



Volunteer Writing Workshop Leader Application

Neighborhood Writing Alliance

The Neighborhood Writing Alliance (NWA) provokes dialogue, builds community, and promotes change by creating opportunities for adults in Chicago to write, publish, and perform works about their lives. NWA sponsors free weekly writing workshops for adults in predominately low-income neighborhoods of Chicago. Workshops are held in libraries, social service agencies, and community centers. Selected pieces produced by each writer in the workshops are published in the award-winning *Journal of Ordinary Thought (JOT)*, whose motto is Every Person Is a Philosopher. *JOT* is distributed for free throughout the community and sent to paid subscribers, arts and community organizations, each branch of the Chicago Public Library, public policy makers, and selected media. To promote and support the writers and their work, we host readings and collaborate with other arts institutions and community organizations on a variety of events.

The Workshops

The Neighborhood Writing Alliance hosts five workshops in branches of the Chicago Public Library: Albany Park, Bezazian in Uptown, Mabel Manning on the Near West Side, and Hall and King in Bronzeville. NWA also hosts workshops at San Lucas Church in Humboldt Park and at St. Leonard's House. NWA also partners with the Chicago Public Schools to host workshops with parents. Over 300 individuals join us each year to discuss and write about their personal histories and everyday experiences.

Our workshops are highly interactive and discussion-based. Through a process of reflection, discussion, and writing, participants tell their stories and make connections between their own histories and the experiences of others. Using a creative model such as writing to examine pressing social issues can ease tensions and further understanding while generating inclusive and in-depth discussions. We encourage individuals to consider their stories within the context of larger policy decisions, and promote both individual and collective social action and increased community involvement.

NWA workshops meet for 90 minutes each week and are open to all adult members of the community at any level of literacy. Participants submit written work to the workshop leader, who types and copies the work, distributing it to workshop participants the following week. Each submitted piece is read out loud by the author and discussed by the group. The discussions generated by the writing are often stimulating and inspired, may lead to new themes in the writing and, at times, encourage further involvement in community issues.

Workshops range in size from 5–15 individuals and participants are encouraged, though not required, to attend every week. The adults in our workshops generally reflect the demographics of the communities in which they meet, which are primarily low-income and house many of the city's minorities. Many of our writers struggle with the effects of substance abuse, poverty, and discrimination. We bring together long-time Chicagoans and those who have recently come to the city; seniors writing about their grandchildren sit across from twenty-somethings recounting stories from their grandparents; those new to writing but longing to express themselves are at a table with others who are well-established local writers, teachers, and professionals.

The Publication

The *Journal of Ordinary Thought* is an important part of what we do; it allows the writers to present their work to friends, family, and neighbors, generates further discussion about the issues raised in the writing, and commands attention from an audience that stretches beyond the writers' communities. The publication is edited by NWA's professional staff. Working with the workshop leaders, the writers respond to recommended edits and help select pieces for the journal. This helps the writers develop editorial skills, identify themes in their own writing and in the writing of the group, and involves them in the production process.

Volunteer Workshop Leaders

We are looking for energetic and engaging teachers, community-oriented writers, or neighborhood activists who are interested in doing community-based volunteer work. Prospective Workshop Leaders should have experience in teaching or participating in adult and/or community-based education, humanities, or writing programs; strong interest and familiarity with a variety of writing styles as well as community responses to pressing social issues; ability to work with diverse groups of adults; and strong communication skills. Fluency in both oral and written Spanish is an asset.

NWA prefers that workshop leaders make a one-year volunteer commitment to ensure stability for the writers and the workshops. At this time, we are seeking substitutes and exploring flexible arrangements such as co-facilitating or workshop sharing. Call us to discuss your ideas and parameters. Workshops do not meet during the month of August, between Christmas and the New Year, or on other major holidays. Substitute workshop leaders are available to step in during illness, vacation, at other times. New workshop leaders participate in a short apprenticeship, which includes meetings with staff and attending other workshops. In addition to preparing for and leading group each week (3–5 hours), workshop leaders attend 2–4 retreats each year in order to learn about upcoming projects, share experiences with other workshop leaders, and participate in trainings. Attendance at three of our readings or events annually is required.

