

Call for applicants

PROPOSAL WRITING RETREAT

Hosted at the UW Neltje Center for Creativity, October 9-13, 2025

2024 participants' proposals were awarded \$1,622,773. Participants also developed new collaborations and made lasting changes to their writing habits!



It's proposal time!

WRITING RETREAT

**APPLICATION
REVIEW BEGINS
SEPT 12**

Details & application here 📌
tinyurl.com/NCPropRetreatF25



WHO: Research-active UW faculty & staff - any discipline, any career stage (incl. UW branches, etc.)
WHAT: "Lightly facilitated" proposal-writing retreat
WHEN: October 9-13, 2025
WHERE: UW Neltje Center for Creativity
COST: Free, all expenses paid
HOW: Led by Alyson Hagy & Bethann Garramon Merkle

SPONSORED BY
UW Creative Writing Program
UW Neltje Center for Creativity & the Arts
WySCI: The UW Science Communication Initiative

See the following pages for retreat details.

We strongly recommend you read the whole CFA (this doc) before applying.

Retreat Opportunity

If you have a proposal that's languishing, or a great idea that needs some dedicated time and attention, this retreat might be for you!

APPLICATION REVIEW WILL BEGIN ON SEPTEMBER 12.

Initial selection decisions will be announced by September 16. For remaining slots in the program, applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis until October 1 at noon MT.

👉 [**Apply here!**](#) 👈

Open to all research-active faculty and staff from *any* unit at UW (and all branches and affiliate programs statewide)

Proposals can include internal and external grants, fellowships, sabbaticals, book proposals/queries, residencies, archival research requests, etc.; basically any proposal to someone to support or fund your work.

Selected participants are expected to be present and actively participate in the entire retreat (October 9-13).

Sponsored and facilitated by:

UW Creative Writing Program, UW Neltje Center for Creativity
and the Arts & UW Science Communication Initiative



Join us!

You're invited to apply for the third annual inter/transdisciplinary proposal writing retreat hosted at the UW Neltje Center for Creativity and the Arts ([overview](#))! The Neltje Center (that's *knelt-gee*) is an inspiring place to work for scholars from all backgrounds.

Facilitators

- Alyson Hagy (Creative Writing faculty & many former admin hats) - ahagy@uwyo.edu
- Bethann Garramon Merkle (director, [UW Science Communication Initiative](#) & many current & former hats) - bmerkle@uwyo.edu

Format

Selected participants will enjoy a week at the spectacular Neltje Center (NC), a quirky, art-filled, rambling facility outside Banner, Wyoming (~20 miles from Sheridan, WY). ([See pics!](#))

- Participants will be assigned preparatory tasks to complete before departing for the retreat.
- Participants are encouraged to ride to/from the retreat in the provided transportation (UW van or suburban).
- Breakfasts will be unscheduled and self-serve. Mornings are dedicated to writing.
- At lunch, participants will engage in discussion and “lightly facilitated” activities designed to coach UW faculty and staff to leverage (a) narrative techniques from the arts/humanities and (b) the strategic, comprehensive budgeting and project planning typical in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) grant writing.
- Afternoons will be available for hiking, additional writing, or touring some of the attractions of the region.
- Group dinners will be a time for swapping stories, ideas, and more.
- Evenings will be free for participants' needs and preferences.

Retreat goal

This retreat will ideally help you *complete* a funding or project proposal (or at least a full draft) by the time the retreat ends. At the same time, spending a week at the NC is a potent opportunity to foster collaboration among scientists, novelists, historians, librarians, etc. We anticipate you'll get a lot from the time you spend writing *and* the time you spend connecting with colleagues.

Who should apply

ANY research-active faculty and staff are welcome to apply. We mean it — any staff or faculty, any unit on campus, any career stage.

That said, you are likely to get the most out of this retreat if:

- You have a proposal you need to submit in the next 1-6 months.
- You're motivated to do the work (and *prep!*) necessary to complete a proposal (or at least a full draft) in a week.
- You have at least a preliminary idea for what you're going to propose, and you have the necessary context/background info (preliminary data, partnerships, etc.) to generate a full proposal draft.
- You write/think well in an environment where you are sometimes working solo and at other times swapping ideas or drafts with colleagues.
- You are interested in learning more about how other disciplines approach proposal writing, project design, budgeting, evaluation, etc.
- You don't mind if the internet and cell service are iffy, and you're nowhere near a grocery store, pharmacy, or medical facility. (The NC is out in the boonies.)

Dates

Selected participants are expected to be present and actively participate in the entire retreat. The fall 2025 cohort runs October 9-13 at the UW Neltje Center for Creativity near Banner, WY (20 miles from Sheridan, WY). The facilitators will depart from UW-Laramie the morning of the 9th and return to UW-Laramie the evening of the 13th. Any members of the cohort who are based in Laramie are encouraged to ride with the facilitators. Any members of the cohort who can be picked up along the way, between Laramie and Sheridan, are also encouraged to join the carpool.

