

*Western Pennsylvania Writing Project
Strategic Plan*

2005-2008/10

*Marnie Arnold
Melissa Butler
C.J. Coleman
Nick Coles
Jerry Halpern
Paul Kameen
Carolyn Luck
Lucy Ware*

Brief Narrative of the 2004-05 Planning Process

Early last fall Fellows Council strongly recommended that instead of hiring outside consultants to prepare our next Strategic Plan, we should proceed with an internal, fellow-driven planning process.

That process began with a two-day visit (October 14-15) by Joye Alberts, from the NWP Oklahoma State Office. A series of events that Joye moderated elicited broad participation from Project fellows. The results of these initial reflections were reported to Fellows Council by Nick Coles. One recommendation that arose from the discussions was for a one-day, project-wide, Visioning Retreat, which was then scheduled and held on December 6, facilitated by Lynne Alvine from the South Central PA Writing Project Site at Indiana University of PA. The results of this event were reported to Fellows Council by Paul Kameen, with additional materials from Oliver Kahn and various participants. The three themes that emerged most strongly, both as concerns and as possibilities for growth, were leadership (especially tapping more deeply into the school-side potential in this area), continuity (especially in relation to broadening outreach and retaining/sustaining the fellowship), and community (especially in relation to team-oriented approaches to organization and a strong focus on mentorship.) This retreat was followed by two full-day planning sessions, facilitated by WPWP fellows. The first, on February 19, focused on Youth and Community programs (facilitated by Melanie Taormina) and SIT (facilitated by Marnie Arnold.) The second, on March 19, focused on School-based and Partnership programs (facilitated by Melissa Butler) and Continuity (facilitated by CJ Coleman.) Each facilitator produced an extensive set of notes for her event, which became the foundational material for the report attached here.

A small planning group was then formed comprising the four facilitators, the WPWP Co-Directors (Nick Coles, Lucy Ware, and Paul Kameen) and the WPWP Managing Director, Carolyn Luck. In March, Melanie Taormina left Pittsburgh for a new job. Her position on the small planning group was assigned to Jerry Halpern. The small planning group began meeting in early May. The group reached consensus very quickly on the kind of report we wanted to produce: It would be short (in the 10 page range) and pointed, directive; it would follow the four part outline inscribed by the event structure; each segment of the report would be written initially by a two-member team, and then discussed and revised by the whole group; each segment of the report would follow the same general format. This report constitutes the body of our Strategic Plan. We also had very productive discussions toward reconfiguring the WPWP leadership structure in ways that are more attuned to our current strengths and needs, and we offer here as well a framework for bringing our longstanding discussion of leadership into a sharper focus, so we can move toward approving and implementing a new structure in the coming months.

We decided not to assign either a specific time coverage for this Strategic Plan or to outline a specific schedule for implementing the recommendations. We believe the plan will carry us through the next 3-5 years and that the recommendations will be implemented in an orderly fashion, as they become possible, under the guidance of WPWP leadership, including Fellows Council and its Working Groups. We want to thank everyone who participated in this extended planning process. It was an extraordinarily productive and revitalizing experience for many of us and, we think, for WPWP generally.

Leadership Reconfiguration

This proposal is intended to provide a framework to continue and, especially, to focus the ongoing discussion of WPWP's leadership reconfiguration. While specifics, including any necessary changes to the WPWP Charter, will need to be worked out under the guidance of Fellows Council, the Planning Group feels that this general structure will support strong and flexible leadership for WPWP for the duration of this planning period (3-5 years.)

WPWP leadership has three interrelated components: Management, Programs, and Governance. We recommend changes in all three components, as well as in ways the components interact.

