



If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.

- Toni Morrison

**Program Proposal
and
Outcome-Based Evaluation Plan**

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Brief Abstract

Word., a creative writing residency program for high school students in grades 9 through 12, aims to increase literacy rates, especially for voluntary reading (or reading for pleasure), and enrich literacy experiences for teenagers in a rural public library setting. In particular, this program seeks to serve students who are considered to be reluctant readers, who are at risk of dropping out of high school, or who are otherwise marginalized in their everyday social, familial, or educational environments.

Word. provides dedicated writing space and time, the creative mentorship of visiting writers, craft lectures and workshops with fellow residents, and the vital community support needed for young writers to grow their critical and creative skills in reading, writing, and storytelling. Residencies will be available in one of five genres – fiction, non-fiction, poetry, songwriting, and graphic novels – and last for one quarter, or about three months. During the course of the residency, writers work on individual projects of their own choosing; meet with professional visiting writers for mentorship in craft; and collaborate with fellow residents to produce a work of value to the greater community.

At the end of the residency, writers publish and print their completed works using the library's Espresso Book Machine. They also present their work to the community in the form of a public literary reading at the library, where community members will also be able to purchase copies of their printed work (thereby earning additional revenue for the library). Finally, they will present the collaborative work that they have conceived and created (such as a collection of work to be gifted to the library's circulating collection, a special event hosted by the writers at a local elementary school, etc.) to the community.

Introduction

The purpose of this proposal is to garner financial funding and institutional support for Word., a unique public library program that offers quarterly creative writing residencies for high

school students in rural communities.

Rationale

Rural communities in the United States face a diverse set of challenges, including “the lowest home broadband Internet adoption rates, the lowest employment and economic growth rates, the fewest physicians per capita, and the lowest educational attainment rates” (Real and Rose, 2017, p. 1). According to the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health article “A Leg Up on Reading in Rural America” (2017), many rural areas struggle to provide families with the support and resources they need to promote childhood literacy. Dropout rates for high school students living in rural areas are higher than those of high school students living in suburban areas (though lower than those living in cities) – and they are even higher for students in rural areas that live below the poverty level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Given this data, it is perhaps not surprising that the same report shows that “a smaller percentage of high school graduates in rural areas enroll in college than graduates in any other locale, and a smaller percentage of rural adults have a bachelor’s degree than their peers in cities and suburbs” (2007).

And yet, as scholars Eileen Schell, Charlotte Hogg, and Kim Donehower rightly remind us, rural areas are so much more than simply places of “lack” in America (2012): they are vastly diverse, uniquely identifying, and highly resilient communities striving to sustain their cultures and economies. So, then, it is only fitting that rural libraries recognize and develop their own capacity for resources, programming, and expertise to become “part of the solution” (Real and Rose, 2017, p. 1).

When, especially in times of economic depression, rural “schools are hard-pressed to offer a full range of courses, let alone such co-curricular activities as plays, student newspapers, literary magazines, and speech and debate teams that enrich students’ ‘literacy lives’ (Donehower, 2007, p. 173), then public libraries can work to fill the gap with much-needed creative arts and literacy programming for youth. As Deanne W. Swan, Justin Grimes, and Timothy Owens (2013), authors of the Institute of Museum and Library services report “The State of Small and Rural Libraries in the United States,” assert, “Despite fiscal challenges and rapid technological changes, services in small and rural public libraries continue to evolve to

serve the unique needs of their communities... Small and rural libraries, which are present in so many communities, serve a strategic role in extending public services to residents that may be hard to reach by other means" (p. 9).

Youth in rural areas face not only the concrete challenges of rural life but also the stigma and stereotypes that urban and suburban dwellers, not to mention mainstream American society, tend to associate with rural communities (Schell, et al, 2012). Media representations frequently convey residents of rural areas as impoverished, un-intelligent, un-educated, and culturally primitive; to complicate matters, coupled with this myth is that of rural communities as somehow purer, more genuine, or more idyllic than urban or suburban areas (one need only look to any seasonal Hallmark television movie for proof of this enduring stereotype). Rural youth, then, must confront both the real challenges of accessibility and economic sustainability in their communities as well as the myths of representation and identity perpetuated by various media and society more generally.

