

The Nonprofit Literary Arts Field and its Unique Role in Arts & Culture

Presented by the Literary Arts Fund

April 7, 2026

{Literary]
(Arts\
/Fund}

What is the Literary Arts Fund?

The Literary Arts Fund is an unprecedented effort to dramatically increase support for and the visibility of the nonprofit literary arts field for the next five years toward ensuring a healthy and more robust U.S. literary culture in support of creative writers.

What are the Literary Arts Fund's Strategies?

- Grantmaking in support of general operating and innovation;
- Learning opportunities for the field;
- Research, data presentation, and storytelling for the field; and
- The Literary Arts Funders Collaborative, a new affinity group for grantmakers

Upcoming sessions for the field:

- ❑ Budget Best Practices
Thursday, May 7, 2026 at 2 p.m. ET
- ❑ 2026 Innovation Project Grants Information Session
Thursday, June 18, 2026 at 2 p.m. ET

Information Session Overview

- ¶ The importance of literature and creative writers;
- ¶ Current challenges in the literary ecosystem;
- ¶ The unique contributions of the nonprofit literary arts field and its composition.

“Books are the carriers of civilization.
Without books, history is silent.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Literature is important to our past, present, and future.

Literature is a compelling expression of information and site of documentation. Where journalism, which is rooted in objectivity and accurate information, provides the factual context of current events, literature, which is rooted in subjectivity and imagination, is creative expression that places ideas and events in the realm of the personal.

Both are essential records of our times.

“The page is where things are slow enough for me to really think in a way that feels necessary and enlivening.”

—Aracelis Girmay

Reading activates our imagination and inspires reflection.

Reading stories and poems transports us outside of the day-to-day as language unfolds images on the page. This exercise helps us dream of different paths and possibilities, and new futures.

Reading is also “slow art.” It takes time to read, which makes room for us to engage in personal reflection, a gift in the attention economy.

“You think your pain and your
heartbreak are unprecedented in the
history of the world, but then you read.”

—James Baldwin

Reading reminds us we're not alone.

Amid what has been called an epidemic of loneliness, in books we find stories and poems that resonate with our experiences.

As we read, the author companions us.

“Words can empower or break a person, a community, a nation. But when we share stories with one another, we are reminded of our shared humanity.”

—Shugri Salh

Reading uniquely encourages empathy and prompts compassion.

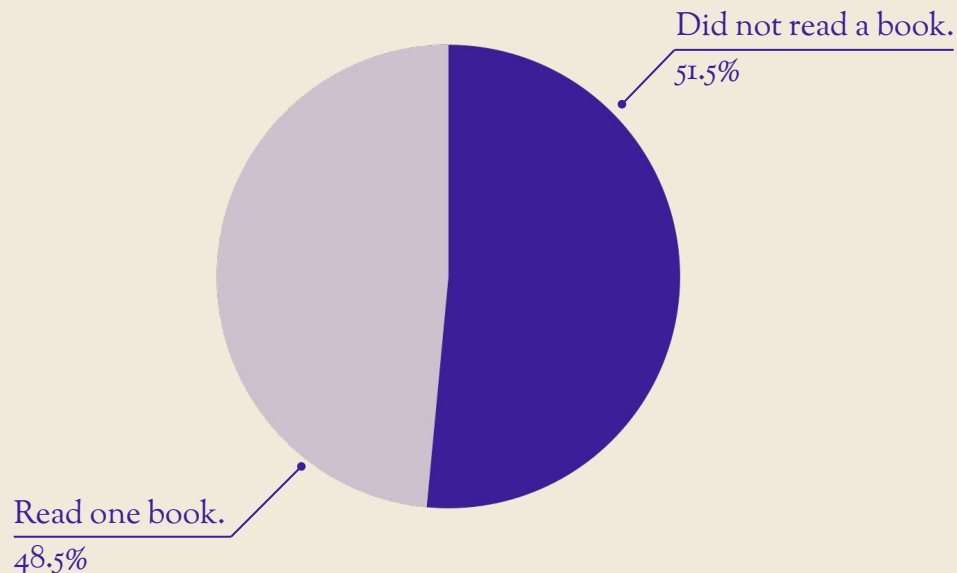
Stories and poems help us understand one another replete with our challenges and aspirations across generations, cultures, communities, and geographies.

