



Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program

Handbook

Fall 2026 Application Cycle

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The TN Tech Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program aims to continue the grand challenge of enriching rural communities across the state through partnership and collaboration with TN Tech faculty and students. Involving faculty and students not only influences future generations, but it largely expands the scope of rural impact. Being a campus composed of diverse faculty with varying backgrounds, skill sets, and interests, there is unlimited potential to transform our rural communities. Therefore, the Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program, through the Tennessee Tech Center for Rural Innovation, is providing a total of **\$50,000** to support faculty led, rural related research projects.

Please read further to develop a deeper understanding of the program's purpose, goals, and qualifications. **Wednesday, September 30, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.** is the deadline to meet the following criterion to be considered eligible for the grant.

Program Overview and Core Goals

The Tennessee Tech Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program was established in Fall 2022 as part of the University's Rural Reimagined Grand Challenge. It is a competitive internal grant program providing a total of \$50,000 annually to support faculty-led research and creative projects that address critical needs and opportunities in rural communities. The program is administered by the Center for Rural Innovation (TCRI) and aims to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and student involvement in projects that can enhance rural resilience and development across Tennessee. By investing in innovative rural-focused scholarship, the program seeks to generate transformative impacts in rural areas while simultaneously expanding educational opportunities for students and strengthening community partnerships.

Important Dates & Submission Deadline

Beginning with the Fall 2026 competition, awards will be made in the fall but funded during the subsequent fiscal year (July 1–June 30) to align with university budgeting and provide awardees with a full project period.

For the 2026 application cycle, the Call for Proposals will be issued on September 1, 2026. The submission deadline is Wednesday, September 30, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. (close of business). No late submissions will be accepted or reviewed. We strongly encourage submitting at least one day early to allow for any technical issues. ***A submission is considered complete only if all required materials are submitted and all required approvals (including the PI's, departmental bookkeeper's, Chair's, and Dean's signatures) are obtained via DocuSign by the deadline. Incomplete submissions or proposals that exceed specified page limits are ineligible and will not be reviewed.***

Review Committee & Selection Process

The Rural Reimagined Review Committee, chaired by the TCRI Assistant Director, includes diverse representation with faculty and administrators from various disciplines, at least one student representative, and one rural community representative. Members serve on a rotating basis to ensure fresh perspectives



and broad expertise. *Conflict of interest policy:* Anyone applying as a PI in a given cycle may not serve on the Review Committee for that cycle, to maintain impartiality.

After the submission deadline, the Review Committee members independently evaluate eligible proposals using a standardized rubric. The Committee then convenes on October 7, 2026 to discuss the proposals and finalize funding recommendations. These recommendations are submitted to program leadership for approval.

The program conducts a Business Office (Grant Accounting) review of recommended awards in early October to verify budgets and compliance with university policies. Award notifications are expected to be sent by the end of October 2026 (after Fall Break), after final approval and any budget adjustments. PIs selected for funding will be notified via email or formal award letter, and PIs not selected will receive a courteous notice of non-award.

Application Procedures

Interested faculty must complete the official Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Application Package and submit it by the deadline. Only one proposal per faculty applicant (as PI) is allowed each cycle. The application package includes:

- **Application Information & Budget Summary** – cover sheet details (project title, PI info, collaborators, funding tier, budget overview, required endorsements by PI, bookkeeper, Chair, Dean, etc.). *PIs should involve their departmental bookkeeper in preparing the budget to ensure accuracy and compliance before submission.*
- **Proposal Narrative** – the main body of the proposal, not exceeding the page limit for the chosen funding tier (see Funding Levels below). The narrative must use required section headings and address all evaluation criteria comprehensively (see Evaluation Criteria below).

Submission Process: After completing the application, the PI initiates the submission using the link provided in the Call for Proposals. The submission workflow captures required information and routes the document for digital signatures from the PI, the designated bookkeeper, the PI's Department Chair, and the relevant College Dean. It is the PI's responsibility to monitor this routing and ensure all parties sign before the deadline. **If any signature is missing at 4:30 p.m. on September 30, 2026, the application will be considered incomplete and will not move forward.** A confirmation email will be sent when the submission is fully executed.

All applicants are encouraged to begin the submission process well ahead of the deadline to allow time for obtaining signatures. *No content or signatures can be added after the deadline.* The program strictly enforces format and submission requirements to ensure a fair competition.

Funding Levels & Award Requirements

The Rural Reimagined program offers funding in three tiers, with distinct expectations and limits for each. The program is highly competitive, and not all available awards may be given if proposals do not meet the high standards of quality and impact:



- **Tier 1 (Large Grant)** – Up to \$20,000 maximum request. At most two (2) Tier 1 awards will be made per cycle. *Tier 1 projects carry the highest expectations for outputs and impact.* Awardees of Tier 1 grants are expected to produce at least two (2) significant scholarly or professional dissemination outputs as a result of the project. Examples include national or international conference presentations, peer-reviewed journal publications, juried exhibits or performances, or similar high-impact contributions in the field.
- **Tier 2 (Medium Grant)** – Up to \$10,000 maximum request. Up to three (3) Tier 2 awards may be made per cycle. *Tier 2 projects are mid-scale in scope.* Awardees are expected to produce at least one (1) significant scholarly or professional output (e.g., a conference presentation, peer-reviewed publication, technical report, or comparable dissemination) from the project.
- **Tier 3 (Small Grant)** – Up to \$2,500 maximum request. Up to four (4) Tier 3 awards may be made per cycle. *Tier 3 projects are smaller exploratory or pilot initiatives.* These awards also require at least one (1) scholarly or professional output, such as a conference poster/presentation, white paper, or other appropriate dissemination of results.

Tier	Maximum	Page Limit	Expected Outputs
Tier 1	\$20,000	6 pages	Two scholarly products
Tier 2	\$10,000	4 pages	One scholarly product
Tier 3	\$2,500	2 pages	One scholarly product

Note: The number of awards at each tier is subject to the quality of submissions and budget availability. The program's total funds (\$50,000) will be allocated at the discretion of the Review Committee and program leadership. In some cycles, fewer awards than the listed maxima may be granted.

Timeline (Key Dates for 2026 Application Cycle / 2027-28 Project Period)

- **September 1, 2026:** Call for Proposals released (handbook and application available to faculty).
- **September 30, 2026 (Wed) – Proposal Submission Deadline (4:30 p.m. COB):** All completed applications, fully signed via DocuSign, must be submitted by this time. No extensions or late submissions will be accepted.
- **October 2026** – Committee and Administrative review of applications
- **By October 30, 2026:** Award notifications issued to selected Principal Investigators (PIs), with non-award notifications sent to all other applicants.
- **November 2026 – June 2027:** Award setup period. PIs work with department bookkeeper and Grant Accounting to finalize project budgets, complete any required documentation, and prepare



project accounts for the upcoming funding cycle. This period can be used for preparatory activities such as recruiting students, coordinating travel plans, and completing other project planning efforts. Although advance planning is encouraged, no award-related expenses may be charged until the funding period begins on July 1.

