

Publisher

Publisher successes

1. As detailed below, we successfully hired Serena Bhandar for a one-year term. This was the Canadian Race Relations Foundation's first time running the grant and (as far as I know) our first time working with a grant of this size from that organization, so we're hopefully able to access other programs and funding in the future - as well as use our successes in this program to access funds elsewhere.
2. We continue to work in partnership with Unrigged, which has helped drive traffic to the website and presented us with event, outreach, and networking opportunities, as well as regular lines of communication with other independent publishers.
3. We've hired a new bookkeeper, Jennifer Kehler of EJK Accounting Services, and she's done wonderful work modernizing our accounting processes and cleaning up the very substantial backlog of accounting work, which will help keep the board better informed and allow for good decision-making and strategising.
4. Briarpatch has been graciously bequeathed a fairly large sum from a reader's estate. This will appear on next year's financials, but the legal work to secure the bequest took a couple of years and finally came to an end in early 2025.

Publisher challenges, and recommendations

Many publishing challenges are carried over from last year. There's a significant capacity issue on the publishing side, and it was compounded this year by some additional difficulties. Some of these difficulties have been resolved, but their effects still remain, and that's kept resolving some of these ongoing issues at something of a standstill.

1. **Reduced subscriptions.** We're hovering around 1300-1500 subscribers, and finding it difficult to grow from there.. 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.

On my end, I'm hoping to mail out a lapsed subscriber outreach letter that's been in the works for a while, and to revisit our renewals program in light of our switch to a quarterly. As well, ongoing strategizing between staff and board around our newsletter will help us use our quite substantial newsletter base as a conversion tool.

2. **Backlogs create backlogs.** There's so many tasks and such little capacity that a large backlog of any task, such as the substantial accounting backlog and subsequent work to both catch that up and remedy outstanding bills, creates difficulties in finding the

appropriate time to do fundraising work, pursue grants, pursue advertisers, etc. At the best of times Briarpatch is a lot of tenuously-spinning plates to begin with.

I know the board intends to hire someone to temporarily cover some administrative gaps. A recommendation I'd make here is for the new board to develop some more long-term fund development strategies in order to relieve some of the pressures on the publisher side and hopefully buoy our resources enough to make some more capacity-building moves in the future.

3. **Implementing our strategies as a remote/nationwide organization.** For a long time, Briarpatch benefitted from having a tight-knit local board with ample connections in Regina's activist and labour community. That's allowed for some fairly tight strategizing and coordination in the past to help the organization either stay afloat or improve its fortunes, but it also means that a lot of our administrative structure was based on being local rather than remote. There are a lot of exciting possibilities for a remote board to leverage its skill sets, but we've had to expend energy and capacity as an organization while we figure out how to further develop the board in a way that takes advantage of those possibilities, and unfortunately the ongoing capacity issues in the publisher seat make it hard to address any potential gaps this creates.

I don't know that I have recommendations for this, necessarily. I think it's going to take time. What I'd maybe suggest to incoming board members is to be familiar with our strategic plan and to be ready and eager to throw some ideas out there and spend a bit of energy figuring out what works.

Finance

Complete financial statements for fiscal year 2024-25 (April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025) have been compiled by Iris Howden, and are available in a separate document. A few highlights are provided here:

	2024-25	2023-24
Revenue	255,162	227,016
Subscriptions	14,235	16,187
Advertising	23,820	26,170
Grants	131,533	81,786
Donations	67,136	80,280

Expenses	274,086	254,260
Salaries & benefits	148,734	101,200
Magazine production	82,593	106,403
Printing and Postage – Other	4,279	5,956
Rent	6,773	5,788
Net income (loss)	-18,924	-27,244

The last couple of years have been rough financially for the organization. Advertising and subscriptions continue to decline, accounting for most of our lost revenue along with a decline in donation revenues. We've made up for it with grants, but the gap in our revenues has caused us to balance out the surpluses we had between 2020 and 2023 somewhat with losses.

This can be attributed to a few things. First is that we were flying fairly blind with our bookkeeping until our current bookkeeper, Jennifer Kehler, came on board and got our finances up to date. Second is an ongoing issue of market penetration that came from the Meta media ban that saw our Facebook and Instagram pages deleted - and saw article sharing hugely limited in Canada - back in 2023. Word of mouth has always been enormously important to Briarpatch and future revenues will in part depend on our ability to develop word of mouth independently of social media.

Circulation

Print subscription levels for 2024-25 were between 1287 and 1585.

