



Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program

Handbook

Fall 2025

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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. **Friday, September 26, 2025 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 TN Tech Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program was established at Tennessee Tech University in the fall semester of 2022 to partner with faculty and students in effort to collaboratively examine and address rural facing issues. We believe that a primary benefit of faculty research lies in its potential to transform rural living. It is anticipated that faculty engagement in research and creative activities will enable them to remain at the leading edges of their fields. This knowledge will filter downward into the classroom and community as well as provide opportunities for students to become directly involved in scholarly exploration.

Review Committee

The TCRI Assistant Director for Rural Resilience serves as the Executive Officer of the Review Committee. The Review Committee is comprised of Tennessee Tech faculty, staff, and community residents who are members of the Faculty Grant Program Committee. Members of the Review Committee will not review applications to which they are connected by any academic, professional, or personal means. They must excuse themselves from a portion of the meeting if their own proposals or any associated proposals are under discussion. The committee meets at least once each semester of the academic year to oversee the evaluation of research proposals as well as consider progress reports and the general status of faculty research supported by the grant program.

Application Process: Competitive.

Funding Levels

The Program is funded by the State of Tennessee Governor's Budget state appropriations received July 1, 2025, for the Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program. The Program is managed by the TN Tech Center for Rural Innovation.

There are three funding levels to which you can apply. Only one proposal per applicant will be accepted across all funding levels. No indirect costs (IDC) should be budgeted.

Level 1 - up to \$2,499

Funding Level 1 requires a two-page maximum narrative. See the Application Package for details.



Level 2 - \$2,500-\$9,999

Funding Level 2 requires a four-page maximum narrative. See the Application Package for details.

Level 3 - \$10,000-\$20,000

Funding Level 3 requires a six-page maximum narrative. See the Application Package for details.

Timeline

The period of performance for the Program is November, 2025 – June 30, 2026.

- All funds must be expensed by June 30, 2026. This is the period during which the PI is expected to complete the project and to incur and expend all approved funds.
- No indirect costs (IDC) should be budgeted.
- **The department financial employee will be assigned as the bookkeeper on the project. Any and all expenditures on the grant will be initiated by the bookkeeper. This includes travel, supplies, student appointments, release time, etc.**
- A proposal that requests to extend a project's budget beyond June 30, 2026 will not be accepted.
- Please note that unexpended funds will not carry over beyond the project period approved. Any unused funds after June 30 of the project year will be forfeited.
- However, it is our hope that the Program will catalyze continued scholarly activity beyond the period of performance.

Allowable Costs

The following categories of expenses fall within the definitions of basic and applied research and other creative scholarly work, including the necessary dissemination of information, and thus are eligible for funding.

A. Release Time. Assistance in the form of release time/reduced teaching load will apply only to the regular academic year and will not exceed one course. Requests for release time will be at the same rate as departmental adjunct faculty.

B. Student Salaries. It is required that proposals include requests to fund student(s) to assist faculty in the design and implementation of the work. At this time, only students who are paid as hourly workers are permissible to be paid on the faculty grants- this can include either graduate or undergraduate level. Students may not be paid from grant funds for activities that are part of a class, capstone project, or required fieldwork for which they are receiving academic credit. These activities are considered part of the student's coursework and cannot be compensated as employment. Students **may** be paid from the grant if they are hired to perform work outside the scope of their required classes. For example, assisting a faculty member with research tasks, data collection, or project support not tied to their own graded assignments would be allowable.

C. Benefits. Personnel costs included in the budget must also account for the applicable employee benefits. For example:



- Faculty release time requires budgeting **42% for benefits**.
- Student hourly workers require budgeting **7.65% for benefits**.

D. Travel. Travel should occur primarily within Tennessee. The committee will not consider travel outside the United States. The committee will consider travel to bordering state counties if it proves to be substantially beneficial for the project.

- Travel is ONLY permitted when it is necessary for the overall support and success of the project.
- **All travel must be completed and expenses incurred/posted prior to the June 30 grant end date. Any travel that occurs after June 30 is prohibited.**
- Travel is limited to faculty members and students.
- Allowable travel costs include employee mileage, lodging, per diem, etc. and will be considered in relation to the overall scope of the project and must follow CONUS rates.

