**Clusters of Excellence**

**Request for Proposals for 2025-2026 (revised 9/8/25)**

**Grant Period: February 1, 2026-June 30, 2027**

Central Connecticut State University ensures that we are dedicated to academic excellence on multiple levels with a focus on applied learning. As part of our commitment to incorporating high-impact practices and utilizing innovative pedagogical practices, we recognize faculty as the pillars of knowledge and disciplinary expertise. However, as we move further into the 21st century, it has become increasingly clear we must work across disciplines and increase our endeavors to move Central to the next level of academic excellence. This is a natural transition of academia where universities partner with industry, support workforce development, and leverage applied learning. Additionally, the university seeks to continue its exemplary status by increasing its partnerships with K-12 and technical high-schools providing an established pathway and pipeline to higher education.

The primary objective of the **Clusters of Excellence** grant competition is to solve today’s toughest challenges by utilizing our faculty’s expertise and providing our students with hands-on experience. The faculty are encouraged to conduct innovative, interdisciplinary research and education to make positive impacts in addressing a societal challenge and to promote Central’s excellence. These Clusters of Excellence will provide the expertise necessary to shape and advance the understanding of complex problems, emerging issues, and future societal challenges. By bringing together diverse and multi-disciplinary faculty teams, these cohorts of scholars and students will focus on new intellectual and relevant themes that cut across disciplines, departments, and schools.

The call for proposals seeks to foster greater innovation, collaboration, technology transfer and the overall advancement of scholarly and impactful work. It is with that in mind that we are requesting proposals for multiple Clusters of Excellence to support these types of multi-disciplinary projects. These projects should build on the expertise of our faculty, collaborate across departments and colleges, commit to locating additional funding for research, and aim to drive academic transformation through innovation. These Clusters must incorporate applied learning and community engagement in a way that recognizes our commitment to mutual collaboration with the surrounding region. Therefore, we invite faculty to submit proposals for Clusters of Excellencethat are designed to promote high-impact, collaborative scholarship in an engaged, integrated experience.

Project Teams must include Faculty, Students and Industry Partnerships. In addition, Clusters may include Faculty from other Public University/College Systems. Projects are for activities beyond the classroom and must include a plan for sustainability with outside funding. While one may request a project for up to 3 years in duration, an annual application will be required with a detailed Project Report, before additional funding is provided by Central.

While there are similarities between the Clusters of Excellence grant competition and the Next Generation Student Success, Innovation, and Community Engagement grant competition, it may be helpful to think of Clusters of Excellence as a program to connect to an external social issue, and Next Generation as a program to enhance innovation and academic excellence.

Please note that applying for a Clusters of Excellence grant prohibits one from applying for a Next Generation grant.

**II. Proposal Format and Content**

**Your proposal should include:**

**Cluster Overview/Cover Page**

* Cluster title
* Proposer names, titles, and brief bios
* Cluster description
* Departments involved in cluster
* Proposed number of faculty, by rank, in cluster
* Signature of Dean

**Executive Summary (1 page)**

Brief description of the cluster’s vision and its alignment with Central’s goal of advancing academic excellence.

* Identify the lead faculty member(s) and all key collaborators. Provide brief overview of all investigators previous research and grant achievements. Describe how the project integrates multiple disciplines or fields of study.
* Curriculum Vita (maximum two pages) highlighting items of relevance to the research agenda (please list as appendix)

**Project Description (3-5 pages)**

* **Briefly describe** (300 words maximum for each question)
* The fields of research involved in your proposed cluster, and what opportunities and challenges exist in these fields.
* What persistent scientific, social, and political challenges, problems, or opportunities will this cluster address, and how?
* How will your proposal include meaningful applied learning for your students?
* **Objectives**: Clearly define the research questions or problems to be addressed.
* **Methodology**: Outline the research methods, data sources, and any theoretical frameworks.
* **Timeline**: Present a realistic schedule for activities and milestones.

**Impact (1–2 pages)**

* Describe expected scholarly outcomes and their potential significance to the university and broader community.
* Highlight specific grant funding opportunities that align with this project as potential sources of continuation funding

**Resource Requests (1–2 pages)**

* **Assignment Time**: Detail any proposed teaching load reductions.
* **Technology and Facilities**: Describe anticipated lab or workspace needs.
* **Student/Staff Support**: Specify the number and type of positions needed.
* **Budget**: Provide a summary of projected costs, including supplies, travel, and any additional resources required. (*see section III*)

**Evaluation and Sustainability (1–2 pages)**

* **Metrics of Success**: State concrete metrics (publications, grants, presentations) and describe how they will be tracked.
* **Long-Term Sustainability**: Discuss how the cluster will continue to thrive after initial funding, including plans for external grant applications and partnerships.
* **Alignment** to items identified in Impact

**References or Works Cited** (as needed)

**III.** **Funding and Resources**

* Faculty may request the following resources to support their Cluster:
  + **Assignment Time**
    - Release from teaching responsibilities (partial) to devote more time to research and scholarly activities.
    - Justify the requested release time based on the project’s scope and potential outcomes.
    - This grant will provide release from teaching responsibilities (partial) to devote more time to research and scholarly activities, with approval by Dean, during the Fall and Spring semester.  If significant time is spent in the summer working on the project, there may be salary compensation.  Request for summer salary, as well as release time, must be justified based on the project’s scope and potential outcomes.
  + **Technology and Facilities Needs**
    - Justify specific needs such as specialized equipment or technology required for the research. Priority given to those projects which can leverage existing facilities and lab environments.
  + **Support Staff**
    - University Assistants, graduate assistants, or undergraduate research aides to support project work.
    - Describe the ideal qualifications needed for student workers.
    - Explain how these positions will contribute to research productivity and mentorship and how the students will benefit from experiential learning through work on the project
  + **Seed Funding**
    - Modest start-up funds for pilot studies, travel for fieldwork, materials, or specialized software (not to exceed $40,000). NOTE: Funding for external partners is unallowable.

**IV. Submission Review Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

1. **Scholarly Merit**
   1. Significance, originality, and clarity of the academic focus.
   2. Feasibility of the methodology and work plan.
2. **Impact statement on development of Cluster of Excellence**
3. **Alignment with Strategic Plan Goals**
4. **Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity**
   1. Evidence of strong collaboration among faculty, departments, and/or external partners.
   2. Inclusion of students as integral members of the research team.
5. **Resource Justification and Budget**
   1. Appropriateness of the requested resources and alignment with the project’s scope.
   2. Illustrated plan for long-term sustainability beyond the initial award period and timeline for sustainability.

**V.** **Submission and Timeline**

* **Letter of Intent** due on **October 8, 2025**. Brief description of your proposed project.
* **Proposal Submission**: Email proposals in PDF format to Brenda Lopez (b.lopez@ccsu.edu)
* **Deadline**: Proposals must be received by **December 3, 2025**.
* **Notification**: Awards will be announced by **January 30, 2026.**
* **Project Start Date**: Funded research clusters should commence by **February 1, 2026.**
* **Post-Award Expectations**

Awardees will be required to:

1. Submit an **annual progress report** detailing research activities, expenditures, and outcomes.
2. Present their findings at a **university-wide research symposium** or equivalent event.
3. Seek **external funding** to support the long-term sustainability of the cluster’s research activities.

**Contact Information**

For additional information, questions, or clarifications, please contact the Office of Grants and Funded Research:

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We look forward to your innovative ideas and active participation in this strategic endeavor to elevate Central’s profile. Your engagement and scholarly excellence will be instrumental as we move toward enhancing the university’s reputation for impactful research and community engagement.