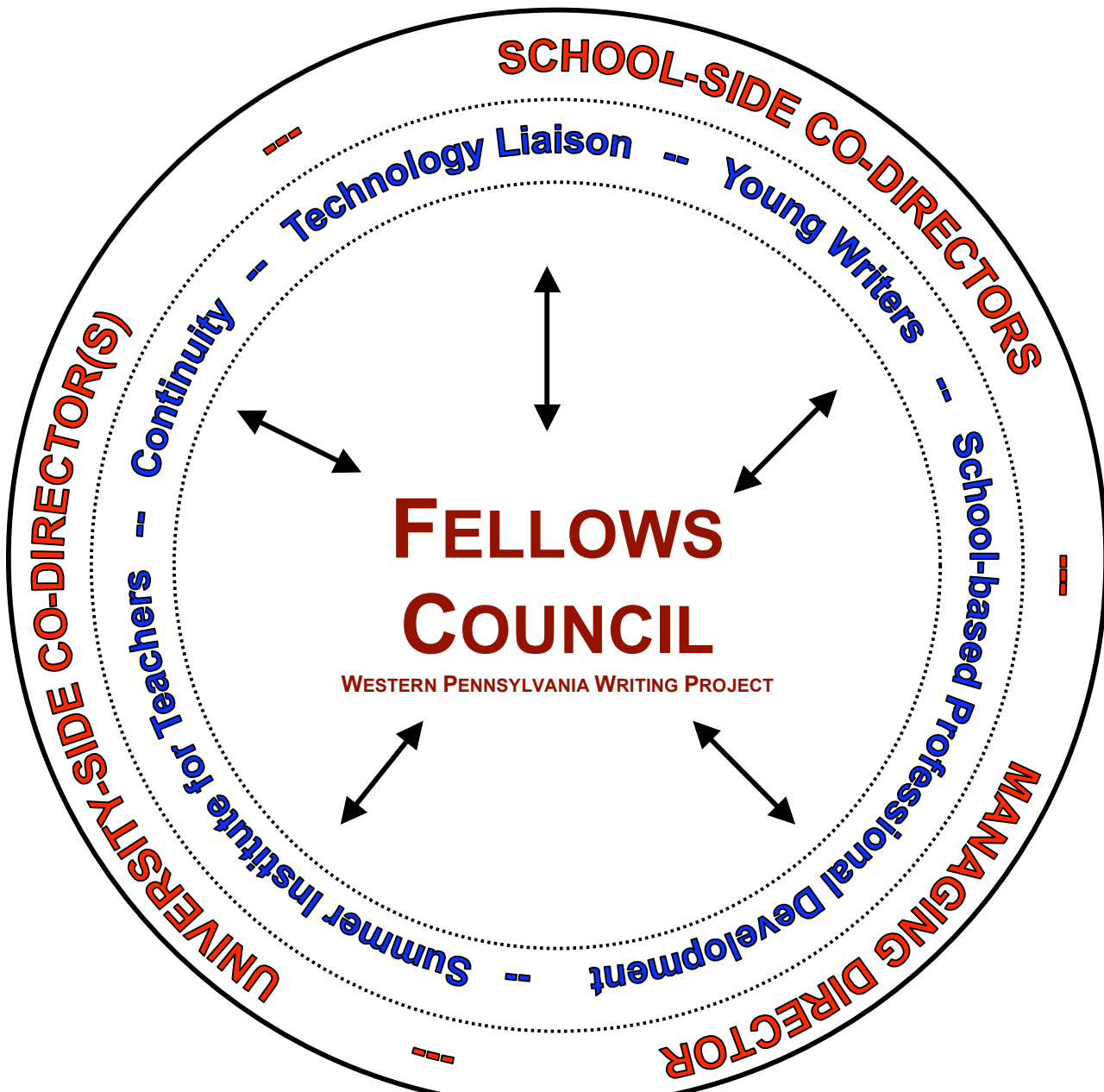
Management: The original model for project management had the Site Director at the top of a pyramid that included one co-director, appointed by the Site Director, and, more recently, the Managing Director. We recommend replacing this with a Management Team composed of four or five co-directors: two school-side fellows, one or two university-side professors, and the Managing Director. Each member of this team will be relatively co-equal, with a significant voice in, and responsibility for, project-wide issues and affairs. Each member of the team will also have a specific area of responsibility, based on ability, project history, and interest. Some of the areas that could be covered by this team include finances, administration, continuity, personnel, fundraising, marketing, relations with NWP and with the PA state network, and overall planning and vision. These positions will be funded in the following ways: The English Department will provide a one-course release and \$3500 dollars to support the university-side positions. When there is more than one such co-director, WPWP will add operating funds to increase the stipend either to the equivalent of a school-side co-director or a course buy-out. The school side positions will be funded out of operating funds. The Managing Director is a full-time, university-funded staff position. The university side co-directors are appointed by the Chair of the English Department. A procedure for appointing or selecting school-side co-directors will need to be formulated. All members of the Management Team will be *ex officio* members of Fellows Council and the Finance Committee.

