



# Tennessee Higher Education Commission

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## *Veteran Initiatives Grant*

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**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**AND**

**GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION**

**FINAL PROPOSALS DUE**

**April 3, 2026**

## Table of Contents

<b>General Information &amp; Overview</b> .....	2
<b>Eligible Postsecondary Institutions</b> .....	2
<b>Proposal Specifications</b> .....	3
<b>Section 1: Program Narrative (5 Points)</b> .....	3
<b>Section 2: Demonstration of need (25 Points)</b> .....	3
<b>Section 3: Program Plan (25 Points)</b> .....	4
<b>Section 4: Sustainability (15 Points)</b> .....	4
<b>Section 5: Budget Plan (15 Points)</b> .....	5
<b>Section 6: Optional Criteria (Up to Fifteen Additional Points)</b> .....	5
<b>Submission Guidelines &amp; Timeline</b> .....	6
<b>Grant Application Procedures</b> .....	7
<b>Notification</b> .....	7
<b>Review and Award Process</b> .....	8
<b>Legal Information</b> .....	8
<b>Title VI</b> .....	8
<b>Funding</b> .....	8
<b>APPENDIX A: Cover Sheet</b> .....	10
<b>APPENDIX B: Budget</b> .....	11
<b>APPENDIX C: Scoring Rubric</b> .....	15

## **General Information & Overview**

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) Veteran Initiatives Grant is a part of the Governor's continued investment in military-connected student education. The Veteran Initiatives Grant will provide funding to aid campuses in expanding mental health resources for currently designated VETS or VETS Bravo campuses. Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-7-1302 directs VETS and VETS Bravo campuses to provide "comprehensive, statewide support" that "should encourage enrollment of veterans and address issues that may deter veterans' participation in higher education." Research has indicated that military-connected students are often treated for "depression-related disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety-related disorders" and suffer mental health challenges more often than other students.<sup>1</sup> The objective of the Veteran Initiatives Grant is to ensure that eligible institutions across the state of Tennessee have allocated resources to support the well-being and mental health of all military-connected students.

This Request for Proposals (RFP), issued by THEC, is made available through a \$1 million competitive grant process. Grants of up to \$150,000 will be available to eligible institutions for up to twenty-four (24) months to aid VETS or VETS Bravo campuses seeking to expand mental health resources for military-connected students. Proposals must include a strategy to identify and address potential gaps on an eligible campus and focus on creating or expanding well-being and mental health services that support military-connected students, with the goal of successfully enrolling, completing a postsecondary program, and attaining a credential.

## **Eligible Postsecondary Institutions**

Any Tennessee public or private, not-for-profit postsecondary institution that has already attained the VETS or VETS Bravo designation from the state is eligible. The eligible institution will execute a grant contract with THEC and will be responsible for coordinating all grant activities and managing the contract. Contract management includes monitoring, auditing, and reporting to THEC in accordance with the contracted timelines.

Proposals must employ strategies and resources that address the mental health and well-being of military-connected students. Specifically, mental health resources

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<sup>1</sup> United States Government Accountability Office: [Opportunities Exist to Further Meet Student Veterans' Mental Health Needs](#)

must focus on quality of life, substance abuse, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and other disorders. A successful proposal could include one or more of the following strategies:

- Contracting counselors with expertise to meet the specific mental health and wellness needs of military-connected students;
- Partnering with an agency to provide mental health and wellness services not offered on campus or locally for military-connected students;
- Offering therapeutic services on campuses related to areas such as art, exercise, or animal-assisted therapy; or
- Creating a military-connected focused program, such as a Student Veteran of America (SVA) chapter or Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL), that includes services for spouses and children of veterans or active-duty service members and promotes wellness, mental health, and social interaction with fellow students.

## Proposal Specifications

Applications must address the following criteria and present a detailed plan for achieving the outlined objectives.

### Section 1: Program Narrative (5 Points)

Provide a brief narrative describing how the proposed program will identify and address resource gaps and clearly identify any specific strategies that will be employed. This section should also demonstrate how military-connected students will be directly served by the proposed strategies.

#### Essential Component:

- ***Brief narrative of the proposed project.*** Provide a clear and concise overview of the proposed project, identifying resource gaps and detailing specific strategies employed to address them. This section must demonstrate how military-connected students will benefit directly from the proposed strategy.

### Section 2: Demonstration of need (25 Points)

Provide evidence of the need for the proposed project. Proposals must include a thorough overview of the project and align relevant mental health and well-being resources for military-connected students. Clearly describe the proposed project, any contracted services, and how the strategies will address mental health and

well-being needs, focusing on quality of life, substance abuse, PTSD, anxiety, depression, and other disorders.

### **Essential Components:**

- ***Demonstrating the need for action.*** Using existing research, identify current resource gaps on your campus and explain how addressing these gaps will benefit military-connected students pursuing and completing higher education. Research and data sources should focus on current and future needs related to mental health and well-being.