To support students in these challenges, and to promote students' own agency in telling the stories of their lives and communities, the Word. program equips high school students with dedicated time, space, and support to enhance their reading and writing skills. Mentorship by visiting writers increases students' access to the world outside their local communities and decreases a sense of isolation that can prevail at times for youth in small or rural communities. Having the guidance and support of professional writers, in addition to that of their own immediate communities and fellow writers in the program, can help high school students gain a sense of validation and affirmation as writers, thereby increasing their motivation to read and write. Ultimately, Word. writing residencies can empower high school students to take ownership of their own identities and narratives as youth living in rural communities.

Creative public library programming is essential to supporting and enriching teenagers' educational experiences, especially as it relates to literacy skills and motivation. Recent data show that "American teen-agers are less likely to read 'for fun' at seventeen than at thirteen" (Denby, 2016): part of that may be due to the rise of digital technologies, which only reinforces our responsibility as parents, teachers, and educators to guide students in developing an intrinsic motivation for the kind of "transformative" reading that "helps produce three-dimensional human beings" (Denby, 2016).

As writer and scholar Denise Montgomery (2016) says:

To be student-centered means to be youth centered and to therefore recognize and support all of the settings in which young people learn: at home, at school, and out-of-school... Creative youth development, with historic roots, hundreds of programs and organizations throughout the United States, and a coalescing field of practice, contributes significantly to young people's arts learning and personal development. (p. 27)

This is precisely how rural public libraries – and innovative programs like Word. – can be “part of the solution” (Real and Rose, 2017, p. 1) for youth in rural communities.

Diversity

In the 2010-11 school year, 71% of public school students in rural areas were white (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Yet the common perception that America's rural communities are homogenous is, it might be better said, a *misperception*:

People of color are 25 percent of the overall U.S. population and constitute 17 percent of people living in rural areas. Almost half of the Native American population lives in rural areas... To acknowledge the diversity and complexity of rural populations is a first step toward moving away from the commonplace myth that rural America is homogeneous. (Donehower, 2007, p. 3)

To include and welcome young writers of all racial and ethnic identities (as well as sexualities, genders, class, and more), program administrators will conduct special outreach to and marketing in diverse communities within the rural area served by the public library. Program administrators will visit high school classrooms, student-run newspapers and magazines, creative writing clubs and other arts organizations to market the program. They will also work directly with teachers, school administrators (including the Bureau of Indian Education) and counselors, parents and families, and social workers in the area to identify young writers who could benefit from the program. Finally, program administrators will partner with social service organizations and other community and cultural organizations in the area to promote the program.

To address other kinds of diversity, such as skill level and disciplinary interest, the program will cater to students of all writing backgrounds through its inclusion of various genres; it also is open to students of all experience levels, which means that students in poorer areas, or areas with less access to education or other resources, will have the opportunity to participate.

The program will continue to support and encourage diversity throughout its implementation by inviting diverse visiting writers (inclusive of various racial/ethnic identities, sexualities, genders, abilities, class, etc.) to mentor students; facilitating thoughtful, rigorous, and supportive conversations among writers, including teaching students how to have such conversations in a healthy, respectful, and constructive way; curating a collection of diverse reading material for students to choose from when engaging in their own reading practices, especially for reading as writers; and supporting intellectual freedom, exploration, and creativity free of censorship in students' written work.

Potential Impact

Potential long-term benefits of this program include increased skill in reading (including the ability to articulate and implement student choice in reading material) and increased time spent reading for personal enjoyment. Other related educational benefits may include increased motivation for and participation in high school classes, leading to the decreased risk of dropout and increased rates of high school graduation and college enrollment.

By participating in this program, young writers likely will demonstrate significant growth in self-efficacy, autonomy, and resilience. The personal experience of many writers and artists suggests that such social-emotional skills are bolstered by open access to high-quality resources and learning, guidance from engaged and interested adult mentors, and the freedom to explore one's creative and intellectual voice in the safety and security of a welcoming community.