- **July 1, 2027:** Project accounts activated and funding cycle begins. Awardees may begin incurring project expenses.
- **July 1, 2027 – June 30, 2028: Project Work Period.** All expenditures must occur within the approved project period and by June 30, 2028. **Any expenses incurred after June 30 will be considered unallowable and will be moved off the grant to a departmental index – without exception.**
- **June 1, 2028:** Final Project Reports due from all PIs (see “Final Report” section for details).
- **June 30, 2028:** Project End and Closeout. All project activities conclude and accounts are closed. Any unspent funds revert to the program. *No extensions beyond this date will be granted.*

Funding Cycle Alignment: Beginning with the 2026 application cycle, Rural Reimagined awards will align with Tennessee Tech's fiscal year (July 1–June 30). Applications and award decisions will continue to occur during the fall semester, allowing faculty ample time to develop project plans, secure any necessary approvals, and coordinate with Grant Accounting prior to the start of the funding period. This change provides awardees with a full twelve-month project period and simplifies budget administration by aligning project expenditures with the University's fiscal year.

Investigator Eligibility and Requirements

The Rural Reimagined grant is open to full-time Tennessee Tech faculty members. Staff and administrators may also apply, with supervisor approval (contact sbyrd@tntech.edu for questions). Each eligible faculty member may submit only one proposal as a Principal Investigator per cycle (though they may be listed as a co-PI on others' proposals, they may lead only one).

New: *To broadly share opportunities, any individual who receives a Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant as a PI must wait three full competition cycles before applying again as a PI.* (For example, a PI funded in Fall 2025 is ineligible to apply as PI until Fall 2028.) This term-limit ensures a wider distribution of grants over time. *Note:* Former awardees may still serve as collaborators or co-PIs on other faculty's proposals during the interim.

Submission Eligibility: Proposals will not be considered if they fail to meet any of the following conditions:

- **Timely Submission:** Arrive by the official deadline with all required components and approvals (as detailed under Application Procedures). Late submissions are not accepted.
- **Complete Approvals:** Include all required signatures (PI, Bookkeeper, Chair, Dean).
- **Page Limits:** Adhere to the narrative page limit for the chosen funding tier (2 pages for Tier 3; 4 pages for Tier 2; 6 pages for Tier 1¹⁰). *Any content beyond these limits will be disregarded and will result in disqualification.*



- **Scope & Compliance:** Propose a project that can be completed by the specified project end date (June 30 of the award year) and does not violate stated unallowable activities (see below).

Should a proposal be selected for funding, the PI must ensure all applicable compliance requirements are met before commencing the project (e.g., IRB or IACUC approval for human/animal research, adherence to minors-on-campus policy if working with minors – see “Working With Minors” section).

Allowable and Unallowable Costs

The grant funds may be used for direct costs necessary to accomplish the project, consistent with University and sponsor guidelines. No indirect costs (overhead) are allowed on these internal awards. Key points:

- **Release Time:** *Allowable.* PIs may request academic year course release (reduced teaching load) for project work, not to exceed one (1) course during the academic year. Release time will be funded at the standard *adjunct replacement rate (including 42% fringe benefits)* and requires approval from the PI’s Chair and Dean, indicating support for the teaching adjustment. *Note:* Summer salary or extra compensation for faculty **is not allowed**; only course buy-out during the regular academic year is eligible.
- **Student Wages:** *Encouraged and allowable.* Funding may be used to pay undergraduate or graduate student assistants for work directly related to the project. Whether undergraduate or graduate students are supported through the award, they should generally be hired and paid as hourly student employees. In special circumstances, partial or full Graduate Assistant (GA) stipends may be allowable; however, this approach is discouraged because GA Fees are not an allowable expense on the grant. Depending on the student’s enrollment status (full-time or part-time) and number of hours worked, hourly student employees may be subject to the 7.65% fringe benefit rate. Applicants are encouraged to budget for these costs when developing their proposals. If sufficient funds are not allocated, the associated fringe benefit expenses will need to be covered through other budget categories or transferred to a departmental index if the award is overspent. The program strongly promotes student engagement; proposals without any student involvement are less likely to be competitive.
- **Travel:** *Allowable* if directly necessary for project success (e.g., field research, data collection, presenting project results). All University travel policies and travel pre-approval procedures apply. *Note:* *All travel associated with the award must be completed by June 30, 2028, the end of the project period. In addition, all travel claims must be submitted, approved, and fully processed by that date in order to be reimbursed from grant funds. Travel reimbursement requests submitted after June 30 cannot be charged to the award regardless of travel date.*
- **Supplies & Services:** *Allowable.* Consumable supplies and vendor services directly required for the project can be budgeted. Examples: lab or field supplies, software licenses, participant incentives, printing costs, etc. All procurement must follow University purchasing policies if applicable. Equipment is not allowable (see Equipment definition below).



- **General Purpose Costs:** *Not allowed.* The grant cannot cover general office or lab furnishings, routine office supplies, or ordinary operating expenses that are not specifically justified by the project's needs.
- **Equipment Purchases:** *Not allowed.* Capital equipment purchases are not permitted with these internal funds. The Uniform Guidance (federal regulation 2 CFR § 200.1) defines Equipment as tangible personal property (including IT systems) with a useful life over one year and a per-unit cost at or above the lesser of the organization's capitalization threshold or \$5,000. If a project requires such capital equipment, those costs must be borne by other sources (departmental funds, external grants, etc.), or existing equipment should be used. Items costing less than this threshold are considered supplies, which are allowed if directly needed by the project. *For example: If you want to buy a drone as part of your project, and the drone costs \$5,000 or more for one drone, that is considered equipment. If the drone costs 4,999 it would be considered supplies. Further, if one drone costs \$3,000 and you want to buy two (total cost \$6000), while the total cost exceeds \$5000 it is not considered equipment because the unit cost is less than \$5000 each.*

Unallowable Costs – Additional: The program will not support faculty summer pay, extra pay (or overload) stipends, equipment acquisitions (per above), or any sub-awards or subcontracted projects outside the University. Also, entertainment, alcoholic beverages, and other costs disallowed by university policy or state law cannot be charged to the grant. **Grant funds may not be used to support any programming, event, service, or benefit that is limited to or favors individuals based on protected characteristics, including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, religion, or marital status (except as permitted by law. This includes any race-based programming, mentorship programs, or affinity-based assistance.**

When in doubt about a particular expense, consult TCRI Grant Analyst, Clay Kelsey (ckelsey@tntech.edu) during proposal development.

Evaluation Criteria & Proposal Review

The Review Committee evaluates each eligible proposal using a scoring rubric with a total of **100 points**. The rubric mirrors the sections of the proposal narrative:

1. **Description of Project (15 points)** – Clarity and significance of the problem or question, background context, justification of need, and reference to relevant literature or prior work. Does the proposal articulate a compelling rural issue and a well-defined project approach to address it?
2. **Significance / Merit / Impact on Rural (40 points)** – Importance of the project's expected contribution to its field and, critically, the **extent of positive impact on rural communities** in Tennessee or beyond. Is the rural focus strong and central to the project? Does it align with the Rural Reimagined mission and promise meaningful benefits for rural people or places?
3. **Plan of Action (25 points)** – Quality and feasibility of the project design and methodology. Is there a clear, logical plan with defined objectives, appropriate methods, a reasonable timeline,



and sufficient detail to assess how the work will be carried out? Are potential challenges identified and addressed? Does the plan fit the budget and time constraints?

