

Research Seed Grants Program

Program Website: <https://www.utrgv.edu/research/faculty/forge/index.htm>

Program Contact: Dr. Megan Keniry, [Office of Research Enhancement](#), megan.keniry@utrgv.edu

I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) research seed grants program “**Faculty Opportunities for Research Growth and Excellence**” (FORGE) supports innovative research and scholarship that advances the university's strategic research priorities while fostering a vibrant research culture across Academic Affairs and Health Affairs. FORGE is a competitive internal funding program that provides strategic investments to generate preliminary data, establish new collaborations, and position faculty teams for successful extramural grant applications and scholarly impact.

II. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Support faculty in generating preliminary data and proof-of-concept studies for competitive extramural proposals and scholarly impact
- Foster interdisciplinary and cross-college collaborations, particularly between Academic Affairs and Health Affairs
- Build research capacity aligned with UTRGV's Research Excellence mission
- Advance research addressing Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA)
- Strengthen research doctoral student training and mentorship through funded research projects
- Increase the quality and quantity of extramural grant submissions and awards, and measurable scholarly impact

III. REGIONAL IMPACT PRIORITY AREAS (RIPA)

UTRGV recognizes its unique responsibility to address critical challenges facing the Rio Grande Valley region and populations we serve. Alignment with the following Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA) is encouraged and preference will be given to proposals demonstrating clear relevance to one or more of the areas. However, proposals in all research and scholarly areas will be considered based on scientific merit and potential for external funding success.

- **EDUCATION:** Improving educational access, outcomes, and innovation from pre-K through higher education
- **HEALTH:** Advancing health equity, access to healthcare services, disease prevention, treatment, and wellness
- **WATER:** Addressing water quality, conservation, infrastructure, and sustainable management
- **ENERGY:** Developing renewable energy solutions, energy resilience, energy storage, and sustainable energy systems
- **NATIONAL SECURITY:** Contributing to border security, cybersecurity, infrastructure protection, and defense technologies
- **SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION:** Fostering economic development and community resilience based on the unique characteristics of our region.

IV. PROGRAM STRUCTURE

FORGE consists of three tiers designed to support faculty at different career stages and collaboration scales. Funded projects in Tiers 2 and 3 are expected to lead to competitive extramural proposal submissions within 90 days of project completion. A Tier 1 proposal may be funded to generate data to publish in a high-impact journal. Office of Research Enhancement of the Division of Research will work closely with the investigators during identification of outcomes and associated processes to achieve them.

Faculty Opportunities for Research Growth and Excellence (FORGE)

Faculty Opportunities for Research Growth and Excellence (FORGE) Program Structure

FORGE	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
	SINGLE-INVESTIGATOR SEED GRANTS	COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH SEED GRANTS	ACADEMIC-HEALTH AFFAIRS BRIDGE GRANTS
Purpose	Establishing independent research program for individual faculty.	Fostering interdisciplinary collaborations between faculty from different departments or colleges to prepare for multi-investigator external funding opportunities.	Building translational research teams that integrate expertise across UTRGV's Academic Affairs and Health Affairs pillars, positioning teams for large-scale extramural funding.
Award Amount	\$15,000 per Award	\$40,000 per Award	\$100,000 per Award
Award Duration	Up to 12 months	Up to 18 months	Up to 24 months
Team Size	Single Investigator	Multiple Investigators	Multiple Investigators
FORGE Overall Eligibility	• Tenure-track or equivalent faculty title with research workload • If applicable, successful completion of previous FORGE awards, meeting all outcome requirements • No other active Tier 1, 2, or 3 award at time of application • A FORGE-eligible faculty can only be a PI on one proposal and a Co-PI on another in a FORGE cycle		
Tier Eligibility	• See Above	• Must include investigators from at least two different academic affairs or health affairs departments • Cross-college collaboration (between different colleges or between Academic Affairs and Health Affairs) is strongly encouraged	• Team must include at least one investigator from Academic Affairs and at least one investigator from Health Affairs • At least two team members must have demonstrated experience as PI or Co-PI on active or recently completed federal grants • Evidence of preliminary collaboration (joint publications, prior grant submissions, or documented collaborative activities) is viewed favorably
Focus	• Establish independent research direction or program • Generate preliminary data for external proposal preparation or a high-impact journal paper • <u>External proposal submission is strongly encouraged</u>	• Develop new interdisciplinary research collaborations • Generate synergistic preliminary data demonstrating team capacity • Establish shared methodologies, infrastructure, or research protocols • Build foundation for multi-PI external proposals • Support graduate student research assistantship and training, especially research doctoral students • <u>Submit an external proposal</u>	• Integrate basic science, applied research, and clinical/translational research • Develop translational research programs addressing health disparities • Create sustainable research partnerships across UTRGV's organizational structure • Generate preliminary data for large-scale research proposals • Establish shared cores, resources, or research infrastructure • Support research doctoral student training in translational research • <u>Submit an external proposal</u>
No. of Awards	40 Awards per Year	5 Awards per Year	2 Awards per Year
Total Budget	\$600,000	\$200,000	\$200,000

V. APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2026-2027

Tier 1 and Tier 2

- Application Deadline: October 15, 2026
- Notification of Awards: December 1, 2026
- Award Activation: January 1, 2027

Two-Stage Process for Tier 3

Tier 3 Stage 1: Letter of Intent (LOI)

- LOI: Maximum 3 pages describing project concept, team composition, and external funding target
- LOI Due Date: October 15, 2026
- Notification to Submit Full Proposal: November 15, 2026

Tier 3 Stage 2: Full Proposal

- Application Deadline: February 1, 2027
- Notification of Awards: April 1, 2027
- Award Activation: June 1, 2027

VI. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

TIER 1 Proposal Application (Single Investigator program)

1. Cover Page

- Project title
- PI, department, college, contact information
- Tier level requested (Tier 1)
- Funding amount requested
- Targeted external funding mechanism(s) with anticipated submission date(s) (optional)
- Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA) alignment (indicate primary and secondary areas, if applicable)

2. Project Narrative (maximum 5 pages)

Must include:

- Significance and innovation
- Research approach and methodology
- Preliminary data (if available)
- Expected outcomes and deliverables
- Timeline and milestones
- How the project positions the team for external funding success
- RIPA relevance (if applicable)
- Research doctoral student training plan (if applicable)

3. References Cited (does not count toward page limits)

4. Budget and Budget Justification

- Detailed line-item budget for the duration of the FORGE award (using OSP budget template)
- Clear justification for all expenses

5. NIH Biographical Sketch or NSF CV for PI (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>)

6. Data Management and Sharing Plan (UTRGV approved template)
 - Describe plans for data collection, storage, sharing, and preservation.
7. External Funding Strategy (Not Required for Tier 1)
 - If a specific funding opportunity is identified, explain how the FORGE proposal is relevant to the targeted program. This is optional for Tier 1.

TIER 2 Proposal Application

1. Cover Page
 - Project title
 - PI and all Co-PI names, departments, colleges, contact information
 - Tier level requested (Tier 2)
 - Funding amount requested
 - Targeted external funding mechanism(s) with anticipated submission date(s)
 - Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA) alignment (indicate primary and secondary areas, if applicable)
2. Project Narrative (maximum 7 pages)
Must include:
 - Significance and innovation
 - Research approach and methodology
 - Preliminary data (if available)
 - Expected outcomes and deliverables
 - Timeline and milestones
 - How the project positions the team for external funding success
 - RIPA relevance (if applicable)
 - Research doctoral student training plan (if applicable)
3. References Cited (does not count toward page limits)
4. Budget and Budget Justification
 - Detailed line-item budget for the duration of the FORGE award (using OSP budget template)
 - Clear justification for all expenses
5. NIH Biographical Sketches or NSF CVs <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/> (For PI and all Co-PIs)
 - Current and pending support included (SCIENCV CPOS)
6. Data Management and Sharing Plan (UTRGV approved template)
 - Must use the DMP Tool: <https://dmptool.org/>. Describe plans for data collection, storage, sharing, and preservation. Describe plans for data collection, storage, sharing, and preservation.
7. Facilities and Resources Statement (1 page maximum)
 - Available laboratory/research space
 - Equipment and instrumentation access
 - Computational resources

