1. State the proposed Institute/Center’s name and purpose.

The Western Lands and Peoples Center (WLPC)

The proposed WLPC builds on a strong base of scholarship on the North American West in the College of Letters and Science and Montana State University, Bozeman, more generally. Through the proposed Center, MSU will become an international hub for the study of critical issues involving the western US and Canada. MSU is the ideal home for such a Center due to our already-existing expertise, our community networks, our geographic location at the meeting place between the Great Plains and the Mountain West, as well as our proximity to Yellowstone National Park. By supporting and advancing interdisciplinary research, publication, graduate and undergraduate scholarship, as well as engagement with the Digital Humanities—the interface between the new information sciences and traditional humanistic inquiry—we seek to establish a research-based resource for the regional, national, and global community.

2. A comprehensive statement of the Institute/Center’s mission and its relationship to the University mission.

   A. State the Institute/Center’s mission.

   The core mission of the proposed Center is to foster the integrated study of the North American West with a focus on human/environmental interactions, or the “lands and peoples” of the region. Situated within a public, land-grant institution whose charter is to serve and educate all citizens in the state of Montana, the proposed WLPC will be part of an established academic network that conveys research and learning to every county in the state. With its emphasis on developing connections throughout the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts, the proposed Center will position MSU as an important site for creative scholarship across interdisciplinary fields that are dedicated to advancing knowledge about the land and people of the North American West.

   B. Identify the Institute/Center’s goals and objectives.

   1]. The proposed Center seeks to bring the various nodes of excellence in research, teaching, and scholarship on the North American West at MSU into interaction with each other and make the University a major hub for the development of cutting-edge research and digital projects on the region. This work will be made available to the public through scholarly presentations at local, regional, national, and international conferences; online publications; and peer-reviewed journals.

   2]. The proposed Center’s initiatives and publications will be interdisciplinary in scope as will any undergraduate and graduate student activities and initiatives introduced by the proposed WLPC. Interdisciplinarity is often difficult to implement due to the dominance of disciplinary silos in academic structures and their budgets. This proposed Center will enable faculty and students to better coordinate and publicize the many scholarly projects that are ongoing at MSU. Creating a Center with an independent budget focused on regional studies and a mission that broadly encompasses the humanities, the social sciences, and the environmental sciences from the outset will thus offer a major
Montana Board of Regents

RESEARCH CENTER AND INSTITUTE PROPOSAL FORM

advance in promoting interdisciplinary research, outreach, and teaching endeavors at MSU.

3]. MSU faculty and graduate students will become more competitive in garnering external research funds for their ongoing scholarly projects by having their work associated with the resources and support of the proposed Center.

C. What specific need is being responded to in developing the proposed Institute/Center?

Demographic studies indicate that the population of the United States is becoming increasingly concentrated in the West, a trend that is likely to continue over the next decades. Establishing a Western Lands and Peoples Center at MSU will help the academic and larger community gain a deeper understanding of the many social, political, and economic changes driven by this region. It will provide a forum for discussion between the university and public over issues facing the state and region, and heighten the importance of imagining the North American West from a variety of viewpoints.

D. Describe how the Institute/Center benefits the department, college, or institution.

The proposed Center draws on the cross-disciplinary expertise that already exists in various academic units at MSU-Bozeman. These include Agriculture, American Studies, Architecture, Art, Earth Sciences, Ecology, English, Film and Photography, History and Philosophy, Native American Studies, Political Science, and Sociology and Anthropology. Faculty and students in various departments often work without knowledge of complementary research taking place in other sections of the university. The proposed Center will bring together scholars from different disciplines in order to enrich their research productivity. Collaboration will enable them to be more competitive in applying for local, national, and international grants, which will enhance their research initiatives. Such opportunities are likely to also favorably impact students’ future job opportunities and academic plans.