4. **Personnel Qualifications (10 points)** – The capabilities and relevant experience of the PI and any collaborators. Does the team have the necessary expertise to execute the project successfully? Have the roles of key personnel (including students) been clearly specified?
5. **Dissemination of Results (10 points)** – Strength of the plan for sharing and applying the project’s results. Are specific mechanisms identified (e.g., publications, presentations, community workshops, policy briefs), and are they appropriate to the project and its rural stakeholders? *Note:* Higher-tier proposals (Tier 1 and 2) are expected to include plans for multiple or higher-level dissemination outputs commensurate with their tier requirements (see Funding Levels above).

Additionally, the Committee will pay special attention to the following **Priority Factors**, which, while not individually scored, serve as important tiebreakers or differentiators in determining final awards:

- **Rural Focus & Impact:** *Projects that explicitly address a significant rural issue or community need* (particularly those aligned with the Rural Reimagined Grand Challenge goals) are prioritized. A clear target rural beneficiary or outcome should be evident.
- **Student Involvement:** *Meaningful participation of students* (undergraduate or graduate) in the project as researchers, assistants, or in other roles is strongly encouraged. This not only enriches student learning but also expands the project’s capacity.
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** *Projects that bring together different fields or disciplines (especially from different colleges at TN Tech) are highly encouraged.* Cross-college collaborations are particularly valued, as they often yield innovative approaches and broader impacts. Interdepartmental collaborations within one college are also welcome, but the committee will view cross-college teams as especially aligning with the interdisciplinary spirit of the program.
- **External Partnerships:** *Engagement with external partners or communities* (such as rural nonprofits, K-12 schools, businesses, government agencies, or community groups) is a plus. These partnerships can increase the project’s relevance and ensure that results are more readily translated into real-world benefits. Letters of commitment from external partners may be included in the appendix to demonstrate support (not counted against page limits).
- **Experiential Learning:** *Incorporating hands-on opportunities for students or community members* (like field work in rural settings, student internships, workshops for rural stakeholders, etc.) is a valued component. Projects that create such opportunities help achieve the program’s dual mission of advancing knowledge and providing practical experience.

Proposals that effectively integrate multiple priority factors generally stand out as more competitive. However, proposals that are weaker on these factors can still be funded if their overall merit is



outstanding in other evaluation criteria. All proposals, regardless of priority factors, must meet high standards in the scored criteria to be considered for funding.

Funding and Award Administration

Once final award decisions are confirmed (after any necessary budget adjustments or compliance reviews), each funded project will proceed as follows:

- **Award Setup:** A dedicated university account (COA) will be established for each project. In coordination with Grant Accounting, a departmental bookkeeper will be assigned to each award to assist with purchasing, travel arrangements, payroll, and other financial transactions. *Note:* If an assigned bookkeeper lacks required financial training, account activation may be delayed until training is completed.
- **Project Period & Expenditure of Funds:** The standard project period runs from July 1, 2027 through June 30, 2028. All approved project activities and expenditures must occur within this timeframe. No-cost extensions beyond June 30 are not permitted, including travel; any unspent funds after June 30, 2028 will be forfeited back to the program's general pool. PIs must ensure all expenses (including any travel reimbursements) have fully posted to the account by the project end date. Over-expenditures are not allowed. If a project goes over budget, the PI's department or college must cover the overrun with other funds.
- **Oversight & Changes:** PIs are expected to manage project execution and finances carefully with support from their bookkeeper and department. If significant changes are needed (e.g., major re-budgeting over ~10%, changes in project scope or key personnel), the PI must request approval from the TCRI Assistant Director in advance. Minor adjustments that do not alter objectives or violate any rules can often be managed informally, but clear communication with program staff is required.

Note: While the Rural Reimagined Financial Analyst (Clay Kelsey, ckelsey@tntech.edu) is available to provide guidance and answer questions related to grant expenditures, budget revisions, and other post-award matters, the grant bookkeeper is responsible for processing and managing all project expenditures, transactions, budget revisions, and budget adjustments. Projects should be reconciled monthly to ensure transactions have posted correctly and a progress report with expenditures should be able to be provided upon request.

Final Report & Deliverables

By **June 1, 2028**, each PI must submit a Final Project Report to the Center for Rural Innovation. The format will be provided and will request information such as: a summary of project activities, key outcomes and results, student involvement details, how rural communities benefited, and how results were (or will be) disseminated. The Final Report is essential for program evaluation and accountability. PIs should also include any output documentation (e.g., copies of published papers, abstracts of presentations, links to products or media). If project outcomes are still developing (e.g., a publication submitted but not yet accepted), the PI should describe the status in the report and provide updates as those outcomes materialize.

Dissemination & Publications

As noted in the funding tier descriptions, awardees are required to disseminate project findings and outcomes in scholarly or professional venues. The type and venue of dissemination should be appropriate for the discipline and scale of the project. All publications, presentations, or creative works stemming from the funded project must acknowledge the “Tennessee Tech Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program” as a source of support. The program may request copies of or references to these outputs for its records or promotional materials.

Working with Minors (Policy 120 Compliance)

Projects involving minors (individuals under 18) must adhere strictly to TTU’s *Policy 120 (Minors on Campus)* and any other relevant regulations. PIs should plan accordingly: for example, ensure any person interacting with minors has completed background checks or training as required, and secure parental consent for minor participants. PIs intending to work with minors are strongly encouraged to contact TTU’s Minors on Campus Coordinator (Ellie Putman, eputman@tntech.edu) during proposal development to understand and plan for these requirements. Awardees whose projects involve minors may be asked to sign an Attestation of Compliance with Policy 120 prior to commencing project activities, affirming all necessary safeguards and approvals are in place. *Failure to adhere to minors-related policies can result in termination of the award.*

Patents and Intellectual Property

Any invention or intellectual property resulting from the project remains subject to Tennessee Tech’s standard Intellectual Property (IP) policies (see TTU Policy 732). Generally, PIs retain rights to scholarly works like publications, but patentable inventions must be disclosed to the Office of Research in accordance with University procedures. The University may claim an interest in patents or inventions developed under this program, consistent with TTU’s IP policies and applicable law. PIs are encouraged to consult with the Office of Research & Economic Development (Michael Aikens, maikens@tntech.edu) if they have questions about potential IP outcomes from their project.

Public Relations & Program Visibility

The University and TCRI may publicize funded projects and their outcomes to showcase the impact of the program. This can include press releases, features on the University website or in campus news, and social media highlights. PIs might be asked to provide quotes, high-resolution project photographs, student success stories, community testimonials, or summaries for these communications. The program also maintains a “Past Award Recipients” section on its website listing project titles, PIs, and abstracts of funded projects, along with notable updates (e.g., publications or awards) that emerge from those projects over time. Participation in these publicity efforts is not mandatory but is highly encouraged, as sharing success stories helps sustain support for the program and amplifies the reach of your work.

Key Contacts:

For questions or guidance regarding the Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program, please contact:

TCRI Assistant Director for Rural Resiliency (Program Manager) - Stefanie Byrd

Email: sbyrd@tntech.edu



Or

TCRI Financial Analyst – Clay Kelsey

Email: ckelsey@tntech.edu

We are committed to assisting applicants and awardees in navigating the application process, compliance requirements, and project implementation. Don't hesitate to reach out for support at any stage.