- Core/Shared facilities to be utilized

8. External Funding Strategy (1 page maximum)

- Specific funding opportunity identified with program announcement or funding opportunity announcement number
- Why this team is competitive for the identified opportunity
- Timeline for proposal development and submission
- Letters of support or documented interactions with program officers (if available)

TIER 3 Proposal Application

1. Cover Page

- Project title
- PI and all Co-PI names, departments, colleges, contact information
- Tier level requested (Tier 3)
- Funding amount requested
- Targeted external funding mechanism(s) with anticipated submission date(s)
- Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA) alignment (indicate primary and secondary areas, if applicable)

2. Project Narrative (maximum 10 pages)

Must include:

- Significance and innovation
- Research approach and methodology
- Preliminary data (if available)
- Expected outcomes and deliverables
- Timeline and milestones
- How the project positions the team for external funding success
- RIPA relevance (if applicable)
- Research doctoral student training plan (if applicable)

3. References Cited (does not count toward page limits)

4. Budget and Budget Justification

- Detailed line-item budget for the duration of the FORGE award (using OSP budget template)
- Clear justification for all expenses

5. NIH Biographical Sketches or NSF CVs <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/> (For PI and all Co-PIs)

- Current and pending support included (SCIENCV CPOS)

6. Letters of Collaboration

- Required from all Co-PIs committing effort
- Required from external collaborators (if applicable)
- Required from departments/colleges (Deans level support) if shared resources or space commitments are proposed

7. Data Management and Sharing Plan (UTRGV approved template)

- Must use the DMP Tool: <https://dmptool.org/>. Describe plans for data collection, storage, sharing, and preservation. Describe plans for data collection, storage, sharing, and preservation.

8. Facilities and Resources Statement (1 page maximum)

- Available laboratory/research space
- Equipment and instrumentation access
- Computational resources
- Core/Shared facilities to be utilized

9. Team Expertise and Collaboration Plan (2 pages maximum)

- Describe how team members' expertise is complementary
- Evidence of prior or ongoing collaboration
- Team management structure and communication plan
- Roles and responsibilities of each investigator

10. External Funding Strategy (1 page maximum)

- Specific funding opportunity identified with program announcement or funding opportunity announcement number
- Why this team is competitive for the identified opportunity
- Timeline for proposal development and submission
- Letters of support or documented interactions with program officers (if available)

VII. BUDGET GUIDELINES – All Tiers

Allowable Expenses

- Faculty summer salary (maximum 2 months per PI/Co-PI, based on Institutional Base Salary)
- Graduate research assistant salary and tuition support
- Postdoctoral scholar salary and benefits
- Research technician or specialist salary (if justified)
- Laboratory supplies and materials
- Software licenses essential to the project
- Subject/participant compensation and recruitment costs
- Data acquisition, processing, or analysis services
- Publication costs (page charges, open access fees)
- Specialized equipment directly essential to project (consult with Division of Research before proposal submission)
- Subaward to external collaborator or service contract for specific expertise or resources not available at UTRGV (requires Division of Research pre-approval)

Unallowable Expenses (All Tiers)

- Course and Time Buyouts
- General professional development or training
- Travel (apply for the TRIP program: <https://www.utrgv.edu/research/faculty/travel-resources-and-investments-program/index.htm>)
- Office equipment including computers (unless specialized research equipment)
- Furniture

- Renovations or construction
- General membership dues
- Entertainment or food (except participant/subject incentives)
- Indirect costs (F&A) - not included in internal awards

Budget Considerations

- Budgets should be appropriate to project scope and directly support seed grant objectives
- Priority should be given to expenses that generate data, establish methodologies, or build team capacity
- Graduate student support is highly encouraged and viewed favorably in review
- Equipment requests >\$5,000 require consultation with Division of Research prior to submission

VIII. REVIEW PROCESS

All proposals will be evaluated using the following weighted review criteria.

