Worcester Polytechnic Institute – Tennessee State University Collaborative Seed Funding Program – FY26

Overview:
Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Tennessee State University have inaugurated an exciting new seed funding program to support early-stage research collaborations between faculty members at the two universities. Successful projects will be aligned with federal funding priority and lead to federal (including appropriations) and/or industry funding.

This year's priority areas are:
- Nanotechnology
- Quantum
- Autonomy
- Precision Agriculture
- Food Packaging Safety
- Carbon Emission

Funding Amount and Award Period:
WPI and TSU plan to award up to five (5) collaborative projects at up to $20,000 each. Funds are awarded for a 12-month period. The start date will be May 15, 2026.

Application Deadline:
Proposals must be submitted to rsi@wpi.edu by March 31,2026 at 11:59 p.m. EST.

Eligibility:
- All full-time tenured/tenure-track faculty
- Proposing teams must include faculty members from both WPI and TSU. The lead principal investigator (PI) may come from either institution, or the team may choose to have co-PIs, one from each institution.
- An individual faculty member may serve as the lead PI on one proposal and co-PI on one additional proposal.

Timeline:
- January 2026 – Announcement of call for proposals
- March 31, 2026 – Proposal deadline
- April 2026 - Proposal review
- May 2026 – Notification of decision to applicants
- May 2026 – Disbursement of funds (12-month award period)

Deliverables:
- Awardees are required to submit a final report outlining activities and outcomes no later than 6 months after the project end date. Instructions for the report will be provided near the end of the award period.

Proposal Format: Please submit all sections below in one PDF file.

Abstract:
A non-technical description of the project that states the problem to be studied or activity to be conducted and explains the project's broader significance and importance. This component should be understandable to an educated lay reader (up to 250 words).

Narrative:
No more than five (5) type-written, single-spaced pages in at least 10-pt font. Include:
1. Problem statement
2. Innovation and potential impact
3. Research questions, goals, and objectives
4. Project design and methodology
5. Roles and responsibilities of performing team and benefits of the collaboration to both institutions
6. Existing resources available to support the project
7. Expected outcomes, including specific plans to prepare and submit a proposal to an external funding agency within 18 months of the start of the award.
8. Project timeline

Literature Cited/Bibliography (no page limit)

Biographical Sketches/CVs:
Provide a brief (up to two pages) Biographical Sketch for each PI and co-PI.

Budget:
Provide a detailed budget table that contains separate columns for the WPI and the TSU portions of the project budget. Exactly half of each awarded project's budget should be allocated to each university (for example, $10k to WPI, $10k to TSU).

All expenses should be justified in the project narrative.

- Student salaries: Identify as graduate or undergraduate and estimate the number of hours and pay rate. In the narrative, describe the work to be performed.
- Research staff support: Hourly funding to support a postdoc or research support staff to conduct literature reviews, assist with generating preliminary results, etc., is allowable.
- Travel to annual conferences/workshops and partner sites must be justified in the narrative and clearly show importance and a direct link to the success of the project.
- Materials and supplies: May include tools, sensors, software, columns, etc., as well as other necessary lab materials and supplies under $5,000. Provide an estimate (itemized) budget.

- Core facility user fees: Provide an estimate of hours and hourly usage fees.
- Publication costs are allowable.
- Please list sources of other funding dedicated to the project (if applicable).
- Funds must **not** be used for:
  - Any charges external to WPI or TSU
  - Research Assistants/tuition waivers (funds may support student hourly wages)
  - Equipment (greater than $5,000)

IRB/IACUC:
If the proposed work includes human subjects or vertebrate animals, you will need IRB and/or IACUC approval from the lead investigator's institution prior to commencing work if you are awarded.

Evaluation:
Reviewers will evaluate applications based on the rubric below.

Criterion	Considerations
Innovative and Clear Goals and Objectives	Does the proposal describe innovative work or a new approach to an existing scholarly pursuit? Does the proposal clearly describe what the applicant(s) intends to do? Does the proposal clearly describe the anticipated direct outcomes of the activities to be funded by the seed grant and their benefits/significance?
Appropriate Design, Methodology and Timeline	Is the approach appropriate for achieving the anticipated outcome/s? Is there a high likelihood that the promised outcome(s) can be achieved given the design and timeline?
Qualified and Multidisciplinary Research/Scholarship Team	Are the backgrounds of the team members appropriate for the proposed effort? Do they have the requisite skill set and/or should others be invited to join the team? Does the team include members from multiple fields and colleges at both institutions whereby different perspectives and backgrounds will contribute to innovative solutions?
Increased Capacity for Research and Scholarship	Will outcomes of the proposed seed effort significantly increase future research capacity of both institutions? For example, will it grow a new research collaboration, initiate a new research direction, or lead to future funding, recognition, or visibility? Is the collaboration likely to be sustained after the award period?
Budget	Are the funds requested appropriate for the project design and intended outcomes? Given the proposal budget, how likely is it that the intended outcomes will be achieved?