2023 Annual Report

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Helping Indie Bookstores Thrive Since 1900
ABA works every day to help independent bookstores across the U.S. survive and thrive.
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Letter from CEO

The growth and impact of independent bookstores was evident in 2023. ABA membership grew by 11% and for the third consecutive year over 200 independent bookstores opened in the U.S. ABA felt honored to support all of our members this past year and we’re proud to present ABA’s 2023 Annual Report.

In 2023, education continued to be a priority for ABA. In February, we hosted the largest Winter Institute in ABA’s history. Over 1,600 attendees met in-person in the beautiful city of Seattle for our first COVID-era, in-person Winter Institute conference to talk about everything from antitrust and best business practices to banned books, and to celebrate books and bookselling. It was especially meaningful to do so with 900 independent booksellers in Amazon’s hometown! In June, we hosted the largest Children’s Institute in ABA’s history with almost 700 attendees meeting in the charming city of Milwaukee to talk about everything from the state of the children’s book market and best business practices to e-commerce for book fairs, and to celebrate books and children’s bookselling. A highlight was the closing keynote with Ruby Bridges and Nikkolas Smith! Over the course of the year, ABA also offered over 100 virtual educational and networking opportunities and created new resources like BookED, a new educational podcast for booksellers; and a Resource Library for members. ABA also took the show on the road providing critical education on preparing for, and avoiding, emergencies for booksellers at the regional associations’ summer/fall shows.
Advocacy was another priority in 2023. ABA lobbied for the Credit Card Competition Act and the American Innovation and Choice Online Act. Our communication with the Federal Trade Commission and 2023 white paper, *The Stepping Stone to Monopoly*, contributed to the subsequent launch of an FTC lawsuit against Amazon. ABA lobbied to raise the federal debt ceiling and lobbied on the state level in opposition or support of several state bills related to our members’ interests. Some of the most important advocacy work ABA conducted in 2023 was in the fight against banned books and for free expression. ABA expanded its advocacy team, created a Right to Read Toolkit for booksellers, and advocated against almost three dozen censorship and free speech bills that directly impacted our members while also assisting individual stores with local challenges and opposition to their own free speech. Most significantly, ABA, along with a coalition of partners, challenged and won injunctions against two unconstitutional laws that restrict members’ First Amendment rights: Texas HB 900 and Arkansas Act 372. These lawsuits are still pending and the work goes on.

And finally, IndieCommerce was a priority in 2023. This multi-year project made significant progress in 2023 as we began migrating stores to the new IndieCommerce 2.0 platform. That said, like many construction projects there have been unexpected delays; a top priority for 2024 is to cross the finish line and migrate all the stores. The Board has provided additional funding to make this possible and the team remains committed.

These were ABA’s strategic priorities in 2023. But we offered so much more that we hope you found valuable in terms of your business and in terms of your membership. This annual report is evidence of some of that work and the success of that work is a testament to the efforts of the entire ABA staff.

**Our team visited over 150 independent bookstores this year** and during those visits we spoke with hundreds of booksellers to hear how their stores were doing, what they needed, and what their concerns for the future were. Each store had its own unique magic but the booksellers were universally passionate about, and committed to, serving their community and championing books. This is what makes independent bookstores special and important.

Thank you for the continued honor of supporting you.

Allison K Hill, CEO
The growth in the indie channel continued in 2023, confirming once again that The Future is Indie.
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN

291 bookstore businesses opened in 2023

- 230 storefronts
- 34 pop-ups
- 18 online
- 28 Black-owned
- 51 BIPOC-owned
- 192 bookstores planning on opening in the next 1-2 years
- 19 Black-owned
- 29 BIPOC-owned
- 95 bookstore businesses closed in 2023

Note: some members do not share their racial identity.
ABA Membership

### Member Locations
- **2019**: 1,916
- **2020**: 2,209
- **2021**: 2,496
- **2022**: 2,547
- **2023**: 2,593
- **2024**: 2,844 (9.7% increase)

### Bookstore Companies
- **2019**: 1,363
- **2020**: 1,635
- **2021**: 1,910
- **2022**: 2,010
- **2023**: 2,178
- **2024**: 2,433 (11.7% increase)

### Provisional Members
- **2019**: 178
- **2020**: 194
- **2021**: 362
- **2022**: 207
- **2023**: 198
- **2024**: 192
2023 marked the **highest participation in history** for ABACUS, ABA’s financial benchmarking report for independent bookstores. ABACUS helps stores see how they compare to other stores and identify areas to improve profitability.

**Indies First**

**November 26, 2023**

This was the 11th anniversary of the national campaign in support of independent bookstores in conjunction with Small Business Saturday, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. **Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman** became ABA’s Indie Ambassador!
EDUCATION, INSPIRATION + SUPPORT

Strengthening Our Community
Wi2023 in Seattle was ABA’s biggest Winter Institute in history with over 900 booksellers in attendance and over 1,600 total attendees.

