

## 2016 CSAC Challenge Awards – Executive Summary

“L.A. County Hosts “Tell Your True Tale” Writers’ Workshops” (Population: 750,001 and Above)

**Overview (25-word summary):** Aspiring authors get published through “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshops – hosted at County Public Libraries, led by former *Los Angeles Times* journalist-author Sam Quinones.

**Problem or Challenge:** Writing a story – let alone getting it published – fills most aspiring authors with both excitement and apprehension. As artists, among their biggest challenges is determining what to write and how to start. As professionals, a related challenge is finding an experienced, effective mentor who will shepherd them through the writing process and introduce them to the publishing world. Finding guidance on these matters can require more financial resources than many new writers can afford – another tough challenge.

**Innovative Solution:** The County of Los Angeles Public Library strives to provide patrons with an environment where they can connect, explore, create and dream. To this end, since 2013, we have worked with renowned former *Los Angeles Times* journalist and author Sam Quinones to offer aspiring authors professionally mentored “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshops. To date, we have held seven workshops – six at the East Los Angeles Library in unincorporated East Los Angeles and one at Sunkist Library in unincorporated La Puente. In each workshop, between seven to ten participants met every Saturday for seven weeks. Quinones customized each workshop to each group’s needs. But no matter which workshop, all participants were inspired to think of their own experiences – and those around them – as raw material for avoiding writer’s block. By insisting telling stories in limited space, the “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshop approach forced participants to hone their imagination, eliminate unnecessary words, and make the hard choices that are part of strong writing so that their non-fiction stories read like fiction. Often this approach works best when new writers are from communities or families that have never told their stories; this is often the case in communities like La Puente and especially East Los Angeles, with its history of both socioeconomic marginalization and more recent revitalization. Workshops generally involved a pre-workshop discussion, where Quinones explained the workshop’s approach and included a required reading list of stories. Then participants generated their own story ideas and submitted first draft writings to Quinones – who, in turn, made his first line-edits. He also provided ideas on how each story might be improved – through cuts, expansions, reorganizations, improved beginnings, rewritten endings, or perhaps further research. At this stage in the workshop, Quinones sometimes interviewed participants themselves to get a better sense of their needs and motivations. Participants then submitted second drafts – and Quinones responded with his second line-edits. Afterward,

Quinones led intense group discussions. He and workshop participants critiqued all submitted pieces, providing both points of praise and suggestions for improvement. If needed, participants then submitted a third draft to Quinones for a final review. The entire series of workshops was overseen by Daniel Hernandez – Chicano Resource Center Librarian with the County of Los Angeles Public Library.

**Originality:** We count on libraries to provide spaces for community engagement and creative activity – ranging from traditional Storytime sessions for kids and book clubs for adults to the more modern STEM sessions for teens and musical performances for the general public. But as special and appreciated as this kind of programming can be, it is not often that the end result is new, publishable content. Yet that is exactly what materializes via our “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshops. Content produced through these unique workshops ultimately is made available for purchase – and for check-out, since it automatically becomes included in the official County of Los Angeles Public Library catalogue.

**Cost Effectiveness:** N/A

**Results:** At the end of each workshop – and under the guidance of Quinones – participants self-published a compilation of their works. The process gave them direct experience with book publishing and promotion. We then hosted a festive author presentation at the East Los Angeles Library or Sunkist Library, depending on which workshop concluded. It was akin to a book signing party with participants bringing along friends, family, and even some fans. They met the public as newly published authors – introducing their book and discussing their writing experiences – and concluded the event by autographing copies of their book, available for purchase on Amazon.com. Through the “You’re Your True Tale” Writers Workshop, participants experienced – start to finish – the process of creating, editing and self-publishing. By continuing to host these workshops, we at the County of Los Angeles Public Library demonstrate how seriously we take our mission not just to provide, but actively nurture, creative spaces for the public. Most aspiring novelists only dream of being mentored by a seasoned, professional author and breaking into the book publishing business. But the County of Los Angeles Public Library helps make their dreams come true through the “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshops.

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**Optional Submission:** Enclosed are books published through the “Tell Your True Tale” Writers Workshop.