Appendix

A. Lessons from Successful Proposals

What Makes a Proposal Competitive?

Each year, the Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program receives many strong proposals. While every funded project is unique, successful applications often share several common characteristics.

Successful Proposals Typically:

Address a Clearly Defined Rural Need

- Identify a specific challenge, opportunity, or gap affecting rural communities.
- Clearly explain why the issue matters and who will benefit.

Demonstrate Meaningful Rural Impact

- Describe tangible outcomes that will improve conditions in rural Tennessee.
- Explain how project results will be used beyond the university.

Engage Students in Meaningful Ways

- Provide opportunities for undergraduate and/or graduate students to participate in research, design, implementation, evaluation, or dissemination activities.

Include Strong Community Connections

- Incorporate partnerships with schools, nonprofits, businesses, healthcare organizations, government agencies, or community groups when appropriate.

Present a Realistic and Well-Defined Plan

- Include clear objectives, activities, milestones, and deliverables.
- Demonstrate that the work can be completed within the project period and budget.

Demonstrate Strong Dissemination Plans

- Identify conference presentations, publications, workshops, exhibits, training events, or other methods for sharing results.

Common Weaknesses Observed in Unfunded Proposals

- Insufficient explanation of rural relevance.
- Broad goals without specific objectives or outcomes.
- Weak or unclear project methodology.
- Budgets that are not clearly tied to proposed activities.
- Limited student involvement.
- Lack of a plan for sharing results or sustaining impact.

Applicants are encouraged to review previously funded projects in this appendix to better understand the range and scope of successful proposals.

Remember: Successful proposals are not necessarily the most ambitious. Competitive applications clearly define the rural need being addressed, present a realistic and achievable plan, demonstrate meaningful impact, and align requested resources with project activities.



B. Examples of Strong Rural Impact

Rural impact can take many forms. Projects do not need to address every area listed below. Rather, applicants should clearly identify how their work will create meaningful benefits for rural communities.

Economic and Workforce Development

Examples include:

- Supporting entrepreneurship and small business growth.
- Expanding workforce development opportunities.
- Increasing access to high-demand skills and career pathways.
- Strengthening rural industry competitiveness.

Education and Youth Development

Examples include:

- Improving K–12 educational outcomes.
- Expanding STEM learning opportunities.
- Supporting teacher development.
- Increasing access to educational resources in rural communities.
- STEM camps and hands-on learning opportunities.
- Digital citizenship and cyberbullying prevention initiatives.
- Children's health education book series.

Health and Well-Being

Examples include:

- Expanding access to healthcare services.
- Improving mental health outcomes.
- Supporting substance misuse prevention and recovery.
- Addressing food security and nutrition challenges.
- Mental Health First Aid and ACEs training in rural counties.
- Neurofeedback interventions for residents in the Upper Cumberland.
- Health screening partnerships through Head Start programs.

Community and Civic Development

Examples include:

- Strengthening community organizations.

- Increasing civic engagement and leadership capacity.
- Supporting local decision-making and planning efforts.
- Building social capital and community resilience.
- Oral history preservation projects.
- Community literacy initiatives.
- Tourism and placemaking projects.

Environmental and Agricultural Sustainability

Examples include:

- Supporting natural resource conservation.
- Improving water quality and environmental stewardship.
- Advancing agricultural innovation.
- Strengthening community resilience to natural hazards.

Culture, Heritage, and Quality of Life

Examples include:

- Preserving rural history, traditions, and cultural assets.
- Expanding access to arts and cultural programming.
- Enhancing tourism and placemaking initiatives.
- Improving community amenities and public spaces.

Strong Rural Impact Statements Include:

- A clearly identified rural population or community.
- Specific expected outcomes or benefits.
- A reasonable pathway from project activities to community impact.
- Evidence that project results can be shared, sustained, or expanded beyond the grant period.

Reviewers are particularly interested in proposals that demonstrate not only academic merit, but also a clear and meaningful benefit to rural people, places, and communities.



C. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Who is eligible to apply?

The program is open to full-time Tennessee Tech faculty members and, in some cases, staff and administrators as described in the handbook.

Can I submit more than one proposal?

No. An individual may submit only one proposal as Principal Investigator (PI) during each competition cycle.

Do I need community partners?

No. However, projects that include meaningful external partnerships often demonstrate stronger community relevance and impact.

Is student involvement required?

Projects are not required to include students, but student engagement is highly encouraged and typically strengthens a proposal's chances of being funded.

Can I request release time?

Yes. Applicants may request up to one course release during the academic year, subject to program requirements and administrative approvals.

Can I purchase equipment?

Capital equipment purchases are not allowable under this program. Applicants should carefully review the Allowable and Unallowable Costs section of the handbook.

When can funded projects begin?

Projects funded through the Fall 2026 competition may begin incurring expenses on July 1, 2027, when project accounts are activated.

Can I start work before July 1?

Faculty may conduct planning activities prior to July 1, but grant funds may not be used until project accounts are active.

What if my project requires IRB, IACUC, or other approvals?

Awardees are responsible for obtaining all required approvals before beginning project activities.

What happens if my proposal is not selected?

Applicants will receive a notification of non-award and may receive reviewer feedback to help strengthen future submissions.

May I reapply in a future cycle?

Yes, unless otherwise limited by program eligibility requirements.

Can previous award recipients apply again?

Yes, subject to program eligibility requirements. Individuals who receive a Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant as a Principal Investigator must wait three full competition cycles before applying again as a PI. Former awardees may continue to participate as collaborators or co-PIs during that period.



D. Previous Winners and Abstracts

Award Year	PI Last Name	PI First Name	Proposal Title	Abstract
22-23	Arce	Pedro	Expanding Sustainability Efforts through Intentional Learning: Using a Mixed Method Approach to Exploring Student Perceptions of the BioFoundry Initiative	The BioFoundry Initiative is a pedagogical effort in Chemical Engineering which integrates the Engineering for One Planet (EOP) framework and biomimicry components into design processes. This proposal focuses on CHE 3550 (Fluid Mechanics) to further the understanding of student engagement in the learning processes associated with the BioFoundry Initiative to better understand and improve student learning. Leveraging a mixed methods approach that uses survey methods design and content analysis, the proposed project will offer insight into student perceptions of sustainability efforts and design, holding social implications for rural research in areas related to the utilization and recycling of water resources.
22-23	Bower	Erica	Uniting, Empowering, and Engaging our Upper Cumberland Community to Reduce Mental Health Issues and Substance Misuse: Community-Based Training in Mental Health First Aid & Adverse Childhood Experiences	For a community to develop economically, they must be mentally healthy and sober. Mental health and substance misuse resources, albeit limited, are available in most communities, mental health issues and substance misuse are often stigmatized and, in many case, people simply do not understand why people are struggling and do not know how they can help. The purpose of this project is to educate people about the impact of adverse childhood experiences, identification of mental health issues and substance misuse, and actionable steps they can take to immediately help people struggling with mental health issues and substance misuse in four rural counties in the Upper Cumberland – Clay, Jackson, Putnam, and White counties. Using a currently established network of substance misuse coalitions in these four counties, we will reach out to community members in various community sectors to establish and conduct ACEs Training and Mental Health First Aid Training. The ACEs training is certified through the State of Tennessee, and the MHFA Training is certified through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (NCMW)– both of which are evidence-based practices. The ACEs training will be conducted by three graduate students, who will be trained by State-certified