E. Describe the Institute/Center’s relationship to the University mission.

As part of a land-grant institution, the scholarly community at MSU has a special responsibility to foster understanding of the local spaces and larger region in which we live, work, and study. As such, a proposed Western Lands and Peoples Center will help integrate learning, discovery, and engagement by bringing together students, faculty, and community members who share an interest in the interdisciplinary study and ongoing centrality of the North American West across national and international contexts.

3. Briefly describe the Institute/Center’s anticipated activities.

The activities scheduled in the upcoming months at MSU include

1]. Hosting a week-long public program of lectures and hands-on workshops called “Building Community
through Historic Preservation” in Bozeman in September 2016, which will be co-sponsored with the Extreme History Project and funded in part by the National Humanities Alliance. Participants include members of the university faculty, staff from the State Historic Preservation Office, and staff from the city of Bozeman.

2]. A “Perspectives on the American West” speaker series will take place at the MSU Museum of the Rockies in fall 2016, funded through the MSU College of Letters and Science and featuring MSU History Professor and Wallace Stegner Chair of Western American Studies Mark Fiege, University of Colorado Distinguished Professor and Moses Lasky Professor of Law Charles Wilkinson, Montana native and award-winning author Maile Meloy, and Conservation Scientist David Theobald from Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

3]. Beginning in fall 2016, the proposed Center will establish a research cluster that will pull together faculty and graduate students who are conducting research on the region. The group will determine a broad theme to explore through shared readings that connect to the mission of the proposed Center. Faculty and graduate students from different disciplines will meet frequently throughout the year to discuss the readings related to the topic.

4]. MSU faculty are organizing a symposium on Ivan Doig scheduled for fall 2017 which will highlight the recently acquired Ivan Doig Papers in MSU’s Special Collections and will result in a set of scholarly publications.

5]. The proposed Center is also organizing a series of interdisciplinary scholarly presentations on “Digital Cultures and the American West” in spring 2017.

6]. Starting in spring 2016 and with the help of a Phase II HASS Award from MSU, faculty began offering research support for graduate students in the form of travel grants and writing awards.

A. Identify faculty expertise available for participation in the Institute/Center’s activities.

MSU’s existing faculty expertise on the North American West draws from the Department of Earth Sciences, including Institute on Ecosystems Director Professor Cathy Whitlock, who is nationally and internationally recognized in the field of past climatic and environmental change with particular reference to the American West. The Department also has a strong group of geographers whose research focuses on the human and physical geography of the American West, including Professor William Wyckoff and Assistant Professors Jordy Hendrikx, Julia Haggerty, and Jamie McEvoy.

The proposed Center draws on faculty in the Department of Ecology, particularly Professors Andy Hansen, Scott Creel, Andrea Litt, and Wyatt Cross, many of whom are also involved in the Institute on Ecosystems.

The Department of English includes noted scholars of western US and environmental literature such as Professors Robert Bennett, Linda Karell, and Susan Kollin. In addition, Rick Bass, the current Western Writer-in-Residence, was appointed in August 2015 and will serve in the position through the 2017-18 academic year.
Montana Board of Regents

RESEARCH CENTER AND INSTITUTE PROPOSAL FORM

The School of Film and Photography houses an MFA program in Science and Natural History Filmmaking; Professor Andrew Parker Nelson in particular has expertise in the history and criticism of the cinematic Western; Professor Alexis Pike’s photography and Professor Cindy Stillwell’s films have also investigated and represented the region in many award-winning works.

The Department of History and Philosophy is the current home of the Wallace Stegner Chair in Western American Studies, which is presently held by western environmental historian Dr. Mark Fiege. The Department also features distinguished historians of western American and Canadian history such as Professors Mary Murphy and Robert Rydell along with emerging scholars such as Professor Amanda Hendrix-Komoto. The Department likewise has distinguished environmental historians, including Dr. Brett Walker and Dr. Timothy LeCain, as well as Dr. Susan Cohen who has expertise in museum-based exhibitions. Philosophy professors in the Department include Dr. Sara Waller who studies animal intelligence and is hosting a conference on “Wild Animals in the Wild West” in fall 2016 as well as Dr. Kristin Intemann who works on environmental ethics and feminist philosophy of science.

