In this era of entitlements, the Utah Arts Council figures everyone's entitled to literature. And the literary arts division has sculpted a pilot project to hand it out.

``Tumblewords,'' a grass-roots project that begins - oddly enough - at the apex of state government, will soon be distributing literary readings to souls in Utah's provinces. During the month of August two Utah writers - poet David Lee and fiction writer Dianne Nelson - will barnstorm through Brigham City, Vernal, Ephraim, Bluff and St. George. As the program gets up to speed, other writers and communities will jump on board. Eventually, Utah's cities and towns will be hearing the work of writers from Wyoming and Idaho while our own writers will be visiting there.``Anytime we can take writers out to places where writers often don't go, that's terrific," says Ken Brewer, a poet at Utah State University who will be reading with the project. ``Our country has a tradition of writers working in isolation, so any time you can create contact between a writer and the audience, it simply creates a larger audience.''

Adds Mark Preiss, who directs the effort: ``We've got great writers in this state, and great listeners and readers. This project is designed to open up the lines between them. It's about communication.''

Like most grass-roots programs, this one grew out of a brainstorming session. State and regional literary wigs were looking for ways to literally get the word out, and ``Tumblewords'' was born.

To kick things off, the Utah Arts Council has chosen to showcase Lee and Nelson in August - two of the state's most entertaining readers. Lee is looking forward to the chance to ``revitalize literary arts in the American West." Nelson hopes to be inspired by the new crop of voices and readers she'll encounter.

They read on August 25 in Brigham City, August 26 in Vernal, August 27 and 28 in Ephraim, August 29 in Bluff and August 31 in St. George.

As the TV people say, check local listings for times and places.

In the future, dozens of other Utah writers will be making the rounds, creating a cross-hatch of readings from Monticello to Mendon. Most of the roster sent out to communities includes winners in recent Utah Arts Council competitions. Local organizers can pick and choose among children's writers, essayists, poets, novelists and nonfiction specialists. The exchanges with other states will begin next year.

G. Barnes of the Arts Council has been edging the project forward for several months. The dream is to eventually stitch all America together with a web of exchanges and readings - a kind of literary answer to the ``We Are the World" musical events.

And what do Utah's outlying areas think of all this attention?

``We're looking forward to it," says Sue Hill of the Brigham City library. "I'm really excited about having David and Dianne here, and also the future prospects. Ken Brewer says he'll read at a nursing home for us. We have writers who have agreed to help our local writers. I'm very positive about the program."

Adds Kathy Bateman with Sanpete County economic development: "People here are very interested in these readings. We'll be sponsoring the first one in the upper part of the Ephraim Co-op - the first building on Snow College campus. We're getting information out to the
newspapers and planning radio spots and some posters."

In the end, the project has its risks. Some of the more urbane writers have attitudes that can be dicey and spicy in a conservative community, and poetry has not always been the "performance art" of choice in many towns.

But prospects look good. Utah's distant communities - such as Bluff and St. George - are often just pleased to be remembered by Salt Lake City. And the writers are already gearing up.

Lee and Nelson have even been polishing things up early.
``Have you heard them read together?" asks Brewer. ``They're dynamite."
Utah's writers, readers and townships are banking on that being true.