Ultimately, the creative writing residencies offered through Word. aim to empower young writers in rural communities with the skills, mentorship, and community support to act as the authors – and agents – of their own stories, both on and off the page.

Proposed Plan of Work and Timeline

After the initial application process (intended as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their level of interest in and motivation for the program, not a competition), the program will kick off with a celebratory gathering to welcome all new writers for the quarter. Students will introduce themselves, get to know their fellow writers, and begin conceptualizing their goals and work for the residency.

Each week, writers will spend a minimum of five hours at the library in self-directed reading and writing time. Then, every two weeks, writers will meet together to discuss assigned reading material, share works-in-progress, and provide feedback on each other's work. Once a quarter, a visiting professional writer will give a craft lecture, lead a writing workshop, and meet individually with the writers to discuss their work. (Visiting writers will also give a reading of their own work to the larger community, to be hosted by the public library.)

Throughout the duration of the residency, student writers will also be responsible for meeting regularly to conceive of and create a collaborative project to gift to the community at the end of their residency. This final project will be presented to the community as part of the culminating literary reading that student writers give; also at the literary reading, student writers will have the opportunity to sell their final works to members of the public via printed copies made available through the library's Espresso Book Machine.

This program will address significant portions of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy, making it a strong companion program to enrich students' academic learning during the school day. In particular, student choice of diverse reading material, including both fiction and non-fiction texts, as well as their writing exercises, workshop sessions, and final literary reading all demonstrate key skills for critical thinking, problem-solving, and using language effectively in both written and oral modes of communication.

The most intensive inputs needed to plan and implement this program are staff time, including a librarian who is willing and able to take ownership of the project as the project manager, and funding for the initial purchase and ongoing maintenance of the Espresso Book Machine, a

compact, on-demand printing machine to be housed on-site at the public library. Funding will also be required to support professional writers who agree to serve as visiting writers and mentors to program participants: even if full funding cannot be garnered to pay for visiting writers’ travel, food, and lodging during their stay, partial funding can work to off-set the costs, especially considering the remote location of some rural communities. Fundraising, likely in the form of grant-writing as well as local and national outreach for funds from private donors, will be an essential component of the initial preparation for this program. Whenever possible, it will be important to consider funding options that are sustainable and reliable to ensure future growth of the program.

The goal of this program is to meet high school students’ need for creative, innovative programming that recognizes, grows, and affirms their agency as storytellers, particularly as rural youth. Youth in rural communities are faced with a barrage of challenges from economic sustainability to access to resources and the persistent myths about rural identity that mainstream American society continues to perpetuate. Word. writing residencies empower high school students with critical reading and writing skills to tell their own stories about who they are and what rural life means to them; furthermore, it provides access to vital resources, such as books and other reading material, Internet access, private writing space, mentorship, and peer support, that support and enrich their literacy experiences. The hope is that, through this program, students will spend more time reading for pleasure, demonstrate an increased skill for writing, and participate more actively in their high school classes – eventually leading to higher rates of graduation from high school and enrollment in college. (See Appendix A for the graphical logic model.)

A proposed timeline for program design/development, implementation, and evaluation is as follows:

Time Point	Task(s)	Person Responsible
12-18 months in advance	Submit grant applications and begin other fundraising efforts for Espresso Book Machine; contact potential writers to serve as mentors	Project Manager (in conjunction with Library Director and other key staff members)

Time Point	Task(s)	Person Responsible
9 months in advance	Design various steps of the application process	Project team (in consultation with area teachers as needed)
6 months in advance	Finalize application materials and begin promoting to high school students; finalize and schedule visiting writers for year, including reserving space and planning promotion to greater community; select facilitator for bi-weekly writing workshops	Project Manager, Community Outreach Coordinator, and Marketing Coordinator
3 months in advance	Collect and review applications for inaugural quarter of residency program; reserve library space for kick-off event, weekly writing time, and final literary reading; install Espresso Book Machine at library	Review Committee (made up of select members of library staff, local writers and artists, and educators), Project Team Members, and Facilities Staff
1 month in advance	Notify selected participants of acceptance; plan kick-off celebration to welcome residents to program and greater community	Project Manager and Youth Services Librarian (if different)
Start of Inaugural Residency	Host kick-off celebration; begin weekly writing sessions, biweekly workshops, quarterly craft lectures by visiting writers, and collaboration on gift to community; begin observation as assessment throughout program	Project Manager, Workshop Facilitator, Youth Services Librarian, and Student Writers
Close of Inaugural Residency	Host literary reading for participants, including demonstration of on-demand printing of individual works for sale to community	Project Manager, Youth Services Librarian, Library Director, and other community leaders and educators

