

# Graduate Student Grant Program 2026 Call for Proposals

**Submission Deadline, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time**

Submit by email at [wrdc@uidaho.edu](mailto:wrdc@uidaho.edu)

**Project funding limit:** \$18,000 per year

**Project time limit:** 1 year, renewable for another (conditional)

**Funding decisions announced:** End of October 2025

**Grant Program Manager:** Dr. Nadeeka Weerasekara, [nadeeka@uidaho.edu](mailto:nadeeka@uidaho.edu)

## ***Graduate Student Grant Program***

The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) funds proposals that present innovative research and educational outreach to advance rural development in the Western U.S. Only full-time graduate students enrolled at accredited land grant universities in the Western region are eligible to apply. At the time of proposal submission, the student must be considered full-time and must have passed their qualifying or preliminary exam.

This grant program aims to obtain results that address critical issues in Western rural development and enhance the quality of life of rural communities. It emphasizes research issues affecting underserved communities, understudied geographic locations, or unexplored topics.

Graduate students will work with their advisor and the WRDC staff to pursue impactful research and outreach education that directly benefits rural communities in the Western Region. Students will have access to various WRDC resources and support services during their contract. This may include assistance with project planning and implementation, opportunities for professional development, and access to a network of experts and practitioners in rural development. Additionally, the WRDC might provide additional funding for graduate students to present their research at national conferences. Students are encouraged to disseminate their findings and share best practices through WRDC's communication channels, such as newsletters, webinars, website articles, and conferences, to amplify the impact of their work. The center will support the students in their work to construct research and policy briefs based on their research studies.

Each Ph.D. student is awarded \$18,000, which can be used to cover various project-related expenses. These may include salary support, fringe benefits, travel costs for fieldwork or conferences, and other project-related expenses. The funds cannot be used to cover student fee payments or tuition costs. The projects can be extended for another year based on their performance, student status, and funds availability. This program does not allow a carryforward balance from year 1 to year 2. Thus, students must spend the \$18,000 budget before the anniversary day each year.

## ***About the WRDC***

The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is one of four rural development centers established by Congress's Rural Development Act of 1972. It is a collaborative effort between the United States Department and the University of Idaho. The core of its funding comes from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The WRDC works with public universities in the Western region to conduct research-based studies and educational outreach programs. It also partners with local communities, decision-makers, entrepreneurs, families, farmers, and ranchers to address various rural development issues. The center's objective is to enhance the research and extension capacity of the region's land-

grant universities to help rural communities thrive in today's world. The WRDC works in conjunction with the other three Regional Rural Development Centers in the country to achieve their shared mission.



### **Western Land-Grant Institutions:**

American Samoa Community College, College of Micronesia, Colorado State University, Montana State University, New Mexico State University, Northern Marianas College, Oregon State University, University of Alaska, University of Arizona, University of California, University of Guam, University of Hawaii, University of Idaho, University of Nevada, University of Wyoming, Utah State University, Washington State University, Blackfoot Community College, Chief Dull Knife College, Dine College, Fort Belknap College, Fort Peck Community College, Institute of American Indian Arts, Little Big Horn College, Navajo Technical College, Northwest Indian College, Salish Kootenai College, Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, Stone Child College, and Tohono O'odham Community College.

### ***Proposal Instructions***

Proposals must be submitted via email to [wrdc@uidaho.edu](mailto:wrdc@uidaho.edu). Before submitting, please refer to the submission checklist found on **page 4** of this Call for Proposals to ensure all required materials are included. All checklist items should be compiled into a **single email**—either as one document or as separate files. Accepted file types include **.doc**, **.docx**, or **.pdf**.

Please use the following subject line format for your email:

**Grad\_[PI's Last Name]\_[University Acronym]\_[State]**

#### **Example:**

Subject: Grad\_Brown\_UI\_ID

**WRDC will reject incomplete proposals and those that do not follow the instructions. Therefore, please ensure that all sections are submitted by the deadline.**

Graduate Student projects require a team of at least two (2) people, including a Graduate Student (Applicant), and a Researcher (Principal Investigator, typically the applicant's major advisor).

- Graduate Student: Students must be enrolled full-time in a graduate degree program in an accredited land-grant university or college in the Western U.S. at the project's starting time and must have passed their qualifying or preliminary exam. Students may receive only one WRDC Graduate Student Grant award during their graduate studies.
- Principal Investigator (PI): A researcher who usually serves as the graduate student's major advisor. The PI is responsible for carrying out contractual provisions and all project expenditures and achieving the stated research and education objectives.

**Note:** While applicants can submit multiple proposals, only one application per individual is eligible for funding in each WRDC competitive program during a grant-funding cycle. However, an exception applies to the Graduate Student program, where a PI can receive multiple project awards as the main advisor of graduate student(s). Winning Graduate Student awards does not prevent the PI from receiving awards in other WRDC grant programs within the same cycle.