While literature and reading encourage qualities that positively contribute to our lives and the health of our communities, writers and their stories, and reading, are at risk.

A majority of Americans don't read books.

The NEA reports that only 48.5% of the U.S. population read any book in 2022.

The number of fiction readers (37.6%) is the lowest in 40 years.



Source: "Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," NEA, 10/2023

Literature is being taught less.

Fewer novels are being taught in English classes as books and reading are being decentered and replaced with short-form content.

easy to consume

*snappy and
to the point*

concise and brief

*designed to be
snackable*

Source:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/12/us/high-school-english-teachers-assigning-books.html>

I v. AI

AI has raised numerous legal, ethical, financial, and philosophical questions that affect creative writers, including:

- ~ Tech companies training LLMs on copyrighted works without permission or compensation;
- ~ New texts produced by generative AI competing with books authored by humans.

Conglomeration and Distribution

~ Over the past 25 years, the few large commercial publishers have become even larger through mergers and acquisitions.

~ Distributors that focus on marketing small presses and getting books to libraries have recently gone out of business.

~ Fees for distributors' services, including warehousing and marketing, are expensive.

Access to Books

~ There are fewer editorially-driven book reviews highlighting new titles for readers.

~ In 2024, “2,452 unique titles were challenged, the third highest number ever documented by the American Library Association and significantly exceeding the annual average of 273 unique titles over the period from 2001–2020.”

Source: <https://www.ala.org/bbooks>

How do literary arts nonprofits and the nonprofit literary arts field address these challenges?

The literary arts is an artistic discipline that encompasses creative writing and literature including creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry.

The nonprofit literary arts field is made up of organizations and publishers that provide creative writers with a wide range of support and opportunities that are distinct from what commercial publishing and public libraries offer.

The nonprofit literary arts field sustains the vitality and independence of American literature and ensures that a wide spectrum of voices and ideas continues to shape our collective imagination.

Literary arts nonprofits uniquely:

¶ ***Engage communities nationwide*** by promoting the benefits and joy of reading, distributing free books, and offering events such as author conversations, book festivals, open mics, reading series, and writing workshops.

¶ ***Assist and advocate for writers*** by providing information, education, and resources about the writing life and publishing process, from contracts to publicity and promotion.

¶ ***Make space for writers*** from a myriad of communities and aesthetic perspectives, including first-time and historically underrepresented authors, and those with intellectually rigorous and artistically adventurous voices.

¶ ***Nurture and mentor writers*** by providing residencies, retreats, and workshops that enable the creation of new work, inspire cross-discipline investigations, and foster artistic development, including among culturally-specific communities.

¶ ***Support writers financially*** by providing monetary awards, fellowships, and prizes; paying writers' fees and honoraria; offering emergency grants; and employing them as teaching artists and staff members.

¶ ***Publish writers*** in print and digital magazines, books, and journals, helping to launch careers, open doors to other opportunities, and showcase work across one's writing life.

Notably, a vast amount of poetry, as well as translated, and experimental literature, is published by nonprofit presses.

¶ ***Build writers' readership*** through feature articles, book reviews, and author interviews in print and on social media, podcasts, websites, and other media that generate conversations about books.

How many literary arts nonprofits are there?

There are 1,000+ independent, incorporated literary arts nonprofits.

Many hundreds more literary arts groups and publishers are not incorporated, use fiscal agents, or are housed at universities.

How much do independent literary arts nonprofits raise, earn, and spend?