Review Criteria	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
1. <u>Scientific Merit and Innovation</u> • Significance of research questions • Novelty and originality of approach • Rigor of research design and methodology • Potential to advance knowledge in the field	40%	30%	30%
2. <u>Likelihood of External Funding Success</u> • Appropriateness and specificity of identified external funding target • Competitive positioning relative to funding opportunity priorities • Feasibility of achieving deliverables needed for external proposal • Track record of investigator(s) in securing extramural funding	N/A	25%	25%
3. <u>Alignment with UTRGV Strategic Priorities</u> • Regional Impact Priority Areas (RIPA) relevance and regional impact potential • Support for doctoral students (GRA)	25%	20%	20%
4. <u>PI/Team Qualifications and Capacity</u> • PI expertise and track record (Tier 1) • PI and Co-PI expertise and track record (Tier 2, 3) • Strength of collaborative plan (Tier 2, 3) • Complementarity of team expertise (Tier 2, 3) • Evidence of effective collaboration (Tier 3) • Academic Affairs-Health Affairs integration (Tier 3)	20%	15%	15%
5. <u>Project Feasibility and Impact</u> • Appropriateness of timeline and milestones • Adequacy of resources and facilities • Quality and clarity of proposal • Broader impacts on discipline, university, or society	15%	10%	10%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

Review Process

1. Administrative review for completeness and eligibility
2. Peer review by faculty panel using standardized scoring rubrics
3. Panel discussion and consensus ranking
4. Final funding decisions made by Senior Vice President for Research based on panel review recommendations

Review Panel Composition

- Multidisciplinary faculty review panel representing diverse research areas
- Includes representatives from both Academic Affairs and Health Affairs
- Panel members recused from reviewing proposals involving conflicts of interest
- Division of Research staff provide administrative support and ensure review process integrity

IX. AWARD ADMINISTRATION

Pre-Award Requirements

Prior to award activation, funded PIs must:

- Attend mandatory seed grant orientation session
- Complete all compliance training (IRB, IACUC, IBC, export control, etc.) as applicable to project
- Obtain all necessary regulatory approvals (IRB, IACUC, IBC protocols)
- Establish sponsored projects account through Office of Grants and Contracts

Award Management

- Funds administered through Office of Grants and Contracts
- Standard UTRGV financial policies and procedures apply
- Awards may not be used to supplement existing funded projects
- No-cost extensions considered only under exceptional circumstances; requests must be submitted 60 days before award end date
- Awards cannot be transferred if PI leaves UTRGV
- Substantial changes to project scope or team composition require Division of Research approval

Allowable Carry-Forward

- All funds must be spent by project end date
- No carry-forward beyond award period except through approved no-cost extension

X. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Annual Progress Reports (All Multi-Year Awards)

Due 12 months after award activation

- Summary of research progress and accomplishments
- Preliminary results and data generated
- Publications, patents, presentations, or other scholarly outputs
- Graduate students supported and training outcomes
- Challenges encountered and mitigation strategies
- Updated timeline for external proposal submission
- Financial summary showing expenditures to date

Final Reports

Due within 90 days of award end date

- Comprehensive summary of project outcomes
- Preliminary data generated
- Publications, presentations, patents, or other scholarly products resulting from the award
- Graduate students trained through the project
- External grants submitted (REQUIRED: include documentation of submission)
- External grants awarded (if applicable at time of reporting)
- Impact on research program development
- Lessons learned and future directions
- Financial summary showing final expenditures

External Funding Submission Documentation (Tier 2, 3)

- External proposal submission is REQUIRED for final report approval. DOR will provide guidance.
- If external proposal has not been submitted by final report deadline, PI must:
 - Provide written justification and revised submission timeline
 - Obtain Division of Research approval to extend submission deadline
 - Understand that failure to submit external proposal may impact future funding eligibility

