Northwestern State University

Elevate-U Faculty Innovation Microgrant Initiative

Program Guidelines

Purpose

Microgrants fund innovation. They help faculty try something new, outside their current practices, to carry out the work Northwestern State University promised in its Title III Elevate-U grant. Every project must fit one of the three approved activities listed below and be led by you. This program does not fund work you already do, and it does not fund ideas outside the grant narrative, even if they could improve retention or graduation.

Who Can Apply and Who Projects Must Serve

- **Applicants:** Full-time faculty, academic departments, student support units, and cross-functional teams. Teams that combine academic and advising staff are encouraged.
- **Students:** First- and second-year undergraduate students. Projects that mainly serve juniors, seniors, graduate students, or faculty will not be reviewed.
- **Funding:** Up to four awards of $10,000 to $15,000 each. The committee may partially fund a proposal.

Key Dates

Step	Date
Application opens	November 2026
Application closes	January 2027
Decisions	February 2027
Budgets sent to the Title III Program Officer for approval	March 2027
Purchasing and required paperwork	April to May 2027
Projects begin (fall semester)	August 2027
Projects end	May 2028

Awards are final only after the Title III Program Officer approves the budget. All awards depend on available funds, allowable costs, and federal requirements, and submitting an application does not guarantee funding.

Your Idea and Our Approved Activities

You bring the idea. You are free to design your project and carry it out the way you imagine. Frame your idea so it fits one of the three approved activities below, because this is work the grant has committed to do. Your project must also meet the requirements in these guidelines.

Every project must show that it is:

- **Aligned:** It carries out one approved activity.
- **Good for students:** You have a clear idea of how first- and second-year students will benefit.
- **Measurable:** You can track what you do and show how students benefit.
- **New:** It is outside your current practices, and you lead it.

This is not only professional development for faculty. If your project includes training, you must also show what you will do with students and how they will benefit.

Proposals that do not fit an approved activity will not be scored.

Activity #1: Improve Academic Advising and Support

1. Try a new advising practice

Try a new advising practice with students in your office or department. How you do it is up to you. Your idea could include advising training (such as the ADT course, Appreciative Advising, or NACADA), coaching sessions, advising check-ins, mid-term grade reviews, a communication plan, or conversations before registration. If it helps your idea, you are also welcome to use our Academic Maps as a resource, such as showing students how to use them.

Activity #2: Enhance First- and Second-Year Experience

2. Create a student learning community

Build a new community of first- or second-year students in your own way. You decide who joins, where it meets, and what it offers. Your idea could include tutoring, study sessions, academic workshops, peer mentor support, financial guidance, health and wellness programming, community-building, or proactive academic advising.

3. Prepare students as Peer Mentors

Prepare students who completed the second-year leadership program, such as NSU LEADS, to mentor other students. You decide how to train and support them.

We currently offer the following services, and you can find ways to collaborate with them to enhance participation and advance our initiatives. You can also collaborate with offices such as the success office or other offices to advance our initiatives.

- Advising: the ADT course, Advising Summits, Academic Maps, and advisor training and certifications
- Living Learning Communities: Resident Mentors, Faculty Mentors, and academic workshops
- Second-year leadership: NSU LEADS and Leadership NSU
- Student events: wellness and mental health, financial literacy, and community-building

How You Can Use the Funds

Because this is Title III funding, you can be inventive in how you use it to support your idea. You know what your project needs, so you can use the funds to purchase what will help you carry it out.

For example, current microgrant projects have furnished a space for programming and tutoring, hired peer mentors to work in classrooms, and bought models that students check out. These are only examples. We encourage you to be creative.

Each expense must support your project and go through the purchasing review in these guidelines.

What Will Not Be Funded

- Course redesign or curriculum development
- Continuing or repeating work you, your office, or Elevate-U already does
- Faculty research as the main purpose
- Faculty development that does not lead to a practice that serves students
- Stand-alone events or general student programming not tied to an approved activity
- Scholarships or direct financial aid
- Food, entertainment, or hospitality
- Student travel, including conferences, study trips, and travel stipends
- Construction, renovation, or facility changes

- Equipment unrelated to instructional or academic support activities
- Replacing existing department funds

What the Application Asks For

The application asks for your idea, the approved activity it fits, what is new about it, how it will benefit students, the problem with baseline data from Institutional Research, a measurable outcome (baseline, target, and when it will be measured), a month-by-month timeline, sustainability, how you will share your practices with the university, and an itemized budget. “Improve student success” is not an acceptable outcome. The application may not be longer than five pages, not counting the budget and quotes.