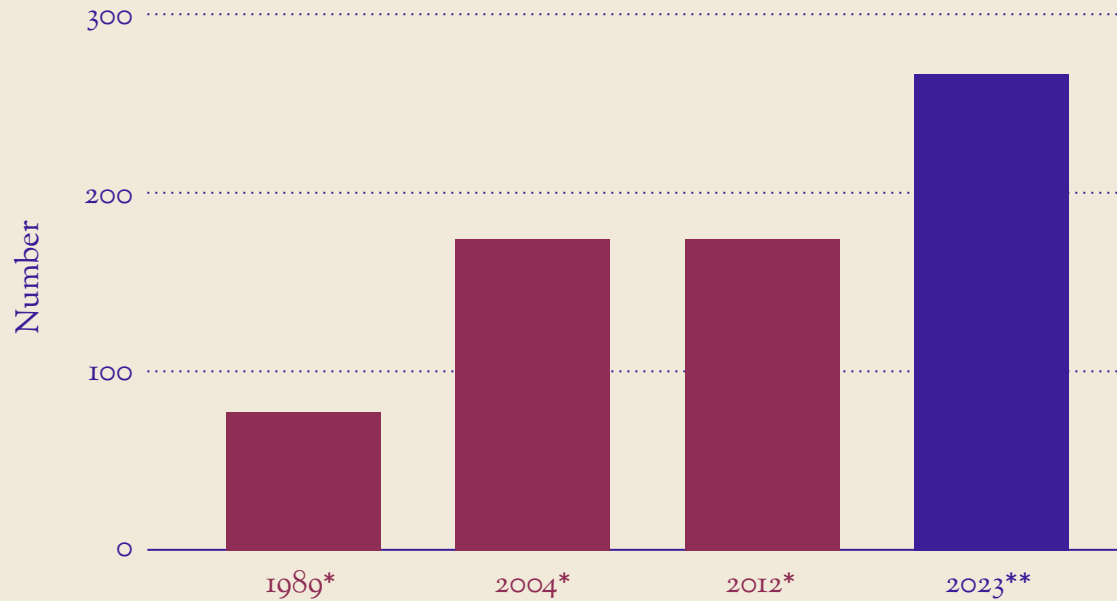
In 2023, there were 267 independent, incorporated literary arts nonprofits that had annual revenue of more than \$50,000.

As a point of comparison, according to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences:

~ in 1989, there were 74 literary arts nonprofits with annual revenue over \$50,000; and

~ in 2012, there were 175 literary arts nonprofits with annual revenue over \$50,000.

Literary Arts Nonprofits With Revenue \$50,000+ (Adjusted for inflation*)



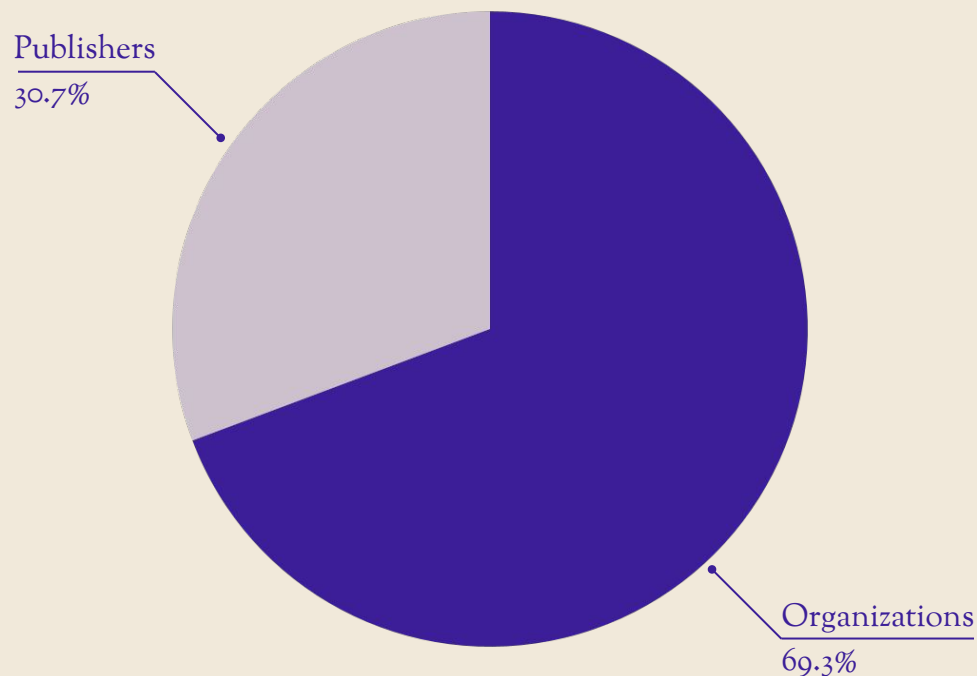
*American Academy of Arts & Sciences **Literary Arts Fund

In 2023, the segment of 267 literary arts nonprofits had:

- ~ Total revenue: \$325,336,776
- ~ Total expenses: \$292,924,816

As a point of comparison, the total expenses of this segment of the nonprofit literary arts field is smaller than the total expenses of a major art museum in one of the four largest cities in the U.S.