				trainers, and the MHFA Training will be conducted by the four members of the research team, who will be certified through the NCMW. The goal is to conduct at least 12 ACEs trainings and 12 Mental Health First Aid Trainings across the four counties between February and May.
22-23	Henniger	Nicole	Healthcare Provider Attitudes towards Substance Use Disorder Treatment in Tennessee	This psychology research project will use survey methodology investigate the prevalence and effects of stigma towards drug users in a sample of physical and mental healthcare providers in Tennessee. The study will also investigate potential moderators of stigma, including healthcare providers' mental models of addiction and experience treating substance use. A better understanding of the psychological origins of stigma towards substance users can inform training programs for Tennessee healthcare providers to counteract harmful beliefs and attitudes, resulting in more effective treatment and support for rural Tennesseans struggling with addiction.
22-23	Hermann-Turner	Katherine	Rural Mothers Birth Experiences	Currently, one-in-ten women experience signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at four to six weeks postpartum (Taylor Miller et al., 2021), and the impact of these experiences can greatly impact motherhood. Nevertheless, existing research provides little consideration of how this experience may differ in rural populations. Developing an understanding of this phenomenon can help direct perinatal mental health services, which could lead to better preparation for future clinicians and better support mothers from rural communities. The proposed study uses a qualitative phenomenological methodology to interview thirty mothers one-year postpartum from five rural communities to better understand their lived experiences.
22-23	Hunt	Helen	We Persist: a Women and Gender Studies Seminar in Livingston, TN	This proposal is for a collaboration between Tech's Women and Gender Studies minor, Tech's Women's Center, and the Livingston Civic and Garden Club to host a seminar on Women and Gender Studies in March, 2023, to celebrate Women's History Month and improve gender equity in Livingston. This seminar would include four speakers drawn from WGS and the WMC, a discussion session, and a roundtable with WGS students. It will be open to the public and specially marketed to high school students and K-12 teachers. It will involve faculty and students from Tech's WGS minor and WMC.



22-23	Hutson	Samantha	Spring Into Health and Wellness: A Pop-Up Event	Spring Into Health and Wellness: A Pop-Up Event aims to support the development of rural areas around the Upper Cumberland region by providing take-home wellness boxes to families. Our goal for this program is to provide families in rural communities with wellness-related resources that can help them to develop healthy life skills, such as increasing their knowledge of healthy eating habits, improving financial well-being, and understanding the ways that personal hygiene can impact overall wellness.
22-23	Langford	Matthew	Rural Reimagined: The Urgent Care Mental Health Model	Hope Springs Urgent Care Clinic's goal is to increase access to mental health services in the rural Upper Cumberlands (UC) of Tennessee for urgent, non-crisis care. There is a lack of mental healthcare resources in this area where increased access not only can improve mental health, but also decrease stress on local law enforcement and emergency departments. By marketing our mental health urgent care clinic, we can reach this goal of increasing access to mental health and decreasing the need of crisis intervention. Furthermore, dissemination of our model to the mental health community will guide others to begin similar programs.
22-23	Lisic	Edward	Increasing Young Student Interest in STEM Education Through Games and Free Apps	With the lack of engagement in at risk k-12 rural public schools, we have managed to conceive and produce games and free apps that will, in our opinion, increase interest in chemistry and other STEM areas, if they are provided for free. Just producing something that has the trappings of science isn't enough; we want to develop sincere educational games that have merit. In order to do this we require student workers who will help us test, analyze, and develop these games and apps to make them highly workable and effective, as well as funds for printing and dissemination
22-23	Michel	Lauren	Establishment of the Upper Cumberland Climate History Project	The Upper Cumberland region lacks a long-term, systematic study of its climate. While there are National Weather Service meteorological stations in the region, most of them have decadal gap in their records. These gaps in the instrumentation records means we lack the ability to fully understand how climate in the Upper Cumberland has varied in the past. We propose here to study archives and collect published meteorological and historical records to create databases of paleoclimate. Through generating these resources, we can then assess how climate has change in the past, and how it might change in the future.



22-23	Wilson	Brenda	Partnering with local agencies to promote rural community services	This project involves a collaboration between the JOUR 4460 Public Relations Cases and Practices course and Upper Cumberland regional service agencies (UCHRA, for example) to promote the services they offer to rural communities including Tennessee Tech students. The students will apply course content to develop a promotional campaign to increase awareness and use of the services offered. Students will review client research of existing awareness and use of the services offered and determine objectives and communication strategies that would work best with the specific audiences to develop the promotional campaign. They will then create multimedia messages and disseminate information to the publics that would most benefit from using the services.
23-24	Atkinson	Megan	Empowering Voices: Preserving the Legacy of Cookeville, Tennessee's West End Community	The "Empowering Voices" project, led by Tennessee Tech Archives and Special Collections in collaboration with the West End Connection (WEC), a Black-led community 501c3 in Cookeville, Tennessee, aims to address the historical underrepresentation of the West End community through the digitization of materials and oral history interviews. This initiative seeks to bridge the archival gap by empowering community members to shape and control their own historic narrative. By focusing on the West End's rich cultural history, the project will create a lasting community archive that celebrates the resilience and vibrancy of this historically underrepresented community.
23-24	Bounds	Paulina	Imagining Generative Artificial Intelligence for Rural Classrooms	"Imagining Generative Artificial Intelligence for Rural Classrooms" is a project planned around a single-evening, resource-rich, interactive workshop for Upper Cumberland K-12 educators. The workshop focuses on strategies for ethically integrating generative artificial intelligence (AI) into participating teachers' classroom practices. The project's research component focuses on teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward AI, which will be measured by pre- and post-workshop surveys and possibly interviews. The three co-PIs and four student workers collaboratively design and implement the workshop and all components of the research.
23-24	Bundy	Sid	Mapping Tennessee's Network of Startup Resources	Using StartupCincy and KCSOURCELINK's startup resource maps as models, we hope to expand our publication to develop an interactive website that maps the complex network of resources available to