E. Supplies and Operating Expenses. Funds for special supplies, dissemination/publishing costs, laboratory assistance, data processing, etc. are allowable. This includes costs to conduct descriptive or normative surveys, i.e., the compilation of data through questionnaires or similar methods and the analysis of the data.

F. Allowable publication and dissemination costs include:

- Payment of the minimum amount for publication in peer reviewed, quality scholarly journals, short articles, or abstracts of articles related to research supported by the faculty research grant program.
- Cost of the minimum number of reprints of articles related to research supported by the faculty research grant program, if required as a part of the publication agreement.
- Costs of University Printing Services to publish handbooks and similar works related to research supported by the faculty research grant program when the document is of broad interest and when support of such publication cannot be arranged through an outside agency.
- The making of recordings when such is an essential part of the proposed research.

NOTE: Special purpose equipment costing **\$5,000 or more per individual item** is not allowable on this grant. This includes items used for research, medical, scientific, or other technical activities.

- **Allowable example:** A 3D printer purchased for \$1,500 to prototype parts.
- **Unallowable example:** A robotic arm purchased for \$6,000 for advanced automation research.

In other words, while your total supply purchases may exceed \$5,000, **no single piece of equipment may cost \$5,000 or more.**

G. Prohibited Use of Grant Funds

- **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.**



Investigator Requirements

Applicants must meet the following requirements to be eligible for an award under this program:

The PI and Co-PIs must be eligible to be an investigator at Tennessee Tech University.

- All full-time faculty are eligible to apply.
- Non-tenure-track faculty are eligible to apply if (a) their Agreement on Responsibilities (AOR) includes a research component.
- Staff and administrative employee who conduct research or routinely engage rural communities as part of their responsibilities.

Proposals will not be considered if any of the following conditions are satisfied:

1. Proposals that do not show demonstrable outcomes appropriate to the discipline.
2. Proposals requesting extra or summer compensation.
3. Proposals requesting equipment purchases.
4. Proposals requesting subawards or contracts.

Notes:

A. If a faculty member is awarded a Faculty Program grant for a given year but is not able to accept it that year, the award is forfeited. The faculty member may resubmit the proposal for consideration in a subsequent year's award competition.

B. The Faculty Grant Program Committee members may submit a proposal but will not review their own proposals. They must excuse themselves from a portion of the meeting if their own proposals are under discussion. Although their proposals may or may not be funded, they may continue to serve their term on the committee.

Proposal Submission and Evaluation

When writing a proposal, it is important to remember the target audience. The members of the Review Committee are the audience, as they will evaluate the proposals and decide which are eligible and which will receive funding. Although the Review Committee members are knowledgeable about research, they are not usually experts in the specialized area of research in the proposal. They are an educated, intelligent, "lay" audience.

The application package will be routed electronically for signatures via DocuSign. Prior to starting the DocuSign routing process, the PI should complete the **Application Package - Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Fall 25** document.

Application Procedures

The committee will issue a call for proposals each year and announce a deadline for the submission of proposals. **PROPOSALS RECEIVED AFTER THE DEADLINE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.**

- A. Completed proposals must be endorsed by the principal investigator (PI), the PI's department chair, and the PI's dean of their respective college/school (or designated representative). **By endorsing the proposal, chairs and deans specifically agree to adhere to the budget requirements including faculty release time and to cover the cost of overages if the PI overspends.**



- B. Fully endorsed proposals and supporting documentation are due no later than 4:30 p.m. on the deadline date.
- C. The Assistant Director of Rural Resilience will distribute proposals to the Review Committee for evaluation after the deadline date.
- D. The Review Committee will evaluate the proposed projects utilizing an approach similar to federal funding agencies.
- E. The Review Committee chairperson will transmit the Review Committee's recommendations to the Assistant Director for Rural Resilience, who will subsequently initiate a comprehensive budget review by a team comprising directors from the Offices of Sponsored Programs and Planning and Finance. This multi-faceted review ensures that the scope of work and budget align with all relevant policies and regulations, promoting adherence to compliance standards.
- F. Once the proposal is approved or declined, the Center for Rural Innovation will notify the applicant.



Criteria Used to Evaluate Research Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated based on the project description and justification of need, intellectual merit, plan of action, PI qualifications, dissemination plan, student involvement, and reasonableness of the budget.