Issue	May/Jun	Jul/Aug	Sep/Oct	Nov/Dec	Jan/Feb	Mar/Apr
Circulation	1585	1592	1423	1417	1287	1381

This is a very low ebb for subscriptions, and as we've cleared up some of our administrative backlog, pushing subscription acquisition and website/newsletter conversion will be a high priority for calendar year 2026 to drive those revenues back up and improve our circulation.

Revenue from sales of subscriptions

Year	Revenue (\$)
2019-20	38,042
2020-21	90,785
2021-22	59,602
2022-23	26,338
2023-24	20,102
2024-25	17,035

Advertising

Our numbers dropped again slightly, with some regular advertisers reducing their buys in the last two fiscal years. After moving down to a 1/8 page advertisement in 2024, Fernwood scaled up to 1/4 page advertisements in 2025. Another goal for 2026 is to try and recruit past advertisers back to the magazine, including advertisers in labour and from larger values-aligned nonprofits.

Staff

Briarpatch operates with a core full-time staff of two: editor meera eragoda and publisher John Cameron.

We once again contracted about 100 people to write articles, make art, contribute photos, fact-check, copy edit, and proofread.

In addition to our normal contracting, we have a contracted 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. Amielle Christopherson has been our *Dispatch* and *Defender* editor since April 2024.

In the summer of 2024, we hired a summer student, Vicky Huang, for an eight-week period. This was financed by a \$4,153 grant from Service Canada's Canada Summer Jobs program. Vicky performed several editorial tasks, including proofreading and writing articles, and publishing tasks, including advertising and letter writing, in addition to crucial work supporting the Writing in the Margins contest and designing social media templates.

Fundraising

In the last fiscal year, we only ran our fall appeal, which raised around \$2,500. We once again ran skate-a-thons in Regina and elsewhere, raising around \$1,970.

An ongoing contract with RWDSU to produce the *Defender* newsletter continues to subsidize the production of the *Dispatch* by covering the costs of having Amielle 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 put on a MayWorks event at the Hampton Hub on May 3, 2024, featuring a panel discussion with Indigenous labour activists Dodie Ferguson and Louise Thomas, sponsored by our staff union, RWDSU Local 568.

Briarpatch tabled at the 2024 Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's annual convention in Saskatoon, making a number of local and national labour connections.

Briarpatch also tabled at & acted as media sponsor for a pair of local concerts in 2024, a Folk Festival concert featuring Cadence Weapon & Super Duty Tough Work, and a locally-organized Palestine solidarity fundraiser organized by Students for Justice in Palestine's University of Regina chapter and the Good Trouble Network.

The Edna Curren Memorial Fund had a small holiday get-together at the Hampton Hub in December 2024, and Briarpatch staff were on hand to meet community members.

Grant Applications

Our core grant, the Aid to Publishers stream of Heritage Canada's Canadian Periodical Fund, had its formula adjusted considerably in the last two years, moving from prioritizing circulation to prioritizing Canadian content. As a publication focused primarily (though not exclusively) on grassroots reporting in Canada, we've benefited from this new model. Our Aid to Publishers grant in 2024-25 was \$59,380.

We also received a \$68,000 grant from the Canadian Race Relations Fund to support the one-year hiring of Serena Lukas Bhandar as our Prairie Editorial Fellow, and \$4,153 from Service Canada's Canada Summer Jobs program to support the hiring of Vicky Huang.

ECMF - Edna Curran Memorial Fund

(The volunteer board that owns and manages Huston House, where Briarpatch rents office space)

John sits on the ECMF Board. The building is fully occupied, and ECMF is beginning (as of the 2025-26 fiscal year) a lengthy and long-overdue renovation and retrofitting process.

Our adjusted monthly rent is currently \$609.04. As of this writing Briarpatch has no outstanding rent owed to ECMF.

Editor

Editorial changes

1. Briarpatch published shorter issues on average this fiscal year (April 2024 to March 2025) as the editor (Meera Eragoda) worked to adjust to the demands of the role.
2. In line with the goal of the Strategic Plan to reduce staff being overextended and burned out, we will be moving the magazine to a quarterly publication for 2026. This will allow us to retain the quality we strive for and leave more capacity for special issues. Additionally, it leaves room to increase the number of issues in the future in line with increases in editorial capacity.
3. Erin Baird left the fact-checking team (but has rejoined in what is technically the next fiscal year); Abigail Popple joined the fact-checking team and has been an invaluable asset.
4. Emma Schultz left the fact-checking team after eight years (!!) of dedicated fact-checking.