267 literary arts nonprofits by type in 2023



Count	Type
185	Organizations*
82	Publishers: 47 book, 35 magazine

* Organizations in this study include those that present creative writers at events including festivals, readings, lectures, conversations, and open mics; provide them with support, such as through workshops, residencies, prizes, or mentorship; and serve youth writers.

What is the nonprofit literary arts field's reach?

In terms of audience, despite their size, literary arts nonprofits serve thousands of writers and millions of unique audience members in-person and online.

Literary arts nonprofits have cultural reach, impact, and influence far beyond their budgets.

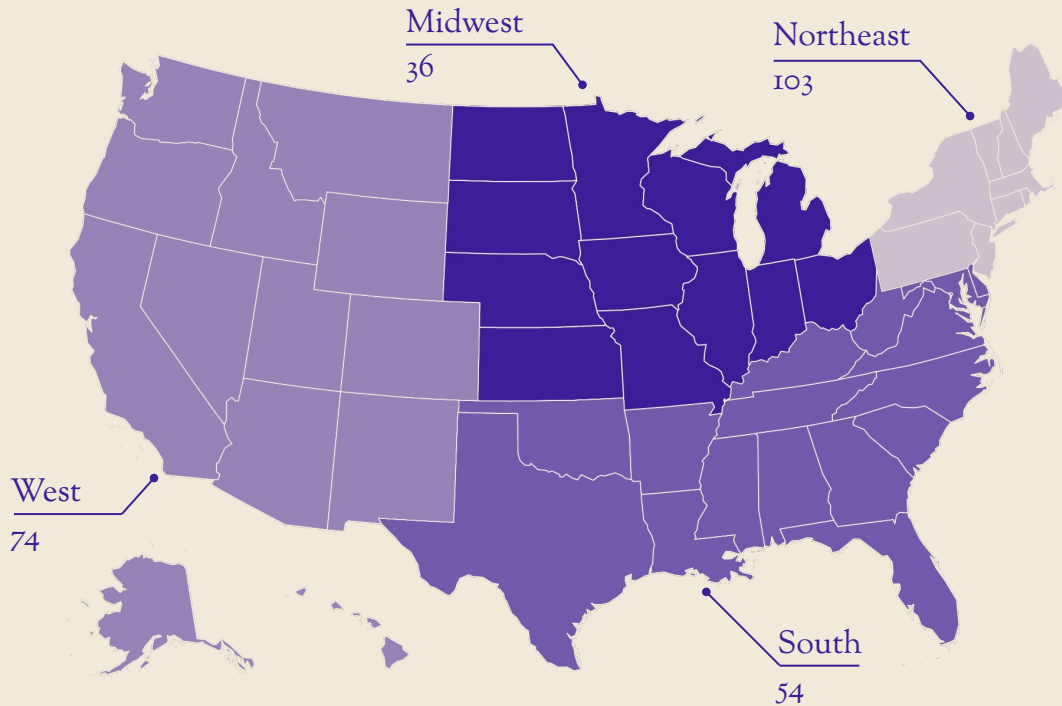
Where are literary arts nonprofits located?

In terms of geography, in 2023, 88% of the 267 literary arts nonprofits were in cities. This is attributable to access to funding, audiences, and transportation.

44% were in NY and CA, and raised and spent 58% of the total revenue and expenses of the 267.

29/50 states—or 58%—had 0-2 literary nonprofits, chiefly in the midwest and the south.

267 literary arts nonprofits by region in 2023



Region	Population in 2022*	# of Literary Nonprofits
Northeast	57,026,847	103
Midwest	68,783,028	36
West	78,759,506	74
South	128,702,030	54
Total	333,271,411	267

Note: the population of NY (19,677,151) and CA (39,030,000) are 18% of the total population

