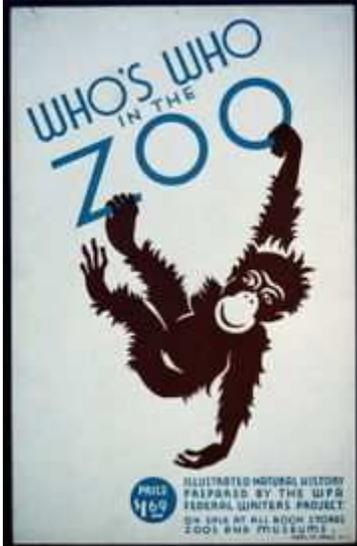


Federal Writers' Project

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



 Poster advertising a Federal Writers' Project publication.

The **Federal Writers' Project** (FWP) was a [United States](#) federal government project to fund written work and support writers during the [Great Depression](#). It was part of the [Works Projects Administration](#), a [New Deal](#) program. It was one of four New Deal arts programs known collectively as [Federal One](#). FWP was particularly charged with employing writers, editors, historians, researchers, art critics, archaeologists, geologists and cartographers. Some 6,600 individuals were employed by the FWP.

Established in July 27 1935, the Writers' Project operated under journalist and theatrical producer [Henry Alsberg](#), and later [John D. Newsome](#), and produced local histories, oral histories, ethnographies, children's books and 48 [state](#) guides to America (plus [Alaska Territory](#), [Puerto Rico](#) and [D.C.](#))—the [American Guide Series](#) publications contained detailed histories of each state with descriptions of every city and town. In every state the personnel comprised a small non-relief staff of editors and a much larger group of fieldworkers drawn from local rolls; many of these had never graduated high school, but most had formerly held white collar jobs of some sort. Among the thousands who worked on the project were [Conrad Aiken](#), [Nelson Algren](#), [Nathan Asch](#), [Arna Bontemps](#), [John Cheever](#), [Kenneth Rexroth](#), [Studs Terkel](#), and [Richard Wright](#). Blakey (2005) estimates that at any one time the Indiana office had fewer than 150 men and women on the payroll. Fieldworkers made about eighty dollars a month, working twenty to thirty hours a week. A majority were women. Very few African Americans worked for any state project. As Blakey notes, "there were very few on the relief rolls who claimed literary expertise in the 1930s, so the FWP had few to choose from" (Blakey p. 42).

The most important product was employment, but the project also produced [American Guide Series](#) volumes for each state. The format was uniform, comprising essays on the state's history and culture, descriptions of its major cities, automobile tours of important attractions, and a portfolio of photographs.

Federal sponsorship for the Federal Writers' Project continued until 1939, though the program was permitted to continue under state sponsorship until 1943.

Famous FWP participants

- [Conrad Aiken](#)
- [Nelson Algren](#)
- [Saul Bellow](#)
- [Max Bodenheim](#)
- [John Cheever](#)
- [Loren Eiseley](#)
- [Ralph Ellison](#)
- [Zora Neale Hurston](#)
- [Weldon Kees](#)
- [Claude McKay](#)
- [May Swenson](#)
- [Richard Wright](#)
- [Frank Yerby](#)

[\[edit\]](#)

Titles in the American Guide Series

Cities

- *Erie[, Pennsylvania]; a guide to the city and county*, 1938.
- *[Houston, a history and guide](#)*, 1942 [Houston, TX]
- *Lincoln City Guide*, 1937. [Lincoln, NE]
- *New Orleans City Guide*, 1938.
- *The New York City Guide: A Comprehensive Guide to the Five Boroughs of the Metropolis—Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Richmond*, 1939.
- *The WPA Guide to Cincinnati: A Guide to the Queen City and Its Neighbors*, 1943.

States

- *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South*, 1941.
- *Arizona: A State Guide*, 1940.
- *Arkansas: A Guide to the State*, Arizona, 1941.
- *California: A Guide to the Golden State*, 1939.

- *Colorado: A Guide to the Highest State*, 1941.
- *Connecticut: A Guide to Its Roads, Lore, and People*, 1938.
- *Delaware: A Guide to the First State*, 1938.
- *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, 1939.
- *Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside*, 1940.
- *Idaho: A Guide to Word and Picture*, 1937.
- *Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide*, 1939.
- *Indiana: A Guide to the Hoosier State*, 1941.
- *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, 1938.
- *Kansas: A Guide to the Sunflower State*, 1939.
- *Kentucky: A Guide to the Bluegrass State*, 1939.
- *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*, 1941.
- *Maine: A Guide 'Down East'*, 1937.
- *Maryland: A Guide to the Old Line State*, 1940.
- *Massachusetts: A Guide to Its Places and People*, 1937.
- *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*, 1941.
- *Minnesota: A State Guide*, 1938.
- *Mississippi: A Guide to the Magnolia State*, 1938.
- *Missouri: A Guide to the 'Show Me' State*, 1941.
- *Montana: A State Guide Book*, 1939.
- *Nebraska: A Guide to the Cornhusker State*, 1939.
- *Nevada: A Guide to the Silver State*, 1940.
- *New Hampshire: A Guide to the Granite State*, 1938.
- *New Jersey: A Guide to Its Present and Past*, 1939.
- *New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State*, 1940.
- *New York: A Guide to the Empire State*, 1940.
- *North Carolina: A Guide to the Old North State*, 1939.
- *North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State*, 1938.
- *The Ohio Guide*, 1940.
- *Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State*, 1941
- *Oregon: The End of the Trail*, 1940.
- *Pennsylvania: A Guide to the Keystone State*, 1940.
- *Rhode Island: A Guide to the Smallest State*, 1937.
- *South Carolina: A Guide to the Palmetto State*, 1941.
- *A South Dakota Guide*, 1938.
- *Tennessee: A Guide to the State*, 1939.
- *Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State*, 1940.
- *Utah: A Guide to the State*, 1941.
- *Vermont: A Guide to the Green Mountain State*, 1937.
- *Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion*, 1940.
- *Washington, City and Capital*, 1937
- *Washington: A Guide to the Evergreen State*, 1941.
- *West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State*, 1941.
- *Wisconsin: A Guide to the Badger State*, 1941.
- *Wyoming: A Guide to Its History, Highways and People*, 1941.

Regions and territories, etc.

- *A Guide to Alaska: Last American Frontier*, 1939.
- *Puerto Rico: A Guide to the Island of Boriquen*, 1940.
- *Here's New England! A Guide to Vacationland*, 1939
- *New York Panorama*, 1938.
- *The WPA Guide to the Minnesota Arrowhead Country*, 1941.

Further reading

- Blakey, George T. *Creating a Hoosier Self-Portrait: The Federal Writers' Project in Indiana, 1935-1942* Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Brewer, Jeutonne P., *The Federal Writers' Project: a bibliography*, Metuchen, NH: Scarecrow Press, 1994.
- Fleischhauer, Carl, and Beverly W. Brannan, eds., *Documenting America, 1935-1943*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Hirsch, Jerrold. *Portrait of America: A Cultural*

History of the Federal Writers' Project (2003)

- Mangione, Jerre, *The dream and the deal: the Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1972.
- Meltzer, Milton, *Violins & shovels: the WPA arts projects*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1976.
- Penkower, Monty Noam, *The Federal Writers' Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts*, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1977.