The conference program included keynote speakers, education, networking, and affinity groups to help booksellers with their businesses.
Advocacy

Antitrust

• ABA advocated in support of the American Innovation and Choice Online Act, an antitrust bill that would protect competition in the marketplace.

• In June 2023, ABA sent a new white paper detailing Amazon’s anticompetitive behavior in the bookselling industry to contacts at the Federal Trade Commission.

• In September, Allison Hill, Ray Daniels, and David Grogan, met with counsel from the FTC in Washington, DC, to discuss Amazon’s behavior in the bookselling and publishing space, and to answer questions about ABA’s white paper. The FTC subsequently filed an antitrust suit against Amazon. This one should be last on the list since the other actions led to the lawsuit.

• In a letter to FTC Chair Lina Khan, ABA CEO Allison Hill cautioned the FTC about Amazon’s request for an eleventh hour meeting saying it was likely to propose a deal to avoid real punishment for its anticompetitive behavior. ABA strongly asserted that it’s the FTC’s responsibility to fully investigate before making a determination.

• ABA joined with Authors Guild and Open Markets Institute calling for an investigation into Amazon.
Swipe Fee Reform

• Lobbied in support of the Credit Card Competition Act (CCCA) to end the Visa/Mastercard duopoly and spur price competition in swipe fees. ABA met with lawmakers in support of CCCA and ABA and mobilized bookstore members to participate in multiple fly-ins to Washington DC to meet with lawmakers and share their small business experience.

Government Assistance

• Provided booksellers with information on the Hardship Accommodation Plan (allowing eligible borrowers to make reduced loan payments for six months) and hosted webinars about overlooked additional opportunities for Employee Retention Credits.

Partnerships

• Opposed licensing laws like HI HB 1412, in partnership with the Association of American Publishers, that would have taken e-book sales from independent bookstores.
• Reached out to the Authors Guild to discuss ways to support authors in the age of AI and shared Top 5 Ways booksellers could help with members.
• Advocated, along with other small businesses, for the debt ceiling to be raised.

Outreach to Lawmakers

• In March, ABA’s Advocacy division wrote an introductory letter to the new federal lawmakers to share some of the challenges facing independent bookstores.
• Lobbied on behalf of independent bookstores’ interest in favor of, or in opposition to, proposed legislation in several states.
Independent Bookstore Day

APRIL 27, 2023

ABA’s national celebration of independent bookstores was the largest in Indie Bookstore Day history to date with 1,063 stores participating from all 50 states!

21.6% increase from 2022 (874 participants)
Courtnay Wallace, Program Director of Independent Bookstore Day

"Independent bookstores are part of the fabric of the neighborhood, staffed by booksellers who know books and their customers. And shopping locally supports our communities as well as the people who live there."
Children’s Institute 2023 was the largest in ABA history. **359 booksellers** representing **238 stores** across the United States met in Milwaukee to celebrate children’s bookselling.

CHECK OUT THE PROGRAM DETAILS.
Fall Regional Trade Shows

SEPTEMBER + OCTOBER, 2023

ABA was happy to be back on the road in full force talking with members and visiting stores.
American Booksellers for Freedom of Expression (ABFE), ABA’s free expression initiative, doubled our efforts this year, expanding the Advocacy team and modifying our strategy to address the growing need to fight book bans.

Right to Read Toolkit

- ABFE released “The ABA Right to Read Toolkit” a member resource containing information about the book ban crisis; interviews with booksellers, book ban experts, and organizers; and how-tos on safely defending the right to read in stores.

Social Media

- ABFE launched on Instagram, Facebook, and X to expand our advocacy community and highlight announcements about ABFE’s initiatives and events, weekly book ban roundups, interviews with Free Expression Advocates, and deep dives into the nuances of book censorship.
Department of Education Outreach and Webinar

• ABFE initiated a relationship with Matt Nosanchuk, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights and President Biden’s newly appointed “Book Ban Czar.” We briefed Nosanchuk on the impact of book bans on independent booksellers, learned about his office’s efforts to combat hostile and discriminatory school environments, and hosted him for a webinar on the role of the Office for Civil Rights and how booksellers can file reports with his office.

Developing Grassroots Relationships

• ABFE increased its outreach to, and partnerships with, grassroots organizers on the state, national, and local levels, including Red Wine & Blue, Our Schools USA, and smaller organizations in Florida, Texas, Missouri, and Alabama, enabling us to brief these organizations when we have information on bans in their area or connect them with interested booksellers.

Direct Support for Stores

• ABFE reached out and offered support, guidance, and best practices to stores facing harassment for their support of banned and diverse books. ABFE intervened on behalf of stores with their local governments in cases where they faced permitting issues or restricted access to events because of the content they sell.
Public advocacy campaigns like Banned Books Week are essential to helping people understand the scope of book censorship and what they can do to fight it.