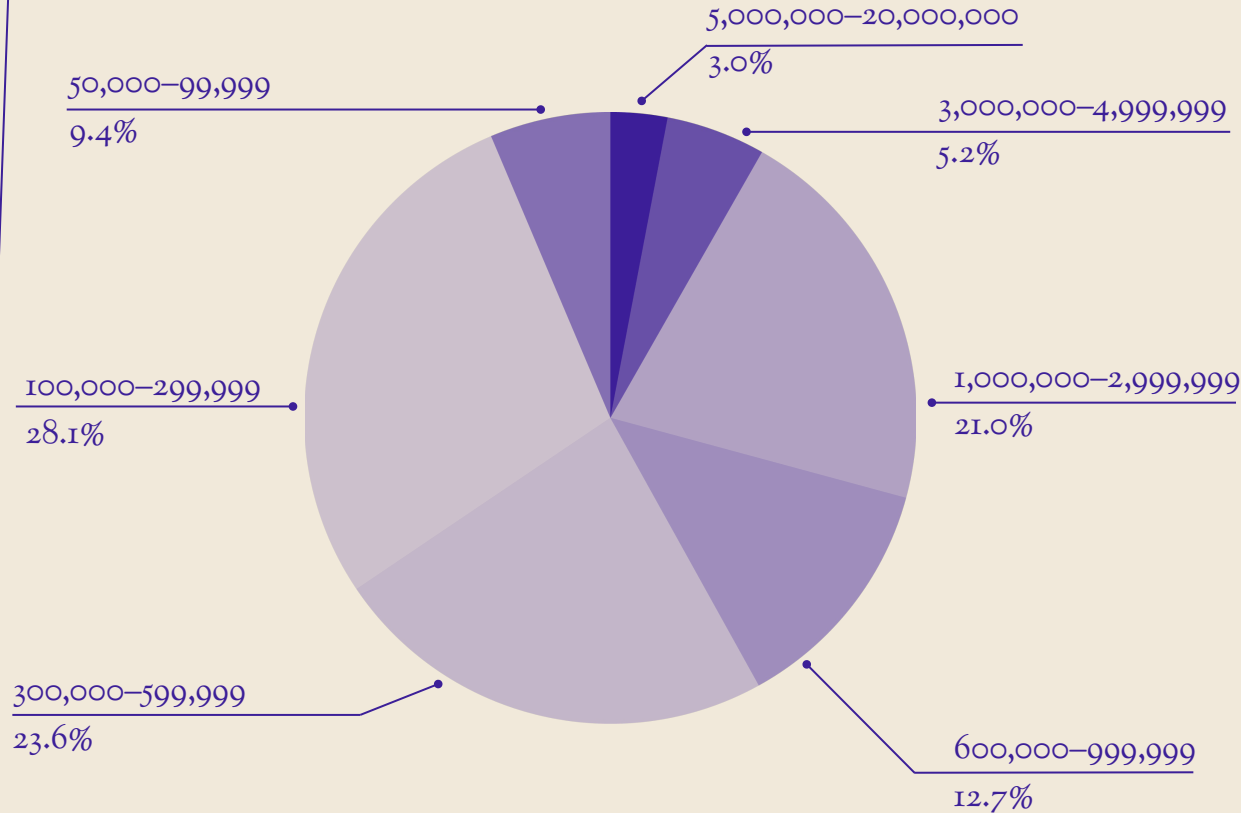
*Source: US Census Bureau

What are the budget ranges of these literary arts nonprofits?

Of the 267 literary arts nonprofits, the majority—71%—had operating budgets less than \$1,000,000.

The median operating budget was \$450,000.

267 literary arts nonprofits: total expenses 2023



Budget Range	Count
5,000,000 - 20,000,000	8
3,000,000 - 4,999,999	14
1,000,000 - 2,999,999	56
600,000 - 999,999	34
300,000 - 599,999	63
100,000 - 299,999	75
50,000 - 99,999	17

How are literary arts nonprofits funded?

In 2023, of the 267 literary arts nonprofits:

Organizations' revenue:

77% contributed

23% earned

Publishers' revenue:

57% contributed

43% earned

TYPICAL REVENUE SPLIT 2023	CONTRIBUTED (Public & Private)	EARNED
All arts and culture organizations *	62%	38%
Literary arts organizations **	77%	23%
Literary arts publishers **	57%	43%