The Department of Native American Studies has a strong group of scholars whose research focuses on Native American culture and issues facing American Indians today, including Professor Walter Fleming, Associate Professors Kristen Ruppel and Matthew Herman, as well as Assistant Professors Gail Small and Gina Richard. The Sheldon and Audrey Katz Chair is an endowed Chair for Visiting Scholars and public figures in the field of Native American Studies. Recent holders of the Chair have included major figures such as Bill Yellowtail, Dr. Henrietta Mann, and Dr. Joseph Gone.

The Department of Political Science includes faculty member Dr. David Parker, who is widely recognized as a major authority on Montana Politics and the politics of the West more generally.

The Department of Sociology & Anthropology includes Professor Kaylin Greene who works on health and family issues as well as Professor Colter Ellis who researches rural sociology.

Also, in the College of Agriculture, Dr. Cathy Zabinski from the Department of Land Resources and Environmental Sciences is an expert in plant and soil ecology as well as restoration ecology and sustainable agriculture.

B. Which departments on campus will be involved and how will the Institute/Center contribute to the academic programs of the institution?

The departments at MSU that would be involved in the proposed Center include American Studies, Architecture, Art, Earth Sciences, Ecology, English, Film and Photography, History and Philosophy, Land Resources and Environmental Sciences, Native American Studies, Political Science, and Sociology and Anthropology. The proposed Center offers support to academic programs in the form of graduate student mentoring and funding, which includes research grants and dissertation completion awards. Through the establishment of a research cluster, the proposed Center will enable faculty and graduate students to gain deeper interdisciplinary knowledge of the North American West, which will enhance their research initiatives and teaching activities.
4. Identify the organizational structure of the Institute/Center within the institution.

The proposed Center is organized by a Director (Prof. Susan Kollin/English) and two Co-Directors (Prof. Mary Murphy/History and Prof. Robert Rydell/History) who will be responsible for writing reports, fundraising, event organizing, and publicity. In addition, a Faculty Advisory Board comprised of nearly a dozen MSU professors from eight departments or academic units will help establish, determine, and organize the proposed Center’s various initiatives and activities.

A. Identify all agencies, organizations and/or institutions that will be involved.

The proposed Western Lands and Peoples Center will be housed at MSU-Bozeman. The proposed Center builds on established relationships with the Montana Historical Society; the Western Heritage Center in Billings; the Butte Silver Bow Archives; the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming; and Yellowstone National Park. The proposed Center also anticipates establishing additional initiatives and partnerships with the Institute on Ecosystems housed at both MSU-Bozeman and UM-Missoula as well as MSU’s Burton K. Wheeler Center for Public Policy.

B. Identify advisory council information.

The members of the Faculty Advisory Council for the proposed WLPC include Rick Bass (Western Writer-in-Residence/English), Mark Fiege (Wallace Stegner Chair in Western American Studies/History and Philosophy); Walter Fleming (Native American Studies); Julia Haggerty (Earth Sciences); Andrew Hansen (Ecology); Amanda-Hendrix-Komoto (History and Philosophy); Susan Kollin (English); Mary Murphy (History and Philosophy); Andrew Patrick Nelson (Film and Photography); Gina Richard (Native American Studies); Robert Rydell (History and Philosophy); William Wyckoff (Earth Sciences); Cathy Zabinski (College of Agriculture/Land Resources and Environmental Science); Jan Zauha (MSU Libraries).

5. Identify first year and continuing finances necessary to support the Center/Institute, including the sources of funding.

