



Graduate Assistance Grant Program 2026-2027 Call for Proposals

Submission Deadline, July 31st, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Mountain Time

Project funding limit: \$15,000 per year

Total funding available: \$30,000

Project time limit: one (1) year

Funding decisions announced: End of August 2026

Grant Program Manager: Dr. Nadeeka Weerasekara, nadeeka@uidaho.edu

Graduate Student Grant Program

The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) invites proposals for innovative research and educational outreach that advance rural development in the Western United States.

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, applicants must be enrolled full-time and must have passed their qualifying or preliminary examination. Project are for **one year** and each Ph.D. student is awarded **\$15,000**, which can be used to cover various project-related expenses.

This program supports projects that address critical issues in Western rural development and enhance the quality of life in rural communities. Priority is given to projects focusing on underserved communities, understudied geographic areas, or emerging and underexplored topics.

Graduate students will work closely with their advisor and WRDC staff to conduct impactful research and outreach activities. Awardees will have access to WRDC resources, including: assistance with project planning and implementation, opportunities for professional development, and access to a network of experts and practitioners in rural development. Students are encouraged to disseminate findings through WRDC communication channels, including newsletters, webinars, website articles, and conferences. WRDC will also support students in developing research and policy briefs.

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 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, Tohono O'odham Community College, Aaniih Nakoda College, and Ilisagvik College.

Proposal Instructions

All proposals must be submitted through the InfoReady system ([APPLY](#)). Applicants should carefully review the submission checklist (page 4) to ensure completeness. All files must be submitted in PDF format.

Incomplete or non-compliant proposals will not be reviewed.

Project Team Requirements

Each project must include at least two team members:

Graduate Student (Applicant)

- Must be enrolled full-time at an eligible land-grant institution
- Must have passed qualifying/preliminary exams
- May receive only one WRDC Graduate Student Grant during their studies

Principal Investigator (PI)

- Typically the student's major advisor
- Responsible for project oversight, compliance, and expenditures

Note:

Applicants may submit multiple proposals, but only one may be funded per individual per cycle. PIs may serve on multiple funded graduate student projects. Winning Graduate Student awards does not prevent the PI from receiving awards in other WRDC grant programs within the same cycle.

Cover Page

Include:

- Project title, Graduate student's name, email, institution, PI's name, email, affiliation
- Project summary (max 300 words), clearly addressing:
 - Problem statement and regional relevance
 - Significance and expected impact
 - Approach (research/extension/outreach)
 - Dissemination and scaling plans

Project Narrative (Max 2 pages)

(12-point Times New Roman, single-spaced, 1-inch margins)

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

Introduction

- Clear articulation of long-term goals.
- Well-defined supporting objectives (research and/or extension).
- Description of the existing body of knowledge that demonstrates the need for the proposed project, including preliminary data if available.

Rationale and Significance

- Alignment with Western region priorities ([website](#)).
- Contribution to scholarship, practice, and/or policy insights.
- Why the project is timely and important.

Approach

- Description of methods and materials to achieve each objective (research and/or extension)
- Explanation of how data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted
- Expected results
- Evaluation plan for extension and educational activities
- Clear communication and dissemination plan
- Consideration of potential pitfalls or limitations, with strategies to address them.

Bibliography & References Cited

No page limit. Use a consistent academic format.

Project Team Members and Roles (Max 1 page)

Clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of each team member throughout the project. In addition, briefly highlight their background and expertise to demonstrate that the team possesses the necessary skills to successfully complete the proposed work.

For each team member, include a **Biographical Sketch** (maximum 2 pages per individual). We recommend following the NSF-approved format available here:

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

Combine all team members' biographical sketches into a single document, then upload it.

Letters of Stakeholder Support (Optional)

Attach letter(s) of support from stakeholder individuals and/or organizations that support the proposed research and education activities. Combine all letters of support into a single file, then upload it.

Budget and Budget Justification (attach as a single file)

Funding is for up to \$15,000 per project. Students must spend the \$15,000 budget before the anniversary day.

The WRDC does **NOT** allow indirect costs. Tuition and fees are **NOT** allowable. Budget may include salary support, fringe benefits, travel costs for fieldwork or conferences, and other project-related expenses.

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.

Program Income: (If Applicable)

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 [NIFA Federal Assistance Policy Guide | USDA](#). See section V. Post award Federal Requirements, F. 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 or less, starting on the day of the award (anticipated September 1, 2026) and ending on August 31, 2027. The Office of Sponsored Programs may require additional time to process fund transfers, so plan your work starting from the day you receive the award decision rather than waiting for the funds to be transferred.

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
- ✓ Letter from the department head or graduate chair confirming the completion of the preliminary examination

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
- Headshot of the graduate student
- IRB if you are collecting primary data