- A. Proposals must follow all university guidelines, procedures, and policies.
- B. Applicants must be knowledgeable and experienced in the proposed research area.
- C. The research project must promise transformative contributions to knowledge in the field of work in rural communities of Tennessee.
- D. The project must not duplicate research already accomplished by others but may represent extensions of such earlier research. This includes former Rural Reimagined Faculty Grant Program awards.
- E. Funds cannot be used to assist faculty in completing the requirements for any degree.
- F. Funds cannot be used to assist faculty in equipment purchases.
- G. In reviewing proposals, the Committee will carefully look for the following:
 - Evidence of plans that have been thoughtfully and carefully worked out;
 - Involvement of students (undergraduate or graduate)
 - Clear definition of the objective(s) and an outline of steps, methods, procedures, and evaluation leading to the accomplishment of the objective(s)
 - Thoughtful estimates of required time frames and anticipated needs;
 - If public schools or other outside agencies/entities are involved, letters of agreement from appropriate persons will need to be included in the form of an appendix. Appendices will not count against narrative page limits;
 - Statements relative to the possibility of publication of the results; and
 - Adherence to the guidelines.

Rating System and Priority Requirements (Rubric)

When evaluating proposals, Review Committee members rate each eligible proposal in the following five areas. The total points that can be awarded in each area is indicated in parentheses. To rank eligible proposals, the totals of all evaluators' ratings are averaged. Any evaluator perceiving a conflict of interest relative to any proposal will not submit a rating of that proposal.

1. Description of Project (15 points)

- A clear statement of the problem or activity is contained in the proposal.
- There is adequate justification for the project.
- There is an adequate review of the literature or other evidence to support the need for the project.
- There are adequate and appropriate references.

2. Significance/Merit/Impact to Rural (40 points)

- The project is of significance and clearly demonstrates intellectual merit and broader impact in its respective field and rural Tennessee.
- The ways in which project will further extend the mission and vision of Rural Reimagined.

3. Plan of Action (25 points)

- An effective plan of management is in place that ensures proper and efficient administration of the project.
- The step-by-step plan will ensure that the objectives are met.
- There are adequate measures to ensure compliance with human subjects or minors, if applicable. See details in the Working with Minors section below regarding research involving minors.
- The plan of action is adequate as applied to such factors as data gathering and analysis.
- An established budget for the project is adequate to support the activities.
- Costs included within the budget are reasonable and appropriate in relation to the objectives.
- An explanation of how your project plans to involve TN Tech students.

4. Personnel Qualifications of Investigator (10 points):

- The PI is qualified to conduct the project.
- Co-PIs and other personnel (if applicable) are appropriate and adequate.

5. Dissemination of Results (10 points)

- The dissemination plan is adequate and appropriate. There are possibilities for publication – including identification of target outlets and how work will contribute to the respective field.

Priority Requirements

Priority/ Eligibility will be given to proposals that have one or more of the following elements in all tracks.

- Demonstrates potentiality for significant contributions to knowledge in the field of work in rural communities of Tennessee.
- Extensively involves graduate or undergraduate students in ways that enhance their education and post-graduate or professional opportunities.
- Projects that promote interdisciplinary and research-based experiential teaching and learning for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, particularly those that can develop into initiatives that can attract external support, are also of interest.
- A faculty member may only be the PI on one project per funding round.
- Provide support to interdisciplinary or other multi-faculty collaborations where at least one faculty member is from another department/unit.
- Involve collaborative partnerships with business, industry, and non-profit entities that have strong probabilities of leading to future federal, state, or other external funding sources and further rural impact outcomes.

Funding of Approved Projects

Funds should be expended in a timely manner. No extensions beyond June 30 are allowable. In addition, delays in making expenditures may lead to the loss of funds with the expiration of the grant program.

Procedures

A. Human Subjects and Animal Care: If human subjects or laboratory animals are involved, the Committee's approval of the award is contingent upon the applicant's obtaining appropriate clearance from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).



B. When a proposal has received final approval, the Assistant Director for Rural Resilience will notify Grant Accounting of the recipient's name, department, and a copy of the itemized budget.

