



DATA INSTITUTE FOR SOCIETAL CHALLENGES
The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA



DATA INSTITUTE FOR
SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

SPRING 2026

SEED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

FACULTY, GRADUATE STUDENTS, AND
POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

DISC Spring 2026 Seed Funding Opportunities: Faculty, Graduate Students, and Postdoctoral Researchers

DISC is pleased to announce our seed funding opportunity for Spring 2026. As in previous rounds of funding, we plan to make multiple awards across our three tracks: Faculty, Graduate Students, and Postdoctoral Researchers. These awards will support data-enabled, AI-driven, and interdisciplinary research while advancing DISC's mission and OU's strategic research areas. For faculty, we are introducing new DISC Nexus awards that will support interdisciplinary research efforts by offering larger funding amounts and higher levels of DISC engagement with the research teams to support their work. The awards for postdoctoral researchers and graduate students will remain the same. We will shift from multiple rounds of review to a single competition with the same due date for all types of awards. Information for each specific track is found below. Rubrics for each track can be found in Appendix A.

DISC Faculty Seed Funding Program: Nexus Awards

Purpose

The DISC Faculty Seed Funding Program supports high-impact research that leverages data science, artificial intelligence (AI), and advanced analytics to address complex societal challenges. The FY26 program features our new DISC Nexus award, which supports interdisciplinary projects, strengthen alignment with OU strategic research areas, and support the development of pathways to external funding.

Award Details

- **Award Amount:** Up to \$25,000 per interdisciplinary team
- **Number of Awards:** Up to five awards
- **Funding Period:** 12 months

Eligibility

- Interdisciplinary teams required (minimum of two faculty from different home departments conducting integrated research)
- You may submit only one proposal as Principal Investigator (PI), but you may participate in an unlimited number of proposals as Co-PI.
- All team members must be DISC members
 - DISC membership form:
https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6JAR3HMzwGifSDk

Priority Alignment

Proposals must align with one or more OU strategic research areas and address the major program goals.

OU Strategic Research Areas

- **Health** – Lifting the health of Oklahomans through AI, data science, and informatics; translational research and biomedical innovation; remote monitoring, digital health and access to care; and growing Oklahoma's biotech and health workforce and technology development
- **Energy** – Advancing Oklahoma's innovation and leadership in energy via enabling sustainable, resilient, and secure energy systems through research and innovation in critical minerals, geothermal, oil & gas, industrial manufacturing, petrochemical, grid optimization, and energy policy.

- **Extreme Weather** – Advancing and improving prediction, mitigation, and resilience for severe weather hazards, leveraging the strengths of our weather enterprise, radar expertise, and AI/ML applications
- **National Security & Defense** – Strengthening security, readiness, and leadership through research in spectrum dominance, sustainment and modernization, autonomous and counter-autonomous systems, and alignment with state and national defense priorities.

Program Goals

- Support development of competitive external proposals (NIH, NSF, DOE, NOAA, DoD, DHS, ARPA-H, foundations, industry)
- Generate pilot data, prototypes, or feasibility studies
- Foster new and sustained interdisciplinary research teams
- Advance impact-driven research aligned with OU priorities

Application Requirements

Applicants must submit a 3-page concept proposal including:

1. **Problem Statement and Societal Relevance**
Clearly define the problem or challenge the project seeks to address and explain its significance to society. Describe why this problem matters now and how addressing it could generate meaningful impact at the local, regional, national, or global level.
2. **Data-Enabled or AI-Driven Approach**
Describe how data science, artificial intelligence, or advanced analytics will be used to address the problem. Clearly explain the role of data, models, algorithms, or computational methods and why this approach is appropriate and innovative.
3. **Team Composition and Roles**
Identify all team members and describe their disciplinary backgrounds, expertise, and specific roles in the project. Proposals must demonstrate meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration and clearly articulated responsibilities.
4. **Alignment with OU Strategic Research Areas**
Explain how the proposed project aligns with one or more OU strategic research areas. Clearly articulate how the work advances OU's strategic research priorities.
5. **Targeted External Funding Vision**
Describe the external funding opportunities the team intends to pursue following completion of the seed project. Identify likely sponsors or programs and explain how this seed funding will position the team to submit a competitive proposal.
6. **Budget and Justification**
Provide a brief budget (up to \$25,000) and justification that explains how the requested funds will be used to support the proposed work and achieve project goals.