Programs: Following current practice, all major units of WPWP will have a paid coordinator who is accountable for program planning and implementation, including personnel. These units include: SBPD, SIT, YWI and (we propose) Continuity. Each coordinator will, in most cases, serve as the chair of the Working Group pertinent to her area. To the greatest extent possible (and, ideally, completely) these positions should be funded from program income. This leadership level will also include the Technology Liaison, a position named and funded in keeping with a specific annual NWP grant, the Chair of Fellows Council, and the PA Network Liaison. The seven members of this group will constitute the WPWP staff and will work in close consultation with both the Management team, through regular staff meetings, and Fellows Council, through the Working Group structure. All members of the staff are recruited (via open calls) by the Management Team and are employees of the University of Pittsburgh.

Governance: WPWP governance is the primary function of Fellows Council, and Fellows Council should be re-envisioned with that in mind. While Fellows Council does need to account for the activities of its Working Groups, its chartered function is also both legislative and broadly advisory. We recommend that Fellows Council reexamine its overall mission, as well as some of

its present conventions: e.g., for electing new members, for term limits and turnover schedules, for Working Group participation (currently not required), and for the FC meeting status (particularly in relation to “open” meetings.)

Visualization: One way (among many) to visualize the relationship among these parts is as a series of concentric circles, with Fellows Council as the idea-, policy- and energy-generating center; the staff as agents of change, implementing programs that reach outward to schools and communities; and the management team, responsible for maintaining a broad and comprehensive view of project-wide affairs.



A Note on Finances: The new leadership structure will be more expensive than the current one, especially until the proposed new Continuity Coordinator can be funded from program income. Overall financial sustainability will always be a factor in determining appropriate levels of compensation year to year. The Finance Committee has been an effective financial oversight instrument for WPWP and will provide guidance along these lines. But it is important for all fellows in leadership positions to be knowledgeable about Project finances. The members of the Finance Committee can assist with that by consulting with Program Coordinators and making presentations to Fellows Council, which has Charter-designated responsibilities in relation to WPWP finances. A portion of one the fall meetings, for example, could be devoted specifically to introducing new Council members to some basic financial information about WPWP, highlighting any budgetary matters that will be especially important that year. Members of the Management Team should become knowledgeable enough about overall finances to provide information and support to Program Coordinators and Fellows Council. Program Coordinators should be familiar with all program-related budgetary information and have an understanding of how their specific programs fit into the overall financial picture.

A Note on Technology: Technology is mentioned numerous times throughout the Strategic Plan, but it is obviously not yet an integral element (as it should be) of the work of the Project. This Strategic Plan defines the Technology Liaison as a leadership position, a first step toward developing an overall plan for using technology to support the various kinds of work that the Project does. The Technology Liaison will be charged to organize an effective technology Study Group which should develop initiatives for using technology to communicate more effectively internally, to establish links with NWP and other NWP sites, and to provide guidance and support for potential classroom applications.

Summer Institute for Teachers

The Summer Institute for Teachers is “The Essential Program” according to NWP literature. It is the gateway to the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project for most fellows. The summer institute will continue to provide an intense learning experience where teachers engage in research, their own writing, and an investigation of their practice as they share an approach to teaching. The program balances these components and is functioning well. It provides the basis for the teacher leadership crucial for the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. For the second consecutive year we have experienced a decline in applications resulting in a smaller group of participants. The Strategic Plan will need to address methods to make the work of the writing project more visible and discover additional ways to attract teachers. The SIT model is one that continues to highlight the partnership between schools and the university.