C. Release Time: Cases involving release time can be handled in one of two ways. The bookkeeper can email Grant Accounting with the planned percent of effort for each month on the project, or a labor reallocation form can be submitted to Grant Accounting after the actual work for the project has been completed. In either case, funds have to be spent within the specified grant period.

D. Other Expenses: **The financial person in the PI's department will be assigned as the bookkeeper on the project.** Grant Accounting will email the FOAPAL information to the PI and bookkeeper once the project is activated. Expenditures shall be made in accordance with University policies and procedures. Standard requisition forms shall be used and forwarded through the regular department and college/school offices for approval.

E. Budget Revisions: Re-budgeting within 10 percent of the total project budget is permitted so long as the amount of funds budgeted for student salaries is not reduced. Any requests for budget revisions where the total cumulative amount of changes exceed 10 percent of the total budget, and/or the amount of funds budgeted for student salaries would be reduced, will require prior written approval by the Assistant Director for Rural Resilience.

F. Overages: Project budgets are only approved for the amount funded in the award letter. Overspending is not permitted for any reason. **If expenditures are in excess of the approved amount, the PI's department or college will be required to fully fund the cost of those overages.**

Final Report

Recipients of research assistance are required to provide the committee with final reports relative to their projects as well as special reports if requested. These reports are necessary so that the committee may constantly assess the progress of both individual projects and the overall research program. The Final Report Form should be submitted to the Center for Rural Innovation no later than June 1st, **WHETHER OR NOT THE RESEARCH HAS BEEN COMPLETED.** The report should summarize the results of the entire project, and in cases where a project was not completed on time, a revised report should be submitted when the project has been completed. Recipients are encouraged to make special progress reports at any time if they encounter unanticipated difficulties and delays in their projects. They are also encouraged to consult the committee in such cases.

Publications

Many faculty research projects result in publications of one type or another, or in papers presented at scholarly meetings. Such publications and papers provide one of the most significant measures of the overall success of the research program. The Final Report Form has spaces for listing these points of evidence of the successful conclusions of the project. It is understood that some articles and papers will not have been published and/or presented by the time the final report is prepared. Once available, the committee should be furnished a copy of the reprint of each article resulting from internal research projects. In submitting articles for publications, recipients of the Internal Grant Program assistance should identify themselves with Tennessee Technological University.

Working With Minors

Applicants whose grants involve minors are required to adhere to these guidelines and take the necessary steps to ensure compliance with the university's Minors on Campus (MOC) policy, denoted as Policy



#120. To facilitate compliance, we require that all applicants working with minors contact via email our MOC Coordinator, Deb Combs DKCombs@tntech.edu, with a bulleted list of facts describing their proposed activities involving minors **before** submitting their grant applications. Deb Combs will provide guidance and assist in reviewing the MOC policy, ensuring that recommended measures are in place to safeguard minors participating in the research.

Furthermore, as a formal acknowledgment of their commitment to compliance, applicants working with minors will be asked to sign an 'Attestation of Compliance (AOC).' This attestation signifies that they have thoroughly reviewed the university's MOC policy, engaged in discussions with the MOC Coordinator, and have taken the necessary actions to align their research activities with the established policy. The AOC must be attached to the application appendix. The AOC will not count against proposal page length limitations. Finally, grant awardees must contact Deb Combs at least two weeks prior to implementation of their activities involving minors.

Patents and Copyrights

The provisions of Tennessee Tech Policy 732 – Intellectual Property – shall govern the interests of the researcher and the University in all inventions, discoveries, or copyrightable materials resulting from a faculty research award. Information and assistance are available in the Office of Research.

Public Relations

The TN Tech Center for Rural Innovation is committed to celebrating our grantees' achievements by crafting news releases and sharing selected information with external news outlets. In this endeavor, we will disclose specific details such as the names of Principal Investigators (PI) and Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PI), the project title, and a concise abstract. However, in order to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of our grantees' research, no other research-related information will be made publicly available. We emphasize obtaining consent from all involved parties, particularly students, before disclosing their names. Additionally, all PR materials will undergo institutional approval to ensure adherence to these guidelines.

Submission Information: Once the budget summary and proposal narrative are completed, [submit the document via DocuSign here.](#)

For questions or more information, contact Stefanie Byrd, Assistant Director for Rural Resilience, at sbyrd@tntech.edu.