				entrepreneurs. The website will empower entrepreneurs to find regional resources efficiently. We are requesting funding to develop the website, publish print materials, and promote use through direct stakeholder contact and at targeted conferences. By funding the Phase II of this project, you enable us to apply for external funding for website maintenance, project expansion, and data collection in Phase III and IV.
23-24	Comer	Melissa	The Stories We Tell: Preserving and Understanding the Voices of Rural Americans	The project will investigate and document oral histories of rural Tennesseans, with the goal of preserving and understanding their experiences, perspectives, and cultural heritages. It seeks to address the potential loss of valuable narratives and insights due to the changing landscape of rural communities. Existing knowledge often focuses on statistical data and economic indicators, providing limited insight into the lived experiences and personal stories of rural residents. Oral histories allow interviewers to capture the nuanced narratives, traditions, and challenges faced by rural Tennesseans in their own words; it will serve as something teacher candidates can replicate within their own classrooms.
23-24	Fidan	Ismail	Redesigning and Remanufacturing the entrepreneurial future (Project R2)	Today, there are several design software tools and manufacturing processes used for designing and fabricating components for the need of educational systems and industry. However, very few people are knowledgeable about the latest trends and technologies of these innovative design tools and production technologies. Project R2 will develop and implement several cutting-edge entrepreneurial knowledge blocks and educational modules about 1) Generative Design using Fusion 360, 2) Transforming Casting to daily life using foundry-in-a-box technology, and 3) Producing products with the no-cost filament made via green manufacturing technologies (established at MET's GE2 lab).
23-24	Geist	Melissa	Serious Gaming to Increase Infection Prevention and Control Awareness	FLIGHT: "Fighting Lurking Infections: Germ Hygiene Training" is an engaging gaming system targeting the challenge of preventing the spread of community and hospital-acquired infections. Diseases such as COVID-19, Influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) spread quickly, and the consequences have economic and health-related implications. Increased healthcare costs,



				missed work or school days, daycare closings, and preventable deaths are consequences of not adhering to evidence-based guidelines for preventing disease transmission. Rectifying this issue demands creating a culture of attentiveness in communities and healthcare facilities, reinforcing the importance of infection control as a cornerstone of public safety.
23-24	Hill	Amy	Rural Tourism Collaborative Project Initiative	Drs. Colleen Mestayer and Amy Hill are creating a multidisciplinary project to promote Cookeville tourism. The project is inspired by Greenville, SC, which has had a successful tourism project featuring a scavenger hunt and book called <i>Mice on Main</i> . The book features a family of mice visiting different businesses in the downtown area. The mice are small sculptures perched in various locations, and visitors (and locals) explore the downtown area searching for the mice. This project will replicate the Mice on Main Project, but will feature small sculptures, which better represent Cookeville (train cars, ice cream cones, etc.).
23-24	Hunt	Helen	Plenty of Book Nooks: Supporting Literacy Through Community Spaces	Community partners build, place and plan continuing care for neighborhood “book nooks” – little free libraries decorated and filled with books for all ages. In a community where 60% of poverty households possess no books, in awareness that books in the home are key to student achievement, and in knowledge that Highlands 3rd grade reading performance is critically low, these nooks elevate reading for homes and families. Reading is key to participation in society and with the support of diverse populations, seniors, the library system, Leadership Putnam and the Plenty Bookshop these nooks will improve access and elevate book culture.
23-24	Mabry	Jennifer	CHART project (Collaboration for Healthcare Access in Rural Tennessee)	The CHART project (Collaboration for Healthcare Access in Rural Tennessee) goal is to improve healthcare access to disadvantaged children within the LBJ&C federal Head Start program and to model professionalism within the community. The L.B.J.&C. Head Start facilities are found within the economically at-risk counties of Jackson, Macon, Pickett, and Fentress and the economically distressed county of Clay (TNEDC statistics 2023). The project aims to connect primary health care providers within the Whitson-Hester School of Nursing with the L.B.J.&C. program for preschool preparation to meet federal requirements of health screenings and staff



				trainings. The goal of this proposal is to expand these services to at risk and distressed communities listed above and to provide onsite lead screenings which is an identified gap.
23-24	Murphy	Kyle	Sustainable Organocatalysts for Degradation of PET Microplastics along the Tennessee River	Green chemistry guides the utilization of renewable biomass into furfural, a sustainable platform chemical. While furfural derivatives have broad applications, their potential for depolymerizing consumer plastics like PET into monomers remains underexplored. This research investigates such derivatives with hydrazone functionality as catalysts for efficient PET degradation. The study addresses microplastic pollution in rural areas within Tennessee and along the Tennessee River. Recent findings indicate high levels of microplastics within the river, exceeding similar rivers in other countries. Removing these contaminants is essential to prevent bioaccumulation and protect the health of local communities.
24-25	Coutinho	Allison	Super Seniors Staying Strong: Nutrition Education for Older Adults	Resources within rural communities can be difficult to obtain, specifically in the area of nutrition education and resources. An examination of rural areas reveals that most locations have a public library serving as a resource to these populations. A needed resource includes improvement to older adult access and nutritional knowledge. The proposed project would provide these individuals with nutrition education, materials, food, and kitchen equipment to enhance their ability to improve their health through library education sessions utilizing student and Tennessee Tech faculty collaboration.
24-25	Ductan	Monic	2025 Appalachian Studies Association Conference	The Appalachian Studies Conference is an interdisciplinary conference that seeks to educate people about the Appalachian region. The conference has been held annually for 47 years, and panels and presentations typically focus on the literature, history, social sciences, life sciences, healthcare, and art of Appalachia. TTU is hosting this conference in March 2025. We will seek student volunteers to plan and manage conference activities. For instance, student workers will run the first-aid station, manage the technological aspects of our audio for guest speakers, direct traffic, and manage the A/V system for music and dance performances.
24-25	Hermann-Turner	Katherine	Support Groups for Low SES Mothers in Rural	Mothers at a low socioeconomic status in rural communities often lack support networks and mental health resources, exacerbating feelings



			Communities: A Collaborative Mixed Methods Approach	of isolation. This mixed methods study will explore the effectiveness of an 8-week group counseling model facilitated by master's level counseling interns for mothers at or below the poverty line living in rural communities in the Upper Cumberland. Doctoral level Counseling & Supervision doctoral students will collect and analyze data. By exploring participants' unique experiences of mothers, the research seeks to enhance understanding of maternal needs in rural areas, inform counseling practices, and empower students through hands-on experience.
24-25	Kim	Duckbong	Metaverse-based Smart Manufacturing for Rural Reimagination in Middle Tennessee	In this project, we will develop and demonstrate metaverse-based smart manufacturing (M-SM) prototype and case scenarios for the TN Rural Reimagination. This project will be geared toward advancing the fundamental understanding and knowledge by studying metaverse-related technologies, such as data analytics, collaborative robot, machine learning, XR:AR/VR/MR, immersive modeling, digital twin, and cyber physical system. If the goal is achieved, it leads to the next step toward advancing the remote manufacturing. Also, TN students will be involved in this project via the senior design project. They will develop case studies and demonstrate/present it at the TTU Research and Creative Inquiry Day.
24-25	Kinmonth-Schultz	Hannah	A Bugs World: A Study on Early Successional Habitat in Gardens	The inclusion of early successional habitat in gardens reduces habitat fragmentation for pollinators and provides habitat for beneficial insect predators. We are assessing whether incorporation of early successional habitat strips in mixed vegetable gardens reduces damage from insect pests on vegetables that are commonly grown in middle Tennessee, using 16 plots at Shipley Farm. Fifteen flowering forbs, native to Tennessee, were planted into 8 plots, with a common agricultural buffer grass planted into the others. Yield and percentage of leaf damage of vegetable plants, insect type and presence, and emergence and persistence of the wildflowers will be assessed.
24-25	Luo	Ye	Click to Care: Cultivating Digital Citizenship and Defending Cyberbullying	The "Click to Care" program focuses on promoting safe and responsible social media use among rural middle school students in Tennessee. By integrating digital literacy education into the guidance curriculum at Dodson Branch Elementary School, the program addresses the growing concerns of cyberbullying and online safety. Through



