WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

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Morgan Center

Professional Learning Community Grants
Guidelines and Application – 2025

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are groups of WPI community members from multiple disciplines engaging in collegial inquiry, action, and collective learning around a central theme *in pedagogical development or educational development and innovation.* Each participant in a PLC plans, implements, and assesses their own project, with regular peer review, feedback, and support from the group. PLCs may also work together to develop and test teaching and learning resources for the campus community. This grant mechanism is *not* intended to fund routine updating or renewal of courses, curricula, or teaching methods.

These grants are administered by the Morgan Teaching & Learning Center, using funds from the Morgan endowment and from the Academic Technology Center. Proposals are reviewed by members of the Educational Development Council and representatives of the Academic Technology Center.

A. Eligibility

Because faculty deliver our academic programs, faculty members must be included in a PLC, and some PLCs may consist only of faculty. All WPI faculty members are eligible and welcome to apply, including dual-mission and teaching-mission tenure-track and tenured faculty, teaching- and research-track (TRT) faculty, and adjunct faculty. Faculty who will be in residence at an off-campus project center during the PLC period will be expected to participate remotely. Potential applicants in this situation should consider whether the time zone difference and advising duties will enable them to engage fully in the PLC during that term.

Staff members with educational roles are also eligible and welcome to apply.

The group may decide to include a student(s) as co-designers or co-researchers in the PLC. The name(s) of specific students need *not* be identified in the proposal.

Current members of the Educational Development Council are not eligible for these grants.

B. Potential Themes and PLC Formation Mechanisms

PLC themes emerge from collective interests. To facilitate networking and identify themes with broad interest, **the EDC faculty and staff social will be held on Tuesday afternoon, December 3, from 3:00-5:00 p.m.** in the Rubin Campus Center Odeum. People can also express interest in particular themes via an online mechanism. The EDC pitches possible themes, gathers initial interest, selects one or more themes with broad appeal, and invites individuals to apply. The committee then reviews proposals from applicants and selects a diverse group of PLC members. Themes will be announced by December 15 at the latest, giving people enough time to prepare their individual applications before the deadline of February 3, 2025.

C. Commitment, Expectations, and Funding of PLC Members

PLCs require a 9-month or 12-month commitment during the range of May 15, 2025, to May 15, 2026, depending on whether summer planning for projects is needed. Each PLC member will be expected to:

- prepare for, attend, and actively participate in monthly meetings over the PLC period;
- conduct a project this is aligned with the PLC theme and assess the outcomes;
- submit a summary of the outcomes of their PLC project by June 1, 2026, or contribute to a group report of outcomes; and
- share their work with a larger audience, by giving a presentation on their work, by providing resource materials on the topic of the PLC for the larger teaching community, by publishing the findings of their work, or through some other means.

Each application for a self-formed PLC should propose its own budget. Because faculty have 9-month appointments, faculty stipends are typical and generally range between $1,000 - $3,000 depending on project scope. Following are some guidelines for faculty stipends:

- Estimate the time commitment for the projects in your PLC and propose a stipend accordingly

- Stipends on the order of $3,000 should generally signal that each awardee will undertake significant course redesign, resource development and testing, or assessment/ research projects. Lower stipends would be appropriate for smaller scale projects such as development of innovative modules or assignments.

- Other stipends recently offered for significant faculty professional development activities may serve as a point of reference: summer course redesign ($3,000), Great Problems Seminar Summer Institute ($1,500), Faculty Institute for Online Teaching ($1,500), Summer Institute on Teaching with Writing ($1,000).

- The EDC typically funds 1-2 PLCs each year at levels ranging between $15K - $20K each. Proposals with a balance of quality, potential impact, and cost effectiveness are more likely to be funded (see section E).

Stipends will be awarded when the work of the PLC is complete or may be split 50/50 at the midway and end points. Faculty stipends will be awarded as supplemental wages, such that benefits will not be charged.

In addition to stipends, funds may be proposed to facilitate the work of the PLC. Examples include external speakers or consultants, books, food for meetings, and wages for student assistants or student members of PLCs. Justification must be included in the application.

If the EDC invites individual applications to join an EDC-formed PLC, the time period and stipend will be specified in an announcement around December 20.

Per HR/labor guidelines, exempt professional staff with 12-month appointments may not receive additional compensation. Staff who wish to be part of PLC should discuss with their supervisor how the project aligns with their work responsibilities or unit goals and the extent to which other work activities would need to be adjusted during the grant period. In other words, participation in the PLC should not be an unpaid overload. *The budget may include funds for staff members to utilize toward specific professional development such as a conference, workshop, publications, or other resource or activity that will enable or enrich their project.*

D. Commitment, Expectations, and Funding of PLC Facilitators

PLCs are facilitated by a faculty or staff member with experience or interest in the PLC theme. The Morgan Center will identify a facilitator for EDC-formed PLCs. The Morgan Center will also recruit a facilitator for self-formed PLCs, or the group may identify its own if they prefer.