Time Point	Task(s)	Person Responsible
1 month after residency	Conduct interviews with participants (both student writers and visiting writers)	Project Manager
3 months after residency	Conduct interviews with key individuals like parents of student writers, teachers, community leaders, and library staff	Project Manager
6-12 months after residency	Send surveys to community members and library users to evaluate overall perception and effectiveness of program	Project Manager and Community Outreach Coordinator

*Note: Applications will be submitted and reviewed on a rolling basis for subsequent quarters in the residency program, so many of these items will be on continual rotation to sustain the program throughout the year. Similarly, program design/development, implementation, and evaluation will necessarily continue throughout the duration of the programming year in order to maintain flexibility and adapt to the needs of student writers, library staff and users, and the greater community.

Outcome-Based Evaluation Plan

A sample outcome-based evaluation plan (drawing on some of the evaluation tasks explored in the proposed project timeline) is as follows:

Indicators	Data Source	Intervals	Goals/Target
As a result of Word. residencies, student writers-in-residence	In-person interview with student writers	30 days after close of residency	75% or more of participating students will spend more time reading for pleasure

Indicators	Data Source	Intervals	Goals/Target
will spend more time reading for pleasure.	Email surveys to parents and teachers of student writers		after completing the residency than before.
As a result of Word residencies, teachers will report increased student participation in high school classes.	Email questionnaires and/or phone calls	60-90 days after close of residency	75% or more of participating students will demonstrate increased engagement in in-class activities and increased rates of homework or other assignments completed.
As a result of Word residencies, students in grades 9-12 will increase their use of the public library.	Library statistics reports 1-question email survey to area students	6 months after implementation of program begins	50% or more of area students will report an increased use of the public library.

Dissemination

The program will be promoted in collaboration and partnership with local high school teachers (especially English, music, and arts teachers) and counselors, campus clubs and organizations (such as creative writing clubs, student centers, student-run newspapers and/or magazines, etc.), and social service and community organizations.

Promotional materials will include posters to be hung in the library, on high school campuses, and in various community organizations in the area; commercial-length videos to air on public-access television and/or on display screens at the library and around town; postcard mailers to the parents and families of high school students; email advertisements to be sent out to students as part of their back-to-school materials; and Facebook ads, Twitter posts, Instagram posts, and other social media materials to be tailored specifically for local high school students.

Budget

A sample budget for this program is as follows:

Item	Description	Quantity	Cost
Library Staff Time	Total hours needed to plan, implement, and run program	1,000	\$25,000 ¹
Promotional Materials	Posters, videos, social media ads, and email content	Varied	\$1,000
In-House Printing	Application materials, program handouts, etc.	Varied	\$150
Literary Readings & Special Events	Refreshments, programs, and other materials	3	\$500
Visiting Writers	Travel, food, and lodging expenses to host visiting writers	3	\$5,000
Espresso Book Machine	On-demand machine for self-publishing	1	\$85,000 ²
Overage	25% estimate for unexpected costs	N/A	\$30,000
Estimated Total			\$176,650

¹ Based on a public librarian working on this project around half-time for 1 year at the average salary of \$50,000 (Source: <http://www.publiclibraries.com/blog/average-librarian-salary/>).

² Based on current estimated cost of machine, not including maintenance (Source: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/bookselling/article/60120-are-book-machines-the-right-fit-for-indies.html>).

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Appendix: Logic Model

Situation: Youth in rural communities in the United States face challenges in accessing resources that support literacy, leading to increased rates of high school drop-out and decreased rates of college enrollment compared to their suburban counterparts. Rural youth must also confront persistent myths and stereotypes about the meaning of rural identity.