Key Issues

- **Diversity:** The constituency of the SIT should represent all of the groups that we serve as equitably as possible.
- **Continuity:** To help build the leadership of the WPWP, teacher leaders need to be mentored. By involving new fellows in this process, we can ensure that our site will continue to be a vital provider of professional development to our region.
- **Teacher Leadership:** If we believe that “The best teachers of teachers are teachers” then we must move toward a model of teacher leadership. Fellows of the WPWP need to be mentored so that they can effectively lead our site. We also need to develop a large base of teacher-leaders from which to draw to ensure that the leadership of the site and programs does not rest on a just a few people.
- **Inclusivity:** The region that WPWP is supposed to serve covers eight counties in Western Pennsylvania. A large percentage of events and meetings for our site occur in Oakland. To include those teachers who live and work a great distance away, we need to create a structure that facilitates their involvement in the WPWP and gives them a voice.
- **Image and Visibility:** Over the past few years, the number of applicants to the SIT has dipped significantly. One way to address this decline is to increase efforts toward public relations with teachers and in school districts in Western Pennsylvania.
- **Credits:** The rising cost of offering the SIT for graduate credit and the fact that it is not always possible for University faculty to direct the SIT lead us to examine the practice of assigning six graduate credits for the completion of the SIT.
- **Technology:** Using technology to connect fellows with the WPWP, the NWP and with other teacher-consultants can help to involve a larger number of fellows in WPWP activities and leadership opportunities.

Goals

- **Diversity:** Recruit fellows from all geographic regions, ethnicities, races, genders, content areas and grade levels
- **Continuity:** Involve more new fellows in WPWP leadership structures and provide avenues for new fellows to attend NWP events
- **Teacher Leadership:** Mentor teachers as leaders of the WPWP and in their professions
- **Inclusivity:** Extend our focus to include the eight counties that the WPWP serves

- **Image and Visibility**
 - Increase public knowledge about the work of the WPWP
 - Increase the number of applicants for the SIT
 - Develop stronger relationships with school districts in the region we serve
- **Credits:** Spend time researching and thoughtfully considering the feasibility and impact of changing the way that fellows are credited for the completion of the SIT
- **Technology**
 - Provide new ways for fellows to connect with the WPWP, NWP and each other
 - Integrate stronger relationships with school districts in the regions we serve

Strategies

- **Diversity**
 - Develop relationships with local professional organizations (science, math, social studies, African American, E.L.L.)
 - Offer workshops to sub-groups of teachers (science, social studies, urban, E.L.L.)
- **Continuity**
 - Identify mentors in each working group to establish relationships with new fellows
 - Establish “Orientation” meetings for new fellows who sign up for a working group to be scheduled after the SIT during the summer
 - Publicly acknowledge achievement of fellows
- **Teacher Leadership**
 - Restructure hiring timelines for identifying leadership of the SIT to allow those leaders ample time to make use of NWP resources (e.g. Annual Meeting)
 - Develop idea that demonstrations are the beginning of an ongoing conversation about teacher-research and self-reflection to encourage fellows to become providers of professional development in their own and other districts and for professional organizations including, but not limited to, the WPWP
 - Offer advanced institutes that extend inquiry begun during the summer
- **Inclusivity**
 - Establish “Continuity groups” in outlying areas
 - Investigate University housing options during the month of July
 - Offer open institutes in outlying areas
- **Image and Visibility**
 - Create a new brochure that is vibrant and teacher-friendly
 - Communicate with participants’ schools regarding ways Fellow could share some aspect of his/her experience during the school year, e.g., through a poster session
 - Publicly acknowledge completion of the SIT to school districts from which new fellows come
 - Offer open institutes as a way of introducing teachers to the professional development offered by the WPWP
- **Credits:** Convene a task group to research and explore options for offering credit for SIT
- **Technology**
 - Utilize technological resources provided by the NWP
 - Create spaces for teachers to engage in dialogue linking literacy and technology to classroom practice
 - Provide on-line support network for teachers