In spring 2016, Professors Susan Kollin, Mary Murphy, and Robert Rydell received a competitive, 3-year Humanities and Social Science Phase II grant for $350,000 from the Office of the Vice President of Research and Economic Development and the Office of the President at MSU. A faculty member associated with the proposed Center also received a grant from the National Humanities Alliance to fund a series of week-long public history events scheduled for fall 2016. Additional funding for the proposed Center has been included in the ongoing MSU capital campaign. We also plan to apply for additional sources of funding from appropriate regional and national foundations as well as federal agencies.

A. Will additional faculty and other resources be required to implement this Center/Institute? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.
Montana Board of Regents
RESEARCH CENTER AND INSTITUTE PROPOSAL FORM

No

B. Are other, additional resources required to ensure the success of the proposed Center/Institute? If yes, please describe the need and indicate the plan for meeting this need.

The proposed WLPC will need to locate office space on campus to house an administrative assistant and the Director as well as the Center’s various activities.

6. Describe other similar Centers/Institutes or research capacities in the state and surrounding region.

The University of Montana at Missoula is home to the O’Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West, which has developed a focus that does not overly compete or intersect with the activities that MSU is pursuing. In July 2016, two MSU faculty members, Profs. Susan Kollin and Mary Murphy, met with Dr. Larry Swanson, the Director of the CRMW, to discuss plans to develop a Western Lands and Peoples Center in Bozeman. The focus of the CRMW in Missoula is on regional growth and development (economics, geography, demography, and regional sciences), regional journalism (online and radio), and regional history. The proposed WLPC at MSU-Bozeman seeks to build on our already-existing research expertise in the study of the North American West’s geography and geology; ecological studies of wildlife, fisheries, and resources in the West; studies of Indigenous societies and issues facing Native American peoples across the region; human/environmental interactions; the Digital Humanities; museum studies; and the culture, film, literature, and history of the region.

The University of Colorado-Boulder is home to the Center of the American West, which maintains a focus on public policy and debate, and thus also does not overlap with or duplicate the primary activities of the proposed Western Lands and Peoples Center at MSU.

A. Describe the relationship between the proposed Center/Institute and any similar Centers/Institutes, programs, or research capacities within the Montana University System.

During our July 2016 visit in Missoula with the Director of the CMRW, MSU faculty came to a deeper understanding of the ongoing need for developing future collaborations across the state to address the many social, environmental, and economic issues facing our local communities, Montana, and the region as a whole.

B. In cases of substantial duplication, explain the differences between these and the need for the proposed Center/Institute at an additional institution. Describe any efforts that were made to collaborate with these Centers/Institutes, programs or research capacities. If no efforts were made explain why.

As noted above, we do not foresee substantial duplication with the CRMW in Missoula, but hope to develop collaborative activities and programming of relevance to the future initiatives of both campuses.
Montana Board of Regents
RESEARCH CENTER AND INSTITUTE PROPOSAL FORM

7. Assessment: How will the success of the program be measured?

The success of the proposed Center’s program will be measured through evaluations solicited from audience members and participants at relevant activities. Likewise, our success will be measured by the grants and funds we are able to raise, as well as the publications, workshops, and conferences we are able to develop during the proposed Center’s first few years. We will also complete a report at the end of the academic year that outlines our activities and successes during that period.

8. State the internal campus review and approval process which has occurred prior to submission to the Commissioner's Office. Indicate, where appropriate, involvement by faculty, students, community members, professional constituencies, etc.

The proposed Center received an initial review and approval in spring 2016 by garnering a Phase II Humanities and Social Science Grant from the MSU Office of the VPRED and MSU Office of the President, which provides funding for its first 3 years. The Dean of the MSU College of Letters and Science supports the proposed Center and has provided funds for various initiatives related to the proposed Center. Two MSU faculty visited the Director of the O’Conner Center for the Rocky Mountain West in summer 2016 to discuss plans to develop a Western Lands and Peoples Center at MSU. In addition, MSU faculty have met with the Director of the Montana Historical Society; the Curator of History at the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman; and the Curator of the Buffalo Bill Museum and Western American History at the Center for the American West in Cody, Wyoming.