Costs & Logistics

Travel, meals, and lodging are paid for and will be arranged by the sponsoring programs: UW Creative Writing Program, UW Neltje Center for Creativity, and UW Science Communication Initiative. To eliminate all direct costs, participants are encouraged to ride to/from the retreat with the cohort. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide caregiver assistance at this time.

Accessibility

- **Facilities:** Most of the sprawling NC is accessible to mobility-limited participants. Staff can provide ramps to key locations, and Neltje's personal suite (including bath, shower, and kitchen) is fully wheelchair accessible. Parts of the grounds are also easily accessed. Applicants who have questions or concerns should contact the facilitators; we can put you in touch with past participants and NC staff who can provide more support and information.
- **Meals:** The NC staff can accommodate most dietary needs. Selected participants will be queried about dietary needs and other related considerations.

- **Caregiving:** If you'd like to apply/participate but caregiving responsibilities pose a challenge, please contact the retreat facilitators so we can explore options that might still enable you to participate!

Rationale

UW faculty and staff (F/S) receive limited grant writing training. Most people have to learn on the job, and there is not sufficient time for learning from peers. Thus, most UW personnel continue making the same mistakes that undermine their attempts to fund their creative work and interdisciplinary scholarship. Typical weaknesses in unfunded proposals (in any discipline) fall into three categories: (1) narrative is not compelling; (2) budget is not plausible or persuasive; (3) work plan is vague or unrealistic.

Furthermore, in our experience (and according to survey and interview research the facilitators and colleagues are analyzing now), the cross-pollination potential inherent in an inter/transdisciplinary retreat leads to future collaborations, not just the immediate, planned outputs.

We led an effective pilot of this retreat in Spring 2023 with funding from Arts & Sciences, Plant Sciences, and the UW-Sheridan Research & Extension Center, in partnership with Creative Writing and the UW Science Communication Initiative. The workshop was a success, but indicated to us the need among UW STEM faculty and staff for support with the persuasive/storytelling aspects of grant writing. At the same time, dedicated time for proposal writing and associated scholarship is hard to access for UW's humanities faculty. Thus, we are facilitating a retreat aiming to meet (or at least take the edge off) some of these needs.

Impacts

\$ ROI in brief:

- Proposals that were developed or refined at the 2024 retreat were awarded \$1,622,773.
- The 2024 ROI on the A&S, English Dept., and Neltje Center's investment is extraordinary: \$121.26 returned per dollar invested. The ROI for only the proposals receiving federal funding is \$118.60 per dollar invested. From this federal funding, given 44.5% indirect cost rates, REDD passively received an IDC benefit of over \$706,000 despite not investing a single dollar.

Non-monetary ROI:

- 5 additional residencies, fellowships & other award applications submitted stemming from writing and ideation during the retreat.
- Every participant reported:
 - establishing 1-2 new collaborations thanks to the retreat.
 - concrete, actionable changes in their writing habits learned at the retreat which they intend to sustain in the future.

- this retreat would be worth paying for if they had access to professional development funds.
- the interdisciplinary nature of the retreat was a major asset that expanded their thinking about proposal writing, writing in general, and their approaches to scholarly and creative activity.

What participants say

- “Staying at the Neltje Center was one of the most useful and generative weeks of my entire life!! Not just for my proposal, but for deep recovery after a stressful semester and for making new connections/strengthening existing connections with intelligent and sensitive writers across campus.”
- “The level of goal-setting and accountability felt just right to me--I think the combination of self-motivation and space for ideation/brainstorming was a big part of what made my engagement level so high -- it didn't feel like it was high-pressure, but I did feel motivated to make progress.”
- “I think the supportive environment that allowed for focus on the writer as a whole was very enlightening -- it reminded me that to work "well," you need to take care of your whole self. It also helped me to think about SMART goals, incremental writing, and other tips for the future.”
- “The idea of breaking down goals into morning, afternoon and evening and literally having meals and walks and naps as breaks is not new but before this retreat, I do not remember being given permission to do all these and prioritize my writing so completely.”
- “What I produced—hugely attributable to the support of the facilitators and other retreat participants—has been foundational for me to clearly articulate the approaches and goals for the next stage of my career (focusing on scholarship and creative activity) and take concrete actions to share that vision with others, including a book proposal and my sabbatical application for 2026-2027.”
- “Lasting professional development outcomes include deepening individual and collective writing practices/habits (like sharing conceptual-stage work more freely) and more confidently using the content produced during the retreat as the starting point from which many other proposals/applications have been built.”
- “Our work in May deeply affected the design of my graduate seminar, and the course filled to the cap of 10 students. Student evals were very strong. I hope to convince my colleagues and administrators that an academic/creative space shared by our various graduate degrees and advanced undergrads could be a grand incubator for writing in the department.”
- “Working alongside folks from such an expansive range of disciplines provided a deep well of insight. The diversity of perspectives, great questions, new ideas, and thoughtful support that emerged throughout the week made my work stronger in every way. I found myself invigorated to ideate, write, and refine my project with rare combinations of focus and abandon, curiosity and clarity.”