Office of the Vice President for Research
Request for Proposals
Democracy Small Grant Program

BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS

The Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) is pleased to announce an internal request for proposals for the **FY26 Democracy Small Grant Program**.

As a land-grant institution, Colorado State University (CSU) and the OVPR are committed to fostering a culture of excellence that supports the success of our research, scholarship, and creative artistry community. With "strengthening our democracy" as one of five institutional priorities, the OVPR is continuing its program that invests in democracy scholarship, which was first piloted in FY25. This program may continue to evolve and may not be offered in future years.

The Democracy Small Grant Program will provide small grants to stimulate research, scholarship, and creative artistry in democracy broadly defined. The program aims to amplify CSU as a recognized leader in this area of scholarship.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Democracy Scholarship Small Grant Program is an internal investment initiative aimed at advancing scholarship that addresses grand challenges in democracy and civic engagement, offering support through two tracks: 1) single investigator and disciplinary teams; and 2) interdisciplinary teams.

For the purposes of this program, interdisciplinary scholarship will be defined as: *scholarship that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions require fundamental research advances in multiple disciplines and research areas*.

Projects proposed under the interdisciplinary team track must include more than one discipline, even if these disciplines are within the same department or the same college, and must be justified within the proposal.

At its core, the program embraces a broad and inclusive definition of democracy scholarship, welcoming a wide range of scholarly approaches. These may include theoretical, empirical, design, or performative methods, from any discipline or combination of disciplines. It is essential to emphasize that democracy scholarship, as defined by this program, spans a wide spectrum of topics. Examples include, but are not limited to: democratic governance,

processes, and institutions; civic infrastructure; conflict, polarization and conflict resolution, communications and democracy; democratic innovations; democratization of science; artistic representations of democracy; and more. Scholarship related to any sociopolitical scale and geography are welcome.

Successful outcomes for projects funded under this program include a wide range of outputs, to include original scholarly work such as a peer-reviewed article, book chapter, edited volume or significant progress on a book project; submission of a grant proposal; artistic work or similar creative endeavors. Synthesis or review articles are encouraged.

AVAILABLE FUNDING

This program intends to fund 5 – 10 projects during FY26 and will provide funding support to each awarded project at a maximum of 1) ***$7,000 for single investigator and disciplinary teams;*** and 2) ***$10,000 for interdisciplinary teams.*** Additional non-OVPR match or leveraged support is not required and will not be evaluated as a part of this program.

Funding will be for a ***1-year maximum period*** and funds must be expended within that timeframe (calendar year 2026). Funds will be approved and released at the program start.

PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS

In addition to providing funds to strategically advance the project, the OVPR will invite awardees to capacity development training and other events during the grant period. The OVPR will also provide individualized consultations and strategic support for those interested in seeking additional funding.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Eligibility:

- Proposals must be submitted and led by Tenure-Track (TT) or Contract and Continuing (CC) Faculty; Research Scientists/Scholars; or Center/Institute Directors, as the Lead/Principal Investigator (PI). Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary team proposals must be led by a collaboration between two or more eligible Co-leads/Co-PIs.
- Other non-lead senior/key personnel are allowable, and do not need to meet this eligibility criteria.
- Postdocs, graduate students, undergraduate students and adjunct faculty are not eligible to lead a proposal. Postdocs and students may be funded and participate as part of a project team.
- Project teams may collaborate with partners at other organizations, however, funding from OVPR may only be used to support CSU personnel and activities (see travel exception, below).

Allowable Costs:

Appropriate use of funds includes: undergraduate/graduate student or postdoc support; research, scholarship, and creative artistry development activities including collaborative teaming meetings and capacity building; efforts to increase participation of personnel; materials and supplies directly related to project activities. Travel to support data collection (field work, archives, etc.) and teaming are allowable costs, if they are well justified. PI salary may be included during the summer, but should be judicious and only part of the overall budget request. Any proposals that include funds for course releases require advance approval from the department/college.

Unallowable Costs:

The following costs will not be approved under this program: capital equipment; travel to conferences; support for external partners (except for travel to participate in teaming activities, which is allowable).

Accountability:

It is expected that allocation of these funds will ultimately lead to substantive impact in research and scholarly excellence in the areas of democracy and civic engagement. A brief progress report of current outcomes and projected follow-on path will be requested at the end of the 1-year funding period. Unspent funds remaining at the end of the project period will be returned to the OVPR.

TIMELINE

DATE	EVENT
September 17, 2025	RFP announcement released
November 10, 2025	***Deadline for receipt of proposal**
On or about December 15, 2025	Awardees notified
January 1, 2026	Program start date
December 31, 2026	Program end date
On or about January 15, 2027	Final report

PROPOSAL CONTENT

Proposals should include the following components, in this order:

1. **Cover Page Information (captured as fillable fields in the submission system)**
   - Proposal title.
   - Name, affiliation (college, department/unit), and contact information for Principal Investigator (PI), Co-PI(s), and all senior/key personnel on the project.
   - Total budget requested.

2. **Project Description (3 pages)**
    The project description should include the following elements, in this order:
    - Brief introduction of the project, including an explicit linkage to and definition of democracy scholarship.
    - Objectives, activities, and anticipated outcomes, including scholarly products.
    - Team composition, including roles, discipline(s), and experience of all key personnel. If applicable, discuss how undergraduate/graduate students or postdocs will be engaged. Proposals under the interdisciplinary team track must explain how an interdisciplinary team advances the project.
    - High-level project plan with timeline and key milestones, including anticipated follow-on external funding targets and scholarly outputs.
    - References Cited (does not count against page limit).

3. **Biographical Sketches (3 pages per biosketch)**
    For the PI, Co-PI(s), and all other senior/key personnel. Compile all Biographical Sketches into one single PDF file.

4. **Budget Request Form (1 page)**
    A line-item budget on the provided template, including any leveraged support.

5. **Budget Justification (1 page)**
    Brief justification of anticipated costs and how awarded funds will impact the project. Describe all leveraged sources of support that will be utilized. Include a timeline of expenditures.

Formatting, all sections: 8.5" x 11" page size; single-spaced; 1" margins; typeface no smaller than 11-point Times New Roman, 11-point Calibri, or 10-point Arial.

File submission format: Separate PDF document for each proposal component.

EVALUATION

All applications will be peer reviewed, with selection recommendations made by a committee that will include representatives from internal research and scholarship leaders. Final selection decisions will be made by the VPR, in consultation with the selection committee.

Review criteria will include:

- Overall quality of the project
- Focus on democracy scholarship, broadly defined
- Research, scholarly, and artistic activities or grant proposals to be developed
- Potential for follow-on opportunities, including potential for additional scholarly outputs or awards from external programs
- Qualifications of key personnel
- Reasonableness of the budget

SUBMISSION PROCESS

Submit proposals via CSU's InfoReady Review system by 5:00 p.m. MT on November 10, 2025. The system will not accept applications after this time.

Accessing the CSU InfoReady Review system to submit:

1. From the opportunities list found at https://colostate.infoready4.com/, locate the "CSU – Democracy Small Grant Program" opportunity and click on the title to open the opportunity information page.
2. From the opportunity page, click "Apply".
3. Use your CSU NetID and password to log into the system.
4. Complete all fields and upload all required components. You can save your application as a draft prior to submission.
5. Be sure to "Submit" your application. Applications left as "draft" will not be reviewed.

CONTACT

Questions about this program should be directed to:

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