NWA offers the opportunity to be part of an innovative and well-regarded project, and to improve your teaching, facilitating, and editing skills. All of our workshop leaders are listed in *JOT* and are recognized at readings and events. As a not-for-profit that operates on a small budget, we rely heavily on a strong group of committed volunteers and teaching artists, and we take our reciprocal commitment to them seriously. We gladly provide references or pass along information about other opportunities that might be interesting or useful.

Please note: The Neighborhood Writing Alliance is grateful for the overwhelming interest in our workshops and the number of individuals who inquire about becoming workshop leaders. However, we are limited in the number of individuals we are able to work with based on the capacity of our staff and our budget to host quality workshops and to publish the amount of written work we receive. We are committed to making the best possible matches between workshop leaders and workshop locations, and therefore, our selection process may reflect the needs of the organization rather than the skills or ability of a specific applicant. Though our workshops, for the most part, are steady, there is some fluctuation and therefore not matching at this time does not mean that it isn't possible in the future. We are honored by your interest and we encourage you to participate in other NWA activities.

Thank you so much for your interest in the Neighborhood Writing Alliance. We look forward to receiving your application.

Carrie Spitler, Executive Director

Please feel free to answer these questions in Word or another software program. Date _____

Name _____ Email _____

Daytime Phone _____ Evening Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Are you at least 21 years of age? Yes No

Are you willing and able to commit to volunteering for approximately one year of work with the Neighborhood Writing Alliance: Workshop Leader Training Program, 3–5 hours a week for workshop, 2–4 workshop leader retreats, and 3 readings or events? Yes No
If no, please tell us your parameters or interests.

Do you have your own transportation or ready access to public transportation? Yes No

Do you have your own or ready access to a computer and internet service? Yes No

Do you have written and oral fluency in a language other than English? (Specifically, would your level of fluency allow you to facilitate a 90-minute weekly writing workshop and edit written work in a language other than English?)
Yes No If Yes, which language(s)? _____

How did you hear about the Neighborhood Writing Alliance? _____

What, if any, is your previous experience with the Neighborhood Writing Alliance? [Check all that apply.]
Volunteer ___ Workshop Participant ___ Donor ___ Reader of the *Journal of Ordinary Thought* ___
Attended a reading/event ___ Other: _____

Please attach your answers to the following questions, copying/retyping the question before each answer:

1. List and briefly describe any volunteer and/or professional social service experience.
2. Briefly describe the role that writing or creativity plays in your life, including a description of your creative involvement.
3. What does the phrase “safe space for writing” mean to you?
4. How do you think community-based writing relates to social justice?
5. Describe some of your experience in participating in collaborative projects as a leader or a participant.
6. What experience have you had working with others to select and prepare work for publication?
7. What neighborhood of the city or what groups of people are you most interested in working with (for example, formerly home less women, adults in job-training programs, non-English speaking adults, and so on)?
8. What do you hope to get out of this experience (for example, personal fulfillment, professional growth, community involvement, and so on)?
9. When would you be able to facilitate a 90-minute workshop? [Please note all that apply.]

Weekday mornings ___ Weekday afternoons ___ Weekday evenings ___

10. Is there anything else you would like us to know about you, your interest, or your experience?
11. Please list two references who can speak to your work with volunteerism, social service, or any other field you feel is relevant. Please do not use a family member or partner/spouse as a reference.

Name	Relationship to you	Phone	Email
_____	_____	(____) _____	_____
_____	_____	(____) _____	_____

12. Please include your resume with this application.

Please send your completed application and resume to Carrie Spitler at the Neighborhood Writing Alliance, 1313 E. 60th St., Ste. 238, Chicago, IL 60637; Fax to 773-684-2744; Email job@jot.org with WORKSHOP LEADER in the subject line.

Applications are due at the NWA office on January 24. Preliminary Interviews by phone will be conducted that same week. Formal invitations to attend the training will be shared on January 31. The training will be held on one of the following dates: February 7 or 8. If invited to progress after the training, candidates will be required to visit 2 NWA workshops between February 8 and February 28. The second training will be held the week of March 1.

Feel free to call us at **773.684.2742** with questions.