I’m honored to lead Banned Books Week 2023.

—LeVar Burton, Banned Books Week Honorary Chair
COMMUNITY

Banned Books Week

OCTOBER 1-7, 2023

Over 735 member stores signed up to receive ABA’s Let Freedom Read kits, including displays, materials, and digital resources.
One of the biggest priorities for ABA in 2023 continued to be the upgrade of the ABA’s e-commerce platform and the migration of all of the stores to IndieCommerce 2.0.

During 2023, most IndieLite stores were moved into the pipeline or migrated enabling the IndieCommerce team to address issues and test the platform. The majority of the development work was completed in 2023, and the IndieCommerce team began migrating IndieCommerce stores to 2.0.

Members were updated on the project throughout the year via the IndieCommerce email communications and the IndieCommerce.org blog:
The IndieCommerce Advisory Council offered feedback through their ongoing asynchronous work and an in-person meeting at Winter Institute.

In May of 2024, the ABA Board approved an additional $1.1M in funding for IndieCommerce 2.0 to accelerate the completion of the store migrations to the new platform.

IndieCommerce traffic was 43% higher in 2023 than 2019

IndieCommerce traffic declined 13% when compared to 2022

IndieCommerce sales conversion rate was 21% higher in 2023 than 2019

For the latest IndieCommerce updates and information about the migration to IndieCommerce 2.0, please view the INDIECOMMERCE BLOG.
New Marketing Partners

**USA Today**
ABA began a partnership with USA Today to share weekly bookstore features on their Books page linking to a U.S. map of indie bookstores featured.

**The USA TODAY Featured Independent Bookstores**
Check out our interactive map of the U.S. to find each of our featured independent bookstores. This is just a sampling of the 2700+ independent bookstores across the United States. Watch for more stores to be featured in the weeks ahead.
Thank you to all of the publishers, authors, poets, illustrators, wholesalers, and business partners who made ABA’s work possible in 2023.

A special thanks to James Patterson and Book Industry Charitable Foundation (BINC) for their generous support of booksellers this year.

And thank you to Bookshop for generating $2.8M for bookstores in 2023!
New + Continuous ABA Support

Here’s What Was New In 2023

EDUCATION

• Bookstore Resource Library
• Toolkits:
  • Book Fair Toolkit
  • ABA Right to Read Toolkit
• BookED: ABA’s Bookstore Education Podcast
• Bookseller Lightning Talk Series
• Virtual Bookstore Tours Series
• This is a Fire Drill: Preparing For and Avoiding Crises
  • Presented live at the Fall Regional Association Conferences
WEBINARS

- Employee Retention Credit Informational Webinar
- Local Organizing to Combat Book Bans Webinar
- ABACUS Workshops

NEW BUSINESS SERVICES/DISCOUNTS

- Square
- ZingTrain

MARKETING CAMPAIGNS + ASSETS

- Indie Bestsellers List branding refresh including new logo, speciality social media assets, and weekly, printable one-sheets
EDUCATION

• Winter Institute: Wi2024 Cincinnati
• Children’s Institute: Ci2023 Milwaukee
• Book Buyer’s Handbook
• Book Biz Book Club
• “Welcome to Bookselling” Onboarding Resource
• Developing a Bookstore Business Plan
• Suggested Steps to Opening a Bookstore
• Buzz Books Editors Panels

VIRTUAL NETWORKING

• Affinity Group Meetups
• New Member Series
  • Store Ownership 101
  • Intro to ABA Benefits
  • ABA Partnerships
• ShopTalks
  • Dedicated ABA Children’s Group ShopTalks
• ABA Open House/ABA Board Office Hours
MARKETING CAMPAIGNS & ASSETS

• Independent Bookstore Day
• Indies First
• Indies Introduce
• Indie Next Program
  • Indies Next List
  • Kids’ Indie Next List
  • Reading Group Guide
  • Indie Gift Guide For Genre Lovers
  • Matchbook Marketing Email Program for Indie Customers
  • Best Books for Young Readers Catalog
• Indie Bestsellers List
• Marketing & Social Media Calendar Handouts
• Anti-Amazon Campaigns
  • The Future Is Indie: A Reader’s Journey
  • #SBADumpAmazon
  • Here’s What You Just Did Infographic
• Seasonal Holiday Campaigns
  • The Presents Are Now and Jólabókaflóð Holiday Campaign
  • Plant the Future You Want to See Pre-Holiday Campaign
• Get Out the Vote Campaign
• Banned Books Week BINGO card, Checklists, and social media
• Boxed Mailing
• Preorder Calendar
The Future Is Indie

For more information on ABA programs, contact INFO@BOOKWEB.ORG.
View consolidated financials on BOOKWEB.ORG.