Editorial successes

1. We received a grant from the Canada Race Relations Foundation to allow us to hire a Prairie Editorial Fellow. We hired Serena Lukas Bhandar in that role and enabled her to gain writing, editing, and fact-checking experience in journalism.
2. We continue 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.
3. The board's outreach committee has developed communications strategies for staff around social media and our newsletter. Staff needs to implement this and with the addition of a term position and a switch to a quarterly, pouring more energy into both should be feasible for the upcoming year.

4. We have found a workaround for the Meta ban to have a presence once again on Instagram which has helped our outreach and circulation, especially for the Writing in the Margins contest.
5. Briarpatch signed onto PACBI.
6. We have produced some stunning covers in the last fiscal year, including ones by Anna Binta Diallo, Kira Buro, and Ibrahim Abusitta.
7. Briarpatch has increased its reporting from the North and is partnering with the Northern Journalism Training Initiative in the implementation of the Northern Writing Prize.
8. Briarpatch increased its fact-checking rates from \$15/hour to \$20/hour.

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 burned 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. Editorial capacity.

- a. Briarpatch has been taking steps to increase editorial capacity through committing to a quarterly schedule for 2026, more active board involvement, and bringing on contract positions.
 - b. Briarpatch is well-positioned to provide deep analysis, explanation, and solutions on specific issues. We have done this in the past through the special issues Saima Desai spearheaded such as the Land Back, Prison Abolition, and Disability Justice issue. As these issues are often a collective effort, it might behoove Briarpatch to come up with a flexible and tiered structure for bringing on additional support to develop and edit these issues. Meera will do some research and come up with a proposal for the board to discuss.
 - c. While bringing on a Prairie Editorial Fellow was a good idea in theory to help solve editorial capacity issues, adding the position in the first year of a new editor's term created a steeper learning curve. In future years, it might be more useful to bring on a new position following the onboarding of a new editor and once they have a chance to get their sea legs.
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 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](#)

2025 is the 15th 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. However, the contest does increase our circulation and outreach. This year, we have contracted previous editorial and publishing assistant Vicky Huang to help with contest administration which is reducing the workload on staff. Writing in the Margins also focuses largely on creative writing, while Briarpatch typically publishes more analytical commentary and previous editors have flagged the desire to do more investigative work so we might want to further discuss the utility of the contest.

The 2024 WITM contest saw 60 entries and a minimal number of photo submissions (only 6). We now accept submissions through a Google Form, making contest administration simpler. In 2024, Board members were 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. 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 has partnered with the Northern Journalism Training Initiative who have connections with grassroots groups and arts organizations in the North. As part of the NWP implementation, NJTI will be running an online workshop on how to pitch which will hopefully result in some high-quality pitches.

The prize has not been advertised from 2023 to 2025. However, there are two years left in the prize and we have started planning for its 2026 rollout.

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 it. From April 2024 to March 2025 our email list grew from 12,193 to 25,987 subscribers. Our open rate is an average of 18%, below the industry standard rate of 34.2%, and our click-rate of 1.4% is below the industry standard click-through rates of 4.4%. Our unsubscribe rate is 0.4% (industry standard is 0.09%) and our bounce rate is 0.34% (industry standard is 0.35%).

Briarpatch website

Our web traffic spiked in 2020-2021 thanks to the Land Back issue, then returned to a relatively normal rate in 2023. It's stayed around the same rate with a slight dip this year but we haven't been getting content up on as regular of a schedule and once the quarterly switch occurs, this will likely get back on track. We also will have the space to use our email list to drive more people to the website. As a long-term plan to rely less on social media, we should brainstorm other ways to reach new readers.

Pageviews

- 239,748 sessions in 2024-2025 (July 1, 2024 - July 1, 2025)
- 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):

- 40.3% of people browse the site on mobile (same as last year), 59.1% on desktop (slight increase from last year), and 1.4% on tablet.
- The top cities where people browse from are Toronto (12.4%), not set (6.7%), Vancouver (3.7%), and Montreal (2.8%). Regina users have increased from 1.2% to 1.5% 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

Bluesky: 458 (new account as of 2025)

Twitter: 11,300 followers

Instagram: 2,323 followers

Sask Dispatch social media

Facebook: out of commission

Twitter: 1,288 followers

The Sask Dispatch

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. Current Dispatch editor Amielle Christopherson has been producing and laying out the Defender since April 2024. RWDSU seems happy with the product, and renewed our contract this year.