School-Based Professional Development

Key Issues

- The capacity of the WPWP to provide professional development services varies. The availability and preparation of teacher consultants for the specific topics and times for the professional development services requested by districts varies and can be a limiting factor. Nevertheless, the WPWP should endeavor to provide:
 - A range of services, including workshop series, extended partnerships, and in-service workshops.
 - Services to its entire WPWP service area, including high poverty and rural sites.
- The content of professional development offerings should:
 - Communicate NWP/WPWP Principles
 - Reflect best practices in the teaching of writing/literacy
 - Stress teacher inquiry
 - Include PD designed for administrators, as well as teachers.
- Professional development efforts should grow out of and be aligned with specific needs and interests identified by fellows for their schools and districts so that:
 - Professional development supports both the mentoring of teacher consultants and the development of their leadership capacity within their own districts.
 - Study/inquiry groups (as part of continuity) are aligned to the needs and resources of school-based fellows.
 - Appropriate resources, including those for publishing and sharing of work, are created to support professional development and the teaching of writing.

Goals

- Provide a range of consulting and professional development services that support the principles and goals of the National Writing Project and that are:
 - Appropriate to the needs of the range of urban, suburban, and rural districts in the WPWP service area, including high-poverty and/or low performing schools and districts;
 - Sufficiently flexible and adaptable to serve as the basis for in-service workshops, workshop series, and extended partnerships tailored to specific schools and/or districts; and
 - Responsive to the professional development needs and interests of WP fellows.

Strategies

- Broaden the base of the School-Based Professional Development Working Group by assessing and using the specific school-based PD needs of fellows to guide the nature and focus of specific professional development activities.
 - Conduct an annual professional development conference to share, highlight, and expand teacher-based inquiry.
 - Work closely with the Continuity Working Group to share, support, and develop teacher-based inquiry.

- Encourage and support study/inquiry/discussion groups for WP fellows that are aligned to professional development interests and needs identified by fellows.
- Develop an annual PD Action Plan, outlining the goals, activities, costs, and staffing needs for the year.
- Increase the number of active teacher consultants by:
 - Working with SIT directors to build explicit links between the SIT and SBPD
 - Recruiting retired fellows
- Conduct coaching and presentation development sessions for teacher consultants and workshop series' coordinators that includes:
 - Presentation/feedback opportunities for fellows who wish to become active teacher consultants or to create/try out new presentations;
 - Familiarization with organization and documentation procedures for series coordination and administration;
- Review and update the professional development materials and services on topics of recurring interest and demand, including: writing process, writing in the content areas, reading/writing connections, personal reflective writing, and other new topics as needed:
 - Include a range of PD experiences, including consulting, workshop series, open institutes, conferences, and full and half-day in-service workshops to provide teachers, schools, and districts for multi-level engagement focused on best practices in the teaching of writing and how to support the teaching of writing.
 - Insure that all PD attempts to replicate some aspect or aspects of the SIT experience, including opportunities to
 - Engage in personal and/or professional writing,
 - Read and respond to professional literature and research,
 - Examine new professional practices and strategies,
 - Share and reflect on professional experiences.
 - Update professional development promotional materials (brochure, letters, handouts)
- Encourage writing, reflection, and sharing of professional practice through publications and through links to other NWP/WPWP conferences, publications, and continuity activities.
- Pursue and maintain active links with the NWP and Pennsylvania Network of Writing Projects for the purpose of enriching professional development services.
- As appropriate and a possible, engage in specific new initiatives, including:
 - Building capacity in rural schools
 - Clustering fellows in rural districts
 - Advocacy / administration buy-in
 - Actively engaging PPS fellows in leadership and professional development for the teaching/learning of writing in the Pittsburgh Public Schools:
 - YWI / PD plan (Marshall Plan)
 - Convene a study group for PPS strategy
 - Other school-based PD efforts
 - Mentoring and supporting new and pre-service teachers
 - Linking more directly with National Board Certified teachers

Continuity Programs

The function of Continuity programs at a National Writing Project site is to develop the site as a professional learning community for its members. “Continuity” refers to the ways in which Fellows graduating from the Invitational Summer Institute become invested in the ongoing work of the site. Becoming involved in school-based professional development and in youth and community work would of course be a form of Continuity. By Continuity, in our organizational design, we mean programs that engage Fellows their own writing, in inquiry into teaching, in socializing and celebrating each other’s work, and in leadership activities with the WPWP. The development of teacher-leaders and of the mentorship that requires is a major goal of Continuity programs.