**References and appendices do not count toward the page limit. Proposals that do not address all required components, or that do not include budget information will not be reviewed.*

Allowable Use of Funds

- Graduate or undergraduate research support
- Data acquisition, software, or computational resources
- Pilot experiments, fieldwork, or prototype development
- Community, Tribal, or industry engagement
- Supplies
- Faculty summer salaries

- Other reasonable project-related costs that directly support project activities and objectives

Deliverables and Responsibilities

Funded teams are expected to:

- Participate in DISC-led activities and mentorship opportunities related to the support of your project, including a kickoff meeting in Spring 2026 and a synthesis workshop in Spring 2027
- Submit a midpoint progress update in October 2026
- Submit a final project report
- Share project results at a DISC research showcase, DISC presentation series, or at a DISC leadership briefing
- Submit at least one external funding proposal within 6-12 months after project completion

Key Dates

- **Proposal Deadline:** Sunday, March 1, 2026, at 11:59 PM CT
- **Submission:** Please complete this online submission form and upload your proposal: [DISC 2026 Spring Seed Funding Opportunity – Fill out form](#)
- **Award Notification:** Wednesday, April 1, 2026

DISC Graduate Student Seed Funding Program

Purpose

The DISC Graduate Student Seed Funding Program supports graduate student teams conducting data-enabled or data science research while fostering collaboration and increasing graduate student engagement with DISC.

Award Details

- **Award Amount:** \$2,500
- **Number of Awards:** Up to four awards
- **Funding Period:** 6 months

Eligibility

- Teams must include at least two graduate students
- All team members must be DISC members
 - DISC membership form:
https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6JAR3HMzwGifSDk
- A faculty member is required to assist with fund management

Program Goals

- Support graduate student-led research projects
- Encourage interdisciplinary and collaborative research
- Strengthen graduate student engagement with DISC

Application Requirements

Applicants must submit a 2-page proposal summary including:

1. **Problem Statement**
Clearly describe the problem or challenge the project seeks to address.
 - If applicable, identify the audience or community you plan to engage.
2. **Background and Prior Work**
Summarize what others have done to address this problem, including relevant research, programs, or approaches.
3. **Identified Gap**
Explain why the problem remains unresolved and clearly define the gap in existing knowledge, practice, or engagement.
 - If applicable, describe why this audience or community has not been engaged previously.
4. **Proposed Approach**
Describe what your team will do to address the identified gap.
 - If applicable, explain how you plan to engage the identified audience or community.
5. **Budget and Resources Needed**
List the amount of funding requested and briefly describe how the funds will be used to support the proposed work.

**References and appendices do not count toward the page limit. Proposals that do not address all required components or that do not include budget information will not be reviewed.*

Allowable Use of Funds

- Team-building meetings or workshops

- Community engagement or outreach
- Conference participation
- Pilot data collection or proof-of-concept studies
- Other reasonable project-related costs that directly support project activities and objectives

Deliverables and Accountability

Funded teams are expected to:

- Provide a monthly progress update
- Submit a final written report at the end of the funding period

Restrictions

- Graduate students may receive one award per year

Key Dates

- **Proposal Deadline:** Sunday, March 1, 2026, at 11:59 PM CT
- **Submission:** Please complete this online submission form and upload your proposal: [DISC 2026 Spring Seed Funding Opportunity – Fill out form](#)
- **Award Notification:** Wednesday, April 1, 2026

DISC Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

Purpose

The DISC Postdoctoral Fellowship supports OU postdoctoral researchers in advancing their research and professional development aligned with their long-term career goals.

Award Details

- **Award Amount:** Up to \$5,000
- **Number of Awards:** Up to four awards
- **Funding Period:** 12 months

Eligibility

- Current postdoctoral researchers
- All applicants must be DISC members
 - DISC membership form:
https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6JAR3HMzwGifSDk

Program Goals

- Support postdoctoral research advancement
- Encourage dissemination of research outcomes
- Enhance professional development and career readiness

Application Requirements

Applicants must submit a 2-page project summary including:

Page 1: Project Description

The first page should clearly and concisely address the following questions:

1. **Problem Statement**
Describe the problem or challenge your proposed work seeks to address.
 - If applicable, identify the audience or community you plan to engage.
2. **Prior Work**
Summarize what others have done to address this problem, including relevant research, methods, or existing efforts.
3. **Identified Gap**
Explain why the problem remains unresolved and clearly identify the gap your work will address.
 - If applicable, explain why this audience or community has not been engaged previously.
4. **Proposed Approach**
Describe what you will do to address the identified gap and how your approach advances existing work.
 - If applicable, explain how you plan to engage the identified audience or community.

Page 2: Professional Development and Impact

The second page should include brief responses (approximately 200 words per section) to the following questions:

1. **Skill Development**
Describe how the fellowship will help you develop additional marketable skills, such as research, data science, mentoring, communication, leadership, or professional development competencies.

2. **Career Advancement**

Explain how participation as a DISC Fellow will support your short- and long-term career goals and enhance your professional trajectory.

