



Red River Valley Writing Project
Improving Literacy, K-College

March 10, 2025

Dear Chairman Sorvaag and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ben Melby, Director of the Red River Valley Writing Project (RRVWP), and I support HB 1013 passthrough grant funding for the **North Dakota Writing Projects**—a local, grassroots organization that serves K-College educators and students across the entire state of North Dakota.

We aim to support teacher retention, youth literacy, and community engagement by providing:

1. High-quality **teacher training** and mentoring support for improved writing instruction.
2. Writing camps, workshops, and competitions to improve the quantity and quality of **student writing**.
3. **Community events** that use writing to enrich our civic life.

The scope and impacts of our public service are detailed on an enclosed project summary. During the last biennium, our writing projects combined to reach **240 teachers**, with **434 hours of mentoring and training**. Additionally, we engaged **over 600 student writers** in our writing competitions, camps, workshops, and writing groups.

Specifically, passthrough grant funding from HB1013 will support:

1. Teacher professional learning courses on **AI literacy, civic literacy, and digital literacy**.
2. Inservice teacher training on **writing across the curriculum** and writing in the workplace.
3. Youth programs such as **“Raising Rural Voices”** (an initiative to bring rural students’ stories to a national audience) and the **Scholastic Art & Writing Awards** (the “state championships” for teen artists and writers).
4. Instructional coaching and resource development for **rural, high needs ND schools** to serve our state’s **teacher retention** goals.

Our proposed budget outline for the 25-27 biennium is enclosed (see below) along with detailed project summaries for both writing project sites.

Thank you for your important, time-intensive civic service. We hope to return the favor by working hard to support student writers and the teaching of writing in the state of North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Ben Melby, Director, Red River Valley Writing Project

RED RIVER VALLEY WRITING PROJECT

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2025-2027 Biennium DPI Budget Request: Northern Plains & Red River Valley Writing Project

Objective:

To **improve literacy** and the **teaching of writing** in ND schools (K-College) in all subject areas, through professional training for teachers and direct work with students in youth writing camps, workshops, and competitions. To foster **informed, intentional, and innovative communication** that can boost North Dakota's economy and enrich civic life.

DPI Budget Request for the 2025-2027 Biennium:

Summer Leadership & Advanced Institutes \$46,000

To support graduate tuition waivers and participant stipends for approximately 50 teachers per year to receive 8 weeks of intensive professional development and leadership training. For the next biennium, training will focus on AI writing, digital media literacy, and other pressing needs for today's teachers.

Instructional Workshops & Book Studies \$10,000

To support approximately 20 teachers per year in studying, developing, and sharing innovative lesson plans, activities, and curricular materials for teaching writing in the ever-changing world of digital tools and writing situations.

Administrative Support \$10,000

To support a programming director, whose duties include leading monthly planning meetings, applying for grants, managing budgets, submitting budget and grant reports, contracting services, overseeing teacher consultants, coordinating with larger organizational networks, and promoting services to increase engagement and visibility.

Conference Participation \$2,000

To help support travel, lodging, and registration fees for up to 10 teachers attending regional conferences such as NDCTE in Mandan, ND.

Continuing Association Fee \$2,000

To cover \$1,000 annual association fees to the National Writing Project network.

Youth Programs \$2,000

To help support statewide youth writing programs such as the North Dakota Art & Writing Awards (the state championships for teen artists and writers) and "Raising Rural Voices" (a teen journalism initiative).

TOTAL 2025-2027 Biennium Budget **\$72,000**

North Dakota Writing Projects

DPI Project Summary, Scope of Work, and Specific Aims

Objective:

To **improve literacy** and the **teaching of writing** in ND schools (K-College) in all subject areas, through professional development for teachers, leadership training, and direct work with student writers in youth writing camps, workshops, and competitions. To focus on writers as **informed, intentional, and innovative creators** who can boost North Dakota's economy and enrich civic life.

Project Summary & Scope of Work:

Grant-funded Programing

We obtain grant funding (e.g. MacArthur Foundation, American Institute of Research, National Writing Project) to run youth journalism workshops ("Raising Rural Voices"), support rural instructors in high needs schools ("Coach.Teach.Write."), and develop instructional resources to engage students in the rich cultural history of our state ("American Creed" and "Japanese-American Confinement Education").

Summer Leadership & Advanced Institutes

We provide intensive, 8-week (60-90 hour) professional development institutes to North Dakota writing teachers from K-College—led by veteran writing instructors, who demonstrate effective teaching practices and guide participants as they develop and refine their own teaching. Our current emphasis has been on AI writing, digital literacy, and civic literacy. We select the most talented, hard-working teacher participants who have great leadership potential. Our writing project teachers go on to become literacy leaders and instructional coaches, providing workshops for their local schools and districts.

Continuity & Community Writing Programs

We support teacher retention through the continued learning and engagement of both teachers and community members. Teachers who complete our Summer Institute go on to organize and lead writing groups, mentoring groups, book discussions, and in-service teaching demonstrations. We also support the community with opportunities to connect and write—for example, our "Pens & Pints" writing pub crawl, "Warrior Words" for military veterans, "Grief and Bereavement" writing, "Novel Writing," and "Write Across America" writing marathons.

In-service Teacher Trainings and Conference Presentations

We partner with specific schools to evaluate and improve literacy and writing instruction (previous and ongoing partnerships include support of literacy objectives at Belcourt, Dunseith, Hatton-Eielson, Oakes, Beulah, Flasher, and Central Cass). We promote writing across the curriculum (not just in English classes) and give teachers strategies for using writing to enhance learning in all content areas. Our teachers also share these strategies at local and regional conferences, such as ND Council of Teachers of English, ND Multi-tier System of Supports, and the NWP Midwest conferences.

Teen Writing Camps & Workshops

Engages North Dakota's creative young voices in writing workshops, weekly "Word Herd" writing groups, and weeklong summer writing camps, where students work with our teacher-leaders, NDSU creative writing instructors, and guest writers (many top professional writers from our region lead workshops at the camps).

Scholastic Art & Writing Awards

Offers North Dakota's teens (grades 7-12) the opportunity to enter the country's most prestigious and competitive art & writing competition, with thousands of dollars of prize/scholarship money offered at both the state and national levels. We run fundraising, promotions, workshops, adjudication, and publication of student work. Additionally, our organization, in partnership with Plains Art Museum, hosts a literary reading event, art exhibition, and state awards ceremony each year to recognize the award recipients. We reach all corners of the state with this program.