The WPWP has a rich record of Continuity offerings, including retreats, writing events, conferences, inquiry groups, social celebrations, mini-courses with professional writers, and advanced institutes — and participating Fellows have expressed satisfaction with the quality and variety of programs. The past year has seen a welcome revival of a focus on teacher-inquiry and on writing for professional purposes. However, our Continuity programs have not always been well attended, and some have had to be cancelled due to low enrolment. A review of our programs during the planning process, in light of the NWP mission, makes clear that we have some issues for improvement if our Continuity work is to fully meet the needs of a developed NWP site.

Key issues

- **Consistency:** Programs have not always been offered on a consistent basis, nor have they always been spread across the WPWP’s annual calendar in such a way that they can be thoughtfully planned for and publicized with sufficient lead-time for Fellows to plan to attend.
- **Outreach:** Programs have largely been offered in different locations around Pittsburgh, but rarely beyond the city in suburban and rural venues. Attendance at events by teachers from outlying areas has therefore been limited.
- **Quality:** While we strive to make sure that the variety of offerings meets Fellows’ needs for Continuity, we need to ensure that our programs are consistently of high quality, whether they are led by WPWP teacher-consultants or by outside consultants.
- **Leadership:** For our Continuity programs to grow in consistency and quality and to reach beyond Pittsburgh, they need expanded teacher-leadership and improved coordination among the people responsible for implementing each type of program.

Goals

- **Consistency:** Develop a consistent calendar of year-round Continuity offerings, across the range of Fellows interests, that are planned and publicized well in advance.
- **Outreach:** Develop strategies for serving our eight-county service area with Continuity programs that draw on the interests and meet the needs of our Fellows in suburban and rural districts, as well as the city of Pittsburgh.
- **Quality:** Ensure that our Continuity programs are of consistently high quality: that they are inviting, diverse, relevant, well organized and professionally led.

- **Leadership:** Ensure that our Continuity programs develop the leadership capacity of Fellows in serving NWP’s mission to schools, teachers, and students in our service area.

Strategies

- **Consistency:** Teacher-leaders with responsibility for WPWP Continuity programs should coordinate the frequency and timing of programs, considering other events in teachers’ work-lives and in the NWP annual calendar. They should also coordinate with the Managing Director so that programs fit well within the WPWP’s annual calendar and the office cycle of work.
- **Outreach:** Teacher-leaders with responsibility for WPWP Continuity programs should consult together regarding their location, with a view to making them accessible to as many as possible of the teachers the project serves. Some programs will need a consistent home, whereas others could be offered at centers in suburban and rural locations. Explore the uses of technology for outreach, writing exchanges, and professional development throughout our service area.
- **Quality:** To better ensure that all our programs meet the high professional standards for which we wish WPWP to be known, we need to be sure that each program is evaluated appropriately and that evaluations are considered in planning future events. It should be standard practice also that when outside writers or consultants are contracted to lead programs for WPWP Fellows, they are oriented to the WPWP’s expectations and the mission of the NWP.
- **Leadership:** To effectively organize and coordinate our Continuity programs for consistency, quality and improved outreach, consider altering the current administrative structure as follows:
 - Appoint a co-director for Continuity, whose responsibilities include coordination of Continuity programs as well as membership development: reaching out to the service area; reaching “in” to former Fellows and orienting new Fellows to ongoing opportunities for involvement and leadership. The Continuity co-director would also coordinate with the leaders of SBPD and Youth and Community on events that serve the mission of more than one program area, such as conferences.
 - Increase to four the number of Working Groups serving the WPWP’s Continuity mission (Writing Events, Inquiry Groups, Conferences, Celebrations). Each group would have a Chair as well as a Co-Chair who is being mentored into leadership. Chairs and Co-Chairs would serve with the Co-Director on a coordinating committee for Continuity as a whole, and on Fellows Council.
 - Decide the location within the project of other clusters of essential work that are reported as Continuity in the Inverness survey of site data: Technology, Governance, Publications, and Political Action. Should these be considered “operations” that serve Continuity, rather than Continuity programs per se; and if so, how will they be overseen and coordinated?