				interdisciplinary collaboration with Tennessee Tech students, the project aims to improve digital literacy and foster positive online behaviors. The program will be evaluated using a structured framework to measure its effectiveness, with the ultimate goal of creating a replicable model for other rural schools across the state of Tennessee
24-25	Momin	Abdul	Affordable Weed Detection in Corn Fields Using Low-Resolution RGB Imagery and Machine Learning	This project aims to develop an affordable Weed Detection System (WDS) using low-resolution aerial RGB imagery and machine learning techniques for early-stage weed identification in corn fields. The WDS will address challenges in traditional weed detection, which is labor-intensive, and high-cost modern methods. By utilizing a low-cost consumer drone and object-based image analysis, the system will provide an accessible solution for rural farmers. The project will enhance crop health, reduce herbicide use, and promote economic resilience, with a focus on increasing data-driven precision engineering technology (DPET) adoption in rural Tennessee and providing valuable experiential learning for TN Tech students
24-25	Simone	Kinsey	Mad Topics 2025 Panel Symposium: Anxiety & Depression	This proposal requests Level 3 funds (\$11,759) to support the 2025 Mad Topics panel symposium. Free educational events are important for rural communities, as mental health access and resources are limited in rural areas (Wakefield, 2022). This panel provides practical information for educators, community members, mental health professionals, and students; research findings can fill a gap in research on the effectiveness of similar events. Tech students will act as leaders in the planning and implementation of the panel, which aligns with Rural Reimagined through transforming rural mindsets and strengthening collaboration between K–12 schools, community members, and Tech.
24-25	Wood	Katherine	Understanding and Addressing Ambiguous Loss in Students: Insights from Rural School Counselors'	School Counselors are an integral part of students navigating both death and non-death losses. This phenomenological study aimed to identify and explore of the lived experiences of rural school counselors' knowledge of and exposure to students dealing with ambiguous loss. Previously, limited research had been conducted on the school counselor's knowledge of and interactions with ambiguous loss in students. Therefore, this study was conducted through identifying rural Tennessee school counselors to share their experiences and provide insights into this under researched



				topic. Implications and recommendations for school counselors, counselor educators, and future research are provided.
25-26	Allen	Samantha	Exploring Our River: Implications for Economic Impact of the Caney Fork River Watershed	The Caney Fork River Watershed in central Tennessee is a biologically diverse freshwater system facing growing threats from urbanization, pollution, and habitat loss. While ecotourism is increasingly seen as both a conservation strategy and sustainable economic driver, its role in incentivizing biodiversity conservation remains insufficiently understood, especially in rural watersheds. This place-based initiative promotes spatial thinking and environmental stewardship, while examining the economic value of local streams. This project provides essential background research and mapping framework to assess connections between ecotourism and biodiversity, laying the framework for future, externally funded projects focused on conservation, community engagement and freshwater sustainability.
25-26	Bhattacharya	Gourab	Outcrop Affinity: Building a Digital Rock Outcrop Database for Tennessee's Rural Landscapes	This project will create Tennessee's first comprehensive digital database of roadside rock outcrops by advancing Outcrop Affinity, a Python-based geospatial algorithm that automates outcrop detection using LiDAR and US road network data. Student teams will verify ambiguous detections statewide and pilot drone-based digital outcrop models at representative rural sites. The resulting public database will support transportation planning, hazard mitigation, education, and geotourism while training undergraduates in modern geospatial methods for high-demand environmental careers. Outcomes will enhance rural workforce development and community engagement, positioning Tennessee as a national leader in rural geoinformatics with a scalable model for Appalachian expansion.
25-26	Geist	Melissa	HEAT MAP: Health & Environment Action Targeting, Mapping At-Risk Populations	An interdisciplinary team of faculty and students from Nursing and Earth Sciences proposes initiatives to utilize Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to prioritize and respond to communities where climate change exacerbates the risk for poor health outcomes. The team is strategically positioned to leverage expertise, community partnerships, and assets to provide education, screenings, and resources that mitigate the devastating effects of Metabolic Syndrome. Inventive use of GIS technology will allow prioritization of counties with individuals at the highest risk for poor cardiovascular,



				endocrine, and neurological outcomes.
25-26	Jara	Manuel	Exploring Science Together: Rural Health Education Through Children's Books	Effective science communication is essential for empowering communities, especially in rural areas where children often have fewer resources and less access to engaging science education. This project will create "Exploring Science Together", a bilingual book series designed for ages 7 to 9. These books will blend storytelling and accurate science to teach about the most prevalent infectious diseases in rural Tennessee. Topics will include farm safety, waterborne diseases, vector-borne diseases, food safety and antibiotic use awareness. Partnering with three rural schools (Dodson Branch Elementary, Rickman Elementary and Hilham Elementary), we will distribute these books and organize one event per school that will combine book reading and engaging classroom activities, building early health literacy and stronger, healthier communities.
25-26	Kalyanapu	Alfred	Agentic AI-based low-cost flood sensors for autonomous flood prediction	Flooding poses a persistent threat to both urban and rural communities, with rural areas often lacking the resources for effective monitoring and mitigation. Events like the 2024 Hurricane Helene and the 2022 Eastern Kentucky floods highlight this vulnerability. Traditional stream gauges are costly, limiting access for under-resourced regions. To address this, we propose a low-cost, technology-driven solution integrating distributed sensors with agentic AI. This system enables adaptive, autonomous flood detection by interpreting data patterns, managing uncertainty, and issuing alerts without human oversight. Our approach aims to democratize flood preparedness, making real-time monitoring accessible and scalable for vulnerable communities worldwide.
25-26	Meadows	Jennifer	Practical STEM: Highlighting STEM in Everyday Life	This proposal highlights a collaborative initiative between the Oakley STEM Center and the Putnam County Extension Office to deliver innovative Spring Break and Summer Day Camps that connect everyday experiences to STEM. Through hands-on learning, youth will explore STEM in practical, engaging contexts—sewing design, consumer decision-making, outdoor cooking, robotics, and food preservation. Each camp integrates problem-solving, creativity, and technical skills with real-world applications, preparing students for future education and careers. By combining the Extension Office's community outreach expertise with the STEM Center's educational



				resources, this partnership will expand access to high-quality, experiential STEM learning opportunities for youth.
25-26	Michael	Tony	Expanding Access to Neurofeedback: Evaluating Mental Health Outcomes in the Upper Cumberland Region	This project will provide 100 hours of neurofeedback sessions to community members in the Upper Cumberland region through partnerships with Heart of the Cumberland, Power of Putnam, and Jackson County Prevention Partnership. The study aims to evaluate the impact of neurofeedback on emotional regulation, stress, anxiety, and overall mental health. Participants completing five sessions will receive a \$100 gift card. Graduate counseling students will assist with implementation and data collection, gaining hands-on research experience. Results will be disseminated at the Tennessee Licensed Professional Counselors Association conference and through peer-reviewed publications, informing rural mental health practices and access to innovative interventions.



E. Before You Apply Checklist

Use this checklist before submitting your application.

