis around an issue.

Briarpatch did a series of anniversary events in cities across Canada during the last fiscal year, culminating in a 50th anniversary celebration on November 4 in Regina:

- Sept. 14, Edmonton – The Aviary. Panel featuring Jeremy Appel & Cole Rockarts. Music by Aladean Kheroufi.
- Sept. 21, Winnipeg – Xcues Café & Events Centre. Panel featuring Lenard Monkman and Mahlet Cuff. Music by Treyson Sinclair.
- Sept. 23, Toronto – Danu Social House. Panel featuring Matthew DiMera & Daniel Sarah Karasik.
- Nov. 4, Regina – The Artesian. Featuring a live episode of Unmaking Saskatchewan with Alex Birrell. Music by Lyssa & the Try-Tones.

The events in Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Toronto drew in over 100 attendees and brought in over \$1,000 in donation revenue. Though most attendees were existing subscribers and/or Sustainers, we also sold around a dozen subscriptions.

Briarpatch ran a Workers' Party event at Hampton Hub during RDLC's MayWorks event with around 30 attendees, featuring a panel with Florence Stratton and Kale MacLellan and music from Gut Balloon. The RDLC covered costs of the event, which brought in around \$200 in donations.

There was no annual holiday party at Huston House, due this time to capacity issues. This is set to change with next year's annual report, so watch this space.

Grant Applications

Our 2023-2024 Aid to Publishers grant was \$54,019.

We were approached to apply for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation's new journalism fellowship grant. We proposed a Prairie Editorial Fellowship, which would allow us to hire a full-time staff member for one year to support editorial work. We were awarded \$68,000, which allowed us to hire a staff member (Serena Lukas Bhandar, mentioned above), cover editorial costs associated with her work, and cover administration costs from Briarpatch. As Serena's work began in FY2024-25, more details will come at next year's AGM.

In the last fiscal year, we also received a \$1,300 grant from RPIRG to support our annual Writing in the Margins contest.

ECMF- Edna Curran Memorial Fund

The Edna Curran Memorial Fund is the volunteer board that owns and manages Huston House; all tenants have to have at least one staff member acting as an ECMF board member.

John sits on the ECMF Board. The building currently has one of its rental spaces vacant, and has its back lot fully leased for parking. The organization is in good financial standing. There is over \$70,000 available for repairs to the house, and the ECMF board is finalizing drafts for a renovation process that will begin in the 2025 calendar year. This will require Briarpatch to move to a temporary office space in FY 2025-26. Our adjusted monthly rent is currently \$543.66. Briarpatch currently has no back rent owing.