3. **Alignment with DISC Mission**

Describe how your research interests and career path align with DISC’s mission, vision, and values related to data science, analytics, and societal impact.

4. **Budget and Resources Needed**

List the **amount of funding requested** (up to \$5,000) and briefly describe how the funds will be used to support your proposed work and professional development.

**References and appendices do not count toward the page limit. Proposals that do not address all required components or that do not include budget information will not be reviewed.*

Allowable Use of Funds

- Open-access publication fees
- Conference or research travel
- Conference registration fees
- Team-building meetings or workshops
- Stakeholder or community engagement
- Undergraduate research support
- Pilot data collection
- Other reasonable project-related costs that directly support project activities and objectives

Mentorship and Accountability

- Regular check-ins to support progress and reporting expectations
- Submission of a final project report

Restrictions

- Postdoctoral researchers may receive one DISC Fellowship per year

Key Dates

- **Proposal Deadline:** Sunday, March 1, 2026, at 11:59 PM CT
- **Submission:** Please complete this online submission form and upload your proposal: [DISC 2026 Spring Seed Funding Opportunity – Fill out form](#)
- **Award Notification:** Wednesday, April 1, 2026

Appendix A: Rubrics

I. DISC Faculty Seed Funding Evaluation Rubric

Scoring Scale:

5 = Excellent | 4 = Very Good | 3 = Good | 2 = Fair | 1 = Poor

Criterion	Description	Score (1-5)
1. Problem Statement and Societal Relevance	Clearly defines the problem or challenge the project seeks to address and explains its significance to society. Articulates why the problem matters now and the potential for meaningful impact at the local, regional, national, or global level.	
2. Data-Enabled or AI-Driven Approach	Clearly describes how data science, artificial intelligence, or advanced analytics will be used to address the problem. Explains the role of data, models, algorithms, or computational methods and demonstrates that the approach is appropriate, rigorous, and innovative.	
3. Team Composition and Roles	Identifies all team members and clearly describes their disciplinary backgrounds, expertise, and specific roles. Demonstrates meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration and clearly articulated responsibilities.	
4. Alignment with OU Impact Areas	Clearly explains how the proposed project aligns with one or more OU Strategic Research Areas and relevant cross-cutting impact pillars. Articulates how the work advances OU's strategic research priorities.	
5. Targeted External Funding Vision	Identifies the external funding opportunity or opportunities the team intends to pursue following completion of the seed project. Explains how this seed funding will position the team to submit a competitive proposal and identifies likely sponsors or programs.	
6. Budget and Justification	Provides a clear and reasonable budget (up to \$25,000) with justification that explains how the requested funds will be used to support the proposed work and achieve project goals.	

Total Possible Score: 30

II. DISC Postdoctoral Researcher Fellowship Evaluation Rubric

Scoring Scale: As indicated per criterion

Criterion	Description	Score Range
1. Insights and Ideas	Insights and ideas are clearly described and demonstrate originality, clarity, and relevance.	1–5
2. Research and Professional Development Alignment	Clearly explains how the fellowship will support the applicant’s research agenda and professional development toward stated career goals.	1–5
3. Data Science and Analytics Skill Development	Demonstrates how the fellowship will support the development of additional data science and analytics skills.	1–4
4. Research or Funding Gap	Clearly describes the research or funding gap that the fellowship seeks to address.	1–4
5. Additional Activities Undertaken	Describes additional activities undertaken to receive funding, such as preliminary work, training, collaborations, or engagement activities.	1–4
6. Overall Quality of the Proposal	Assesses the overall quality, clarity, feasibility, and coherence of the proposal.	1–4
7. Use of Funds	Provides a clear and well-justified description of how the requested funds will be used.	1–4

Total Possible Score: 30

III. DISC Graduate Student Seed Funding Evaluation Rubric

Scoring Scale: As indicated per criterion

Criterion	Description	Score Range
1. Problem Statement and Context	The problem to be addressed is clearly stated. If applicable, the target audience or community is clearly identified.	1–5
2. Prior Research or Engagement Activities	Provides a clear explanation of relevant prior research or, if applicable, engagement activities that inform the proposed work.	1–4
3. Research Gap	Clearly explains the research gap or unmet need the project seeks to address.	1–5
4. Approach to Filling the Gap or Engagement Plan	Clearly explains how the project will fill the identified gap or, if applicable, how the audience or community will be engaged.	1–5
5. Data-Enabled or Data Science Component	Clearly explains the data-enabled research or data science component, including data sources, tools, or methods to be used.	1–5
6. Societal Relevance and Impact	Clearly connects the project to societal challenges, important problems, and/or potential solutions.	1–3
7. Use of Funds	Clearly describes how the requested funds will be used and demonstrates alignment with proposed activities.	1–3

Total Possible Score: 30