Consequences of Non-Compliance

- PIs with outstanding or unapproved progress or final reports are ineligible for new Division of Research funding opportunities
- IDC distribution to PIs with outstanding or unapproved progress or final reports will be paused until all reports are submitted
- Failure to submit required external proposal (applicable to Tiers 2 and 3 only) may result in repayment of seed grant funds or ineligibility of 2 years of FORGE

XI. SUCCESS METRICS AND PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Division of Research will track program outcomes including:

- Number and dollar amount of external proposals submitted
- Success rate of external proposals
- Total extramural funding secured attributable to seed grants
- Publications in peer-reviewed journals
- Conference presentations
- Patents and invention disclosures
- Doctoral students supported and graduated
- New interdisciplinary collaborations established
- RIPA impact and regional engagement activities

Aggregate data will be reported annually and used for continuous program improvement.

XII. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND SUPPORT

The Division of Research provides comprehensive support to seed grant applicants and awardees:

Pre-Award Support

- Individual consultations on proposal development
- Assistance identifying appropriate funding tier
- Guidance on external funding opportunity identification
- Review of draft proposals (by request, timeline permitting)
- Connection to relevant research cores, facilities, and resources
- Facilitation of team formation and collaboration development

Post-Award Support

- Award administration and financial management guidance
- Progress monitoring and milestone tracking
- External proposal development coaching
- Connection to grant writing workshops and resources
- Regulatory compliance assistance
- Research development expertise for scaling up to larger awards

XIII. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Eligibility

Q: Can clinical faculty in Health Affairs apply?

A: If they have “research workload”, then they can apply.

Q: Can faculty with active external grants apply?

A: Yes, as long as the proposed seed grant project does not significantly overlap with existing funded research.

Q: Are adjunct, adjoint, or affiliate faculty eligible?

A: Only faculty members with “research workload” can apply.

Application Process

Q: Is there a limit on the number of applications per department or college?

A: No, there are no departmental or college quotas.

Q: Do I need department chair or dean approval to apply?

A: Proposals will be routed through ARGO for such approval prior to submission. However, letters of support may be needed to strengthen Tier 3 applications if some commitments are involved.

Q: Can undergraduate student research assistants be supported?

A: Yes, though priority is given to first research doctoral students and secondly masters students.

External Funding Requirements

Q: What happens if my external proposal is not funded?

A: Submission of a competitive external proposal fulfills the requirement. Non-funding does not reflect negatively on the seed grant investment, which could be a learning experience to go for a second round FORGE proposal.

Q: Can I submit to a different external funding opportunity than originally proposed?

A: Yes, with Division of Research approval, especially if the alternative opportunity better aligns with research outcomes.

Q: What if the targeted external funding opportunity is cancelled or changed?

A: The Division of Research will work with you to identify appropriate alternative mechanisms.

Review and Award

Q: Can I receive feedback on unfunded proposals?

A: Yes, summary reviews are provided to all applicants upon request.

Q: Can I revise and resubmit an unfunded proposal?

A: Yes, revised applications are encouraged in subsequent cycles.

XIV. ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND PUBLICITY

Recipients must acknowledge UTRGV Division of Research support in all publications, presentations, and external proposals resulting from seed grant funding:

Suggested acknowledgment language:

"This work was supported by the Faculty Opportunities for Research Growth and Excellence (FORGE) Seed Grant Program of the Division of Research at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)."

Recipients are encouraged to:

- Notify Division of Research of publications and presentations
- Highlight RIPA impacts in communications
- Participate in Division of Research "research showcase events"
- Share successes through UTRGV media channels by contacting the Division of Research Communications team

XV. PROGRAM AMENDMENTS

The Division of Research reserves the right to modify program guidelines, funding levels, or competition timelines as needed. Any substantive changes will be communicated to the UTRGV research community with adequate notice before implementation.