The facilitator's general responsibilities are to foster a collegial environment among the PLC participants while supporting them with structure that helps them achieve both individual and collective goals. Faculty who will be in residence at off-campus project centers should not be the group facilitator. Specific responsibilities include:

- Scheduling monthly meetings

- Setting the agenda for each meeting with input from the group

- Arranging meeting space and catering with the assistance of staff in the Morgan Teaching and Learning Center (if desired)

- Selecting some common reading for the group at the start of the PLC (encouraged)

- Facilitating discussion and dialogue that helps each person refine their ideas using constructive feedback during the planning and implementation stages. Submitting an informal mid-year update to the facilitator is recommended— including refined project objectives and deliverables and how their project is fitting into the community as a whole.

- Conducting some informal formative evaluation throughout the year about how the PLC is going and making adjustments

- Arranging for resource sharing through SharePoint, a Canvas site, or another mechanism

- Budget oversight, with assistance from the Morgan Center as necessary

- Encouraging internal and external dissemination of the group's work

Facilitators will receive a stipend of $1,000 for their role. If the facilitator also conducts their own project within the group, they will receive $1,000 on top of the stipend budgeted for PLC members.

E.   How to Prepare a Strong Proposal

Proposals for self-formed PLCs must contain the following:

1. **Individual Narratives.** Each participant should contribute 1-2 pages (single spaced) that includes the following information:

    (a) Working title of individual project

    (b) Project synopsis (maximum of 80 words, for publicity)

    (c) Description of individual project that includes:

    - Why are you interested in this PLC theme?

    - What is your initial idea of a project to plan and implement within the PLC? How will you assess, evaluate, and/or disseminate the outcomes of the project? What will be the concrete deliverable or product, as best as you can plan at this time?

        Advice: We understand that projects are likely to change and sharpen with feedback and collaboration in the PLC — that's the great thing about PLCs! At the same time, vague or open-ended project descriptions will not be reviewed well. Thus, be as specific as possible at this stage—you can always change later.

    - Why are you interested in participating in a Professional Learning Community? What would you bring to the group? How will working in the PLC improve or enhance your project?

Some prior successful PLC proposals can be found at this OneDrive location: [Teaching Innovation Grant Proposal Examples.](#)

The proposal deadline is **February 3, 2025**. Please submit proposals as an email attachment to morgan-center@wpi.edu.

Department head endorsement: All PLC applicants are asked to discuss their proposal with their department head, program director, or supervisor so that those folks are aware of their teaching innovation goals and interests and potential time commitment. Please have a conversation with your department head (or Dean if you are a DH) about your application and its workload implications (e.g., do other things need to be taken off your plate?) This is especially important if you are applying for multiple grants; the review committee wants to know that you'll have sufficient time for the project(s). Department heads or other supervisors are then asked to submit this TIG Department/Program Endorsement Form by February 10, 2025.

Review criteria: The review committee will use the following criteria when evaluating PLC proposals: 1) effective group composition (range of departments and faculty experience levels, thematic coherence among members, and commitment to collaboration); 2) potential scope and sustainability of impact; 3) presence of strategic, innovative or distinctive elements; and 4) cost effectiveness.

Applicants will be notified in D term whether their proposal has been accepted.

F. Reporting Requirements and Grant Conditions

- Grantees are responsible for consulting with WPI's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to determine if the project involves human subjects and constitutes exempt or non-exempt activity.

- The facilitator is responsible for budget oversight and must approve any disbursement of funds. All funds unexpended by the end of the PLC period will be returned to the EDC or IT Division for redistribution the following year. Extensions should be requested in writing.

- Each PLC member is expected to submit a brief summary of the outcomes of their PLC project by June 1, 2026, or contribute to a group report of outcomes. *Failure to do this will lessen the likelihood of future funding from the EDC.*

G. Contacts

Prospective applicants for Professional Learning Community grants are invited to contact any faculty member of the EDC (Mike Buckholdt, Jeanine Dudle, Geoff Pfeifer, Jessi Hill) or ATC staff (Kate Beverage, Caitlin Neer) with questions prior to submission, related to the theme and scope of PLCs or budget questions. With sufficient advance notice, Jessi Hill (Booking App) and Kate Beverage (kwrigley@wpi.edu) may be able to provide feedback on proposal drafts. To inquire about the availability of our in-house evaluator or to discuss objectives and assessment methods, please contact the Morgan Center's Senior Research and Evaluation Associate, Kimberly LeChasseur, by completing this form.

Please see application form on subsequent page

Application to Join an EDC-Formed Professional Learning Community

Deadline: February 3, 2025

PLC Name/ Theme:
Applicant Name:
Applicant Job Title:
Department, Program, or Unit Affiliation:
Will you be advising off campus during the PLC period? If so, indicate which term and time zone difference:

CERTIFICATION

If selected for the PLC, I will commit to actively engage in the work of the PLC, attend monthly meetings, submit a brief summary report by June 1, 2026, and share my work with a larger audience.

Signature of Applicant: (typed signature is acceptable)	**Date**

ADDITIONAL APPLICATION ELEMENTS:

1. In addition to this cover page, a complete application includes an **individual narrative**, which is explained in item 3 on p. 3 of this document. Please compile this cover page and the narrative together and send to morgan-center@wpi.edu by February 3, 2025.
2. **Endorsement from your Department Head or Program Director** is also required. See p. 4 for explanation. Please ask them fill out this [TIG Department/Program Endorsement](#) by February 10, 2025.