#### Cover Page

The cover page must include:

- Project title
- A project summary (300 words max). A clear and concise summary is crucial in the review process. It should outline the problem and propose an innovative solution. The summary will be available to the public if the proposal is funded. The summary must include:
  - Identified problem or research question(s)
  - Describe the research components and explain how your project will creatively address the identified problem or research questions.
  - Identify the potential significance of the project and expected outcomes
  - Explain how your project will disseminate results.
  - Identify potential funding sources to expand the project (be precise).

### Project Narrative

The project narrative section may not exceed 4 pages using 12-point Times New Roman font with single-line spacing (i.e., no more than six lines per vertical inch), including all figures and tables and 1-inch margins.

The project narrative must include, but is not limited to, the following sections:

- **Introduction:** Include a clear statement of the proposed project's long-term goal(s) and supporting objectives. Summarize the body of knowledge or past activities, if any, that substantiate the need for the proposed project. Include preliminary data/information pertinent to the proposed project. For example, estimates of issues' magnitude and relevance to Western stakeholders. Explain why it is important to the Western Region.
- **Approach:** For each research and extension objective, describe what will be done, including **methods** and **materials**. Describe the activities and expected results. How extension and education activities, if applicable, will be evaluated. How data will be analyzed or interpreted-generalizability of results is important. Your plans to communicate results to appropriate audiences, including relevant scientific peers, stakeholders, and the public, as appropriate.
- **Benefits:** Briefly explain the project's benefits for you and the Western region.

### Bibliography & References Cited

There is no page limit. All work cited in the text should be referenced in this application section. All references must be complete, including titles and all co-authors, conform to an acceptable journal format, and be listed in alphabetical order using the first author's last name or listed by number in the order of citation.

### Project Team Members and Roles

For each team member, provide a Biographical Sketch (3 pages max) describing their background and expertise to demonstrate that they have the appropriate skills to complete the proposed project. We recommend you follow the NSF-approved format found here:

<https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/biosketch.jsp>.

Describe all team members' roles at all stages of the project. For each project objective, indicate who will be responsible and which team member(s) will be involved in the research and dissemination activities.

### Letters of Stakeholder Support

Attach letter(s) of support from stakeholder individuals and/or organizations that support the proposed research and education activities. These letters are optional

### Budget and Budget Justification

The WRDC does not allow indirect costs. Funding is for up to \$18,000 per project. The budget justification detail should follow the same order as the budget. While you should provide information for each item of the budget, you must justify the following budget categories, where applicable: salaries,

fringe, equipment, supplies, travel, contractual, and other direct cost categories. The funding cannot be used to pay tuition.

Program Income: If an applicant wishes to generate program income through activities proposed in their project, this must be included in the proposal. Specifically, an applicant must address the following questions:

- How will the program income be generated?
- How much program income is anticipated?
- How will generating program income benefit the project?
- How will the program income be utilized?
- When will the program income be generated during the project period, and will there be sufficient time to expend it?

Please include these details in the **budget justification** section of the proposal so that reviewers and the WRDC staff can objectively evaluate the budget in relation to the proposed activities.

If a current WRDC subrecipient **DID NOT** include program income in their grant proposal, the PI, Authorized Official, or fiscal officer must request **prior approval** from WRDC to generate program income at least 30 days before program income is generated. Full details about program income can be found in the [USDA-NIFA Policy Guide](#). See section V. Post award Federal Requirements, E. Program Income.

#### Timeline

Provide a timeline, such as a Gantt chart or other detailed breakdown for accomplishing each project objective. Identify the major milestones and activities that will be completed, when each of those milestones or activities will occur, and how they relate back to the objective(s). The timeline should cover one year. However, if you anticipate a potential extension for an additional year, please include a rough plan for the extended period. Extension is conditional.

#### Data Management Plan

The data management plan should outline how the data that you collect will be handled throughout the project and after its completion. You should describe how the data will be acquired, managed, analyzed, and stored. It should address how data storage will comply with regulations and how the awardee plans to address sharing and reuse.

**The proposal submission will have two steps. In the first step (pre-proposals) you will only need to submit the documents in the submission checklist below:**

#### **Submission Checklist**

- ✓ Cover page
- ✓ Project Narrative
- ✓ Bibliography & References Cited
- ✓ Project Team Members and Roles
- ✓ Biographical Sketches of all team members
- ✓ Letters of Stakeholder Support (optional)
- ✓ Budget and Budget Justification
- ✓ Timeline
- ✓ Data Management Plan

Accepted projects will have to provide the following documents later on:

- Sub-recipient form
- Signature page
- Statement of responsibility
- Statement of Work (This is the project narrative you submitted)
- Budget and budget justification
- Letter from the department head or graduate chair confirming the completion of the preliminary examination
- Headshot of the graduate student
- IRB if you are collecting primary data