Project Design

- ☐ My project addresses a clearly defined rural challenge, opportunity, or need.
- ☐ I have clearly explained who will benefit from this work.
- ☐ My project aligns with the goals of Rural Reimagined.
- ☐ I have identified specific, measurable outcomes.
- ☐ I have clearly identified the rural population, community, or region that will benefit.

Student and Community Engagement

- ☐ Student involvement is clearly described.
- ☐ Community partners have been identified when appropriate.
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined.

Budget Preparation

- ☐ I reviewed allowable and unallowable costs.
- ☐ Budget requests are clearly connected to project activities.
- ☐ I consulted with my departmental bookkeeper.
- ☐ Budget calculations and justifications are complete.
- ☐ All requested costs are allowable under program guidelines.

Project Implementation

- ☐ My timeline fits within the project period.
- ☐ Potential compliance requirements have been identified.

☐ IRB, IACUC, Policy 120, or other approvals have been considered if applicable.

Dissemination

☐ I have identified how project results will be shared.

☐ Dissemination plans align with expectations for the selected funding tier.

Submission Requirements

☐ Narrative follows required formatting guidelines.

☐ Narrative is within the page limit for my selected funding tier.

☐ All required sections are included.

☐ All required signatures will be obtained before the deadline.

☐ My application is ready for submission before September 30, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.



F. Scoring Rubric

Evaluation Criteria & Scoring

Evaluation Criterion	Max Points	What the Committee Looks For
Description of Project	15	Clarity of project problem statement, justification , and context (incl. relevant literature/supporting evidence).
Significance / Impact to Rural	40	The project's importance in its field and the extent of impact on rural communities (alignment with Rural Reimagined mission).
Plan of Action	25	Quality and feasibility of the methodology and work plan (clear steps/timeline, appropriate methods, addresses any compliance needs, budget aligns with objectives). Projects should present a realistic work plan for the July 1, 2027–June 30, 2028 project period.
Personnel Qualifications	10	The PI/team's expertise and capability to execute the project successfully (relevant skills, experience, and roles defined).
Dissemination of Results	10	Strength of the plans to share outcomes (identified publications, presentations, or community outreach to maximize project impact).
Total	100	–

Score	Interpretation
90–100	Exceptional
80–89	Highly Competitive
70–79	Competitive
Below 70	Unlikely to Fund

Performance Quality Descriptors: *The following describes characteristics of proposals scoring at different levels for each criterion.*

- **Description of Project (15 pts):**
 - *Excellent (Exceeds expectations):* Provides a clear, compelling problem or question, backed by strong rationale. The need/justification is well-supported with current literature or evidence, and the proposal demonstrates a thorough understanding of the context and prior work. The project objectives are explicit and logically flow from the problem statement.



- *Satisfactory (Meets expectations)*: States the problem and justification adequately but may lack some clarity or depth. The relevance is apparent though not strongly emphasized; some supporting references or context are provided but might be limited in scope or currency. Overall, the project idea is understandable, though certain details could be clearer.
- *Needs Improvement (Below expectations)*: The project description is vague or incomplete. The problem or need is not clearly articulated, or justification is weak (little to no supporting evidence). Key background information may be missing, leaving reviewers unclear about what will be done or why it's important.
- **Significance / Rural Impact (40 pts):**
 - *Excellent*: Clearly articulates a significant contribution to knowledge in the discipline and demonstrates a major positive impact on rural communities. Aligns strongly with the Rural Reimagined mission; the proposal convincingly explains how rural areas will benefit in tangible ways. There is a strong sense of innovation or meaningful change.
 - *Satisfactory*: Describes **a moderate contribution or impact**. Some rural relevance is explained, but the extent of impact or alignment to rural priorities may not be fully convincing. The project's significance is apparent but could be clearer or more strongly justified.
 - *Needs Improvement*: The proposal's value or rural impact is unclear or minimal. It may not clearly connect to Rural Reimagined's goals, or might address a trivial or tangential issue. The broader significance is questionable or insufficiently described to gauge its importance.
- **Plan of Action (25 pts):**
 - *Excellent*: Presents a well-structured, detailed, and feasible plan. Each step of the methodology is clearly described and directly supports achieving the project objectives. The timeline is realistic; potential challenges are anticipated. Compliance requirements (e.g., IRB for human subjects, Minors on Campus policy) are addressed proactively. The budget is clearly tied to project tasks, well justified, and appropriate for activities occurring during the project period.
 - *Satisfactory*: Provides a workable plan, but some details may be underdeveloped or less clear. The methodology and timeline cover the main aspects, though a few steps or contingency plans may be missing. Budget appears mostly reasonable, with minor questions possible. Compliance considerations are acknowledged if applicable.
 - *Needs Improvement*: The plan is lacking detail or credibility. It may be unclear how the project will be executed, or key steps/timeline elements are omitted or unrealistic. The budget may seem disconnected from activities or inadequate/excessive. Important compliance issues (if relevant) are not addressed.
- **Personnel Qualifications (10 pts):**
 - *Excellent*: Highly qualified team – the PI (and any collaborators) have strong relevant expertise and experience directly aligned with the project's requirements. Past accomplishments or credentials indicate a high likelihood of success. Roles are clearly defined and appropriate.



- *Satisfactory*: The PI/team meets basic qualifications to conduct the work. They have relevant knowledge or related experience, though perhaps not extensively documented. Capabilities are adequate for the project, albeit without exceptional distinctions.
- *Needs Improvement*: Qualifications are unclear or insufficient. The proposal does not instill confidence that the team has the necessary skills or experience to complete the work successfully (e.g., missing critical expertise, or PI's background does not align with project topic).
- **Dissemination of Results (10 pts):**
 - *Excellent*: Outlines a robust dissemination plan with specific outlets and methods (e.g., targeted journals, conferences, community workshops). Demonstrates a strong commitment to share results broadly, including how rural stakeholders or communities will benefit from the findings.
 - *Satisfactory*: Describes a basic plan to share outcomes, for example mentioning intent to publish or present results, but details are somewhat general or limited. Still indicates an awareness of the need to disseminate findings.
 - *Needs Improvement*: Inadequate dissemination strategy. The proposal lacks clarity on how results will be shared beyond TTU, or doesn't mention dissemination at all. Opportunities to extend the project's impact to the academic community or to rural stakeholders are not clearly identified.

Priority Factors (Non-Scored Considerations)

The following five **Priority Factors** are *not scored with points*, but the Review Committee will note and consider them when making final funding decisions (for example, as tie-breakers among top proposals). Proposals that strongly address multiple priority factors are more likely to stand out.

Priority Factor	Description / Rationale
Rural Focus & Impact	Project directly addresses a significant need or opportunity in rural communities; clearly aligned with Rural Reimagined's mission.
Student Involvement	Project provides meaningful roles for TTU students (grad and/or undergrad) to participate, fostering experiential learning.
Interdisciplinary Approach	Project team spans multiple disciplines or departments, leveraging diverse expertise for a richer approach and broader impact.
External Partnerships	Includes collaboration with external partners (e.g., rural community organizations, local industry, schools), helping ensure practical relevance and community engagement.
Experiential Learning	Offers hands-on experiences, especially that connect faculty and students with rural community environments or stakeholders.

(Note: While not scored as separate line items, these priority factors reflect core values of the program. The Committee will give special consideration to proposals that meet these criteria when determining final awards.)