Youth and Community Programs

Currently YWI is the centerpiece of the youth and community component of WPWP, and as such it can serve as a springboard both for fellows' professional development and for fellow-inspired community- and school-based initiatives. YWI is a strong and stable program that has, over the last five years, made great progress toward financial and programmatic sustainability. That process has not unduly compromised the integrity and efficacy of the program. Community-based initiatives and after-school programs were less visible and more difficult to fund during the previous plan cycle and could be revitalized. It is important that this process be fellow-driven and take place within the framework of the overall WPWP and NWP mission, with the professional development of the participating teachers a strong component.

Key Issues

- **Professional Development:** YWI is a strong link in the continuity chain, especially as a follow-up experience to SIT. This aspect of YWI needs to be better explained and promoted.
- **Sustainability:** Currently, the program continues to require foundation/grant support to cover expenses, including the salaried coordinator. Funding MFAs according to University fringe benefit guidelines is an ongoing challenge.
- **Diversity:** Many of the sites are economically and racially unbalanced.
- **Beyond YWI:** Both community-based and after-school programs were less visible during the last planning cycle. YWI offers one focal point for revitalizing these programs, which need to be fellow-initiated and separately funded.

Goals

- **Professional Development:** WPWP should promote YWI internally as an opportunity for fellows to gain experience both as writers and as teachers of other teachers, the latter through their relationships with their MFA program co-teachers and their (prospective) School of Education interns. YWI can provide opportunities for collaborative teaching and teacher reflection/inquiry.
- **Sustainability:** YWI should continue to strive toward economic self-sufficiency, without dependence on significant foundation grants. It is crucial that the salaried position of YWI Coordinator be maintained and, if possible, funded fully from YWI income. It is important to maintain the WPWP/MFA relationship as the program evolves—within the framework of financial sustainability—in order to promote professional development and engagement with the Pitt English Department.
- **Diversity:** YWI should strive for economic and ethnic diversity at the sites over which WPWP continues to have centralized control. With the discontinuation of the North Side Site and better recruitment at the East End Site, some of this issue has already been addressed.
- **Beyond YWI:** Fellow-inspired community and school-based initiatives should be encouraged to germinate both independent from and in concert with YWI.

Strategies

- **Professional Development:** The longstanding WPWP/MFA partnership should be fostered as a way of enhancing both the writerly identity of fellows and their teacher-mentor function. The initiative to establish a partnership with the School of Education through the use of teacher-interns also has good potential to promote teacher-mentorship. YWI provides an ideal vehicle for professional development and should be promoted better during the SIT. A Marshall Plan-type school-based program would also offer opportunities for fellows to accomplish certain kinds of professional development and outreach in their own schools.
- **Sustainability:** YWI has been reconfigured in a variety of significant ways over the last 5 years, with sustainability the key issue, and that process will continue. Small grants and foundation support, along with contributions from fellows and friends, remain important to YWI viability. Fees have not been raised for 5 years; there may be leeway here.
- **Diversity:** The city sites can be consolidated into the University-based site, with recruitment in diverse neighborhoods and scholarships and transportation provided. We can explore other models for summer writing, in partnerships with PPS or existing neighborhood programs.
- **Beyond YWI:** Community and school-based writing initiatives beyond YWI need to be Fellow-driven, not Project-programmed. Successful efforts of this sort require fellow(s) to create, plan and carry out specific plans, and to participate in fund-raising work. The Project can, of course, serve as a resource and a sponsor for mini-grants and foundations support, but cannot generate and sustain the initiatives. Potential areas for focus include
 - family literacy-related programs
 - after-school mini grants, perhaps family-related
 - Fellow-led kids' writing groups, either school or community-based, as YWI follow-up
 - publishing workshops, perhaps involving parents
 - writing for school
 - school-based youth writing programs, in the Marshall Plan mode

An annual budget to support the some of these initiatives could be set aside from the NWP grant. Fellows Council would be the preferred venue for soliciting and vetting proposals, making awards, and reviewing the projects. The function and status of the current YWI Coordinator will be worked out in the leadership reconfiguration process.