You must also explain how students are identified, how participation is recorded, and what numbers and results you will report each month. If possible, identify low-income students among the students you serve. Projects without student-level tracking will not be funded.

Required Pre-Submission Purchasing and Budget Review

Applicants must review proposed expenses and complete any necessary institutional consultations before submitting the microgrant application. Applicants should not include items or services in a proposed budget without first determining whether they can be purchased, approved, and supported by Northwestern State University. NSU purchasing policies and procedures must be followed for all microgrant expenditures.

- **Purchases:** Consult with the individual in your department who handles requisitions and purchasing to review proposed purchases and determine applicable purchasing requirements. Departmental administrative assistants and coordinators can assist. If you still have questions, email purchasing@nsula.edu, or contact Ashlee Grayson, Director of Purchasing.
- **Technology:** Any technology-related purchase must be reviewed and approved by Information Technology Services (ITS) before the application is submitted. This includes software, technology equipment, subscriptions, or other products that may require University installation, networking, system integration, technical support, or access to University systems. Contact Thomas Tilley (tommy@nsula.edu) or Alfred Ehlers (ehlers@nsula.edu). For student-related technology, contact Chris Brumley (brumleyc@nsula.edu).
- **Personnel and other specialized expenses:** If your project needs personnel, contractual services, or other specialized expenses, consult with the appropriate University office to determine applicable requirements and whether the proposed expense can be processed as described. These offices are in Business Affairs: Payroll, Human Resources, and Purchasing.
- **Fringe:** For proposal planning, use 36% for fringe.
- **Quotes:** Obtain quotes, documentation, or approvals required for proposed expenses before submission when applicable. Get a professional quote directly from the vendor, because it guarantees the price and product for a set time. Online carts are not recommended because they can change daily. Vendor quotes and supporting documentation must be included with the application when required by University purchasing procedures or by the office reviewing the proposed expense.
- **Equipment:** Equipment is typically $5,000 or more per unit with a useful life of more than one year. Consult with Purchasing about how to classify an item.
- **Timing:** Allow time for items to be received by June 30, 2027, the end of the fiscal year, in case items are backordered.

- **Not sure who to ask:** Contact the Elevate-U Title III Office before submission if you are unsure which University office should review a proposed expense.

Approval of microgrant funding does not exempt recipients from compliance with NSU purchasing, technology, contracting, personnel, fiscal, or other applicable institutional requirements. If an approved expense cannot be purchased, processed, or approved by the University, Elevate-U is not obligated to approve a substitute expense. If this prevents the project from being implemented substantially as approved, the award may be cancelled, and the funds may be reallocated to another project.

Budget and Budget Justification

Applicants must submit a detailed, itemized budget and corresponding budget justification for all proposed expenditures. Each expense must be adequately described and justified based on its necessity, reasonableness, and direct relationship to the proposed project activities and Title III objectives. Applicants should identify the basis for estimated costs, such as vendor quotes, institutional pricing, historical costs, or other reasonable estimates, when applicable. Costs must be allowable under applicable federal, institutional, and program requirements. Lump-sum budget requests will not be reviewed.

Any pay for people working on the project, including faculty, must be tied to specific work with students. Include the total amount, the hours or months of work, the estimated FTE or percentage of effort, and the duties. This work must be documented in your monthly reports.

If You Are Funded

- **Monthly report:** Write a report each month and submit it to Edgar Martinez, Title III Program Director. Include your numbers for the month, such as student and faculty participation, and your results.
- **Yearly survey:** Participate in the Elevate-U yearly survey. Elevate-U collects and analyzes the survey data, so you do not need to analyze it.
- **Sharing practices:** Share your practices with the university so the university can grow from your work. Your application must explain how you plan to do this.
- **Check-in:** We will check in with you once a semester.

How Proposals Are Reviewed

The Title III Innovation Committee first checks that each proposal fits an approved activity and serves the right students. Proposals that pass are scored below. The committee may include the Project Director and representatives from Institutional Research, Grant Administration, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Student Success.

Category	Points
Fit with the approved activity	30
Measurable outcomes and data plan	20
Innovation and benefit to first- and second-year students	15
Student tracking plan	15
Budget justification and allowability	10
Sustainability and sharing practices	10
Total	**100**