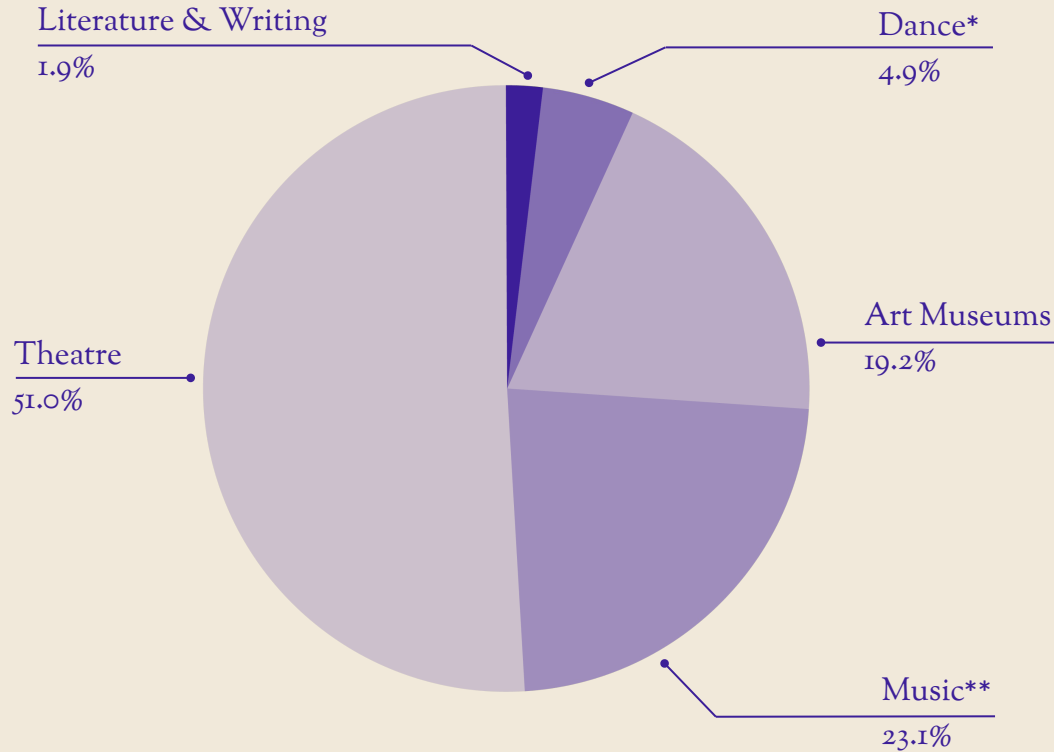
Sources: * SMUData Arts, **Literary Arts Fund

Literature & writing receives the least support of all artistic disciplines from private foundations.

According to Literary Arts Fund research, this field received just 1.9% of arts and culture funding from foundations.

This has profound challenging effects on the nonprofits sustaining creative writers and literary culture.

Private foundation support by artistic discipline



In 2023 (and consistent YOY)	
Literature & Writing	\$95,763,082
Dance*	\$253,998,868
Art Museums	\$986,828,812
Music**	\$1,186,597,213
Theatre	\$2,624,027,468
Total Grant \$	\$5,147,215,443

*Ballet, Choreography, Folk and ethnic dance, Jazz and tap dance, Modern dance

**Composition, Folk and indigenous music, Musical ensembles and groups, Opera, Orchestral music, Vocal music

What has contributed to the nonprofit literary arts field being underfunded?

Misperceptions About the Literary Arts Field

- ~ The literary arts are often confused with the library and literacy fields, as well as commercial publishing
- ~ People are often unaware that there even is a nonprofit publishing sector
- ~ Incorrect assumptions about what it takes to present literary events and award literary prizes

“When other generations look back to see how and whether we were sufficient to the demands our times will have made of us, they will look at what we wrote and published and read.”

—Marilynne Robinson

Information sources:

2023 IRS 990 tax forms

2023 Candid data on philanthropic giving

NEA Arts Participation Survey: <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/2022-SPPA-final.pdf>

American Libraries Association: <https://www.ala.org/bbooks>

American Academy of Arts and Sciences:

<https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/funding-and-research/not-profit-writing-book-and-literature-organizations-and>

SMUData Arts FY23: <http://culturaldata.org/national-trends/national-trends-2025/data-tables/#revenue-trends>

Other essential reading:

“Magnitude and Bond: A Field Study on Black Literary Arts Organizations,” 2025

<https://cavecanempoets.org/magnitude-and-bond/>

Literary Arts Emergency Fund Impact Report, 2022:

<https://www.clmp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/LAEF-Impact-Report-2022.pdf>

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