### **Section 3: Program Plan (25 Points)**

Based on the research or data identified in Section 2, each proposal must include a detailed description of the timeline, objectives, and accountability plan.

### **Essential Components:**

- ***Detailed project timeline and overview.*** Provide a quarterly overview of critical activities and actions that will comprise the development and implementation of the identified project.
- ***Identify key objectives for each phase of the project and describe how they will be measured.*** Include detailed metrics to be used to continuously track progress and associated student outcomes.
- ***Project governance and accountability plan.*** Clearly outline the plan for grant management, meetings, and decision-making structure, and identify a project director who will maintain oversight throughout the project period.

### **Section 4: Sustainability (15 Points)**

Proposals must include a commitment and detailed plan for sustaining grant activities beyond the 24-month grant period. Securing another grant is not an acceptable sustainability plan. *If the proposal includes contracted services*, a detailed plan including the availability of long-term resources for maintenance or updates must be included.

### Essential components:

- ***Detailed plan for sustaining the program beyond the 24-month funding period.*** Describe how the work supported by this grant will continue beyond the grant period and outline the roles thereafter. *If the proposal includes contracted services, provide a detailed description of long-term resources available to support student success.*

### Section 5: Budget Plan (15 Points)

Proposals must include a detailed financial plan and a complete budget using the template provided. Applicable “Grant Budget Line-Item Details” should be submitted **as a separate attachment with the completed budget** (see Appendix B).

Services purchased should provide resources that support students’ success, retention, and completion. If the proposal seeks indirect costs, an explanation of any anticipated indirect costs associated with the implementation and administration of the grant must be provided. Indirect costs are limited to eight percent (8%) of the total budget and dependent upon approval by THEC.

Subawards are not permitted.

### Essential Components:

- ***Clear alignment between funding requests and grant activities.*** Provide a detailed discussion of how each line item in the budget supports the goals and projected outcomes of the grant.
- ***Role of proposed services request.*** Required only for proposals seeking contracted services with grant funds. Explain how services will specifically address military-connected students’ needs.
- ***Explanation of any anticipated indirect costs associated with the implementation and administration of the grant.*** Indirect costs are limited to eight percent (8%) of the total budget.

### Section 6: Optional Criteria (Up to Fifteen Additional Points)

Proposals may receive up to fifteen (15) additional points by incorporating a partnership (higher education, industry, local agency, or government agency, etc.) within the strategy. Partnerships must extend beyond the contracted services and

demonstrate a commitment to fostering ongoing relationships that enhance services for military-connected students. While contracted services may be a part of the partnership, the plan should reflect a comprehensive and sustainable collaboration. **The maximum points available under this section for any one proposal are capped at 15 points.**

### Essential Components:

- **Detailed description of each partner's role and their capabilities in implementing the identified program.** Describe how each partner will contribute to the project, including assigned tasks and personnel roles.
- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the partnership agreement.** Applicants must submit a signed MOU outlining the benefits of the relationship. Letters of support will not be accepted as a substitute.

At a minimum, the MOU should establish an agreement among partners outlining respective benefits, roles, and responsibilities. MOUs **must** be signed by **all** partners to earn points in the scoring rubric.

### Submission Guidelines & Timeline

The application process consists of two (2) steps: the submission of the Notice of Intent to Submit and the submission of the final proposal.

A Notice of Intent to Submit must be transmitted via Formstack no later than **12:00 p.m. (Central Time) Friday February 27, 2026**. The Notice of Intent to Submit must include:

- Name of Higher Education Institution(s)/Fiscal Agent
- Project Director/Co-Director
- Project Director/Co-Director Phone Number(s)
- Project Director/Co-Director Email Address(es)
- Title of Proposed Project
- Proposed Partners (All additional Mandatory Partners and Anticipated Workforce Partners)
- Proposed Funding Requested

The submission of the Notice of Intent to Submit is a mandatory step to submit a proposal for this grant program. Final proposals must be received electronically through Formstack by **12:00 p.m. (Central Time) April 3, 2026**.

**SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED AFTER THIS DEADLINE WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.**

**Link to Notice of Intent:**

[https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/veteran\\_initiatives\\_grant\\_notice\\_of\\_intent](https://stateoftennessee.formstack.com/forms/veteran_initiatives_grant_notice_of_intent)

**RFP TIMELINE:**

- Release Date: Monday, January 26, 2026.
- Technical Assistance Webinar: Tuesday, February 17, 2026
- Notice of Intent due: Friday, February 27, 2026
- Final proposal due: Friday, April 3, 2026
- Tentative Notification of Selection: June 2026
- Tentative Technical Assistance Webinar for Grantees: June 2026
- Tentative Contract Start Date: July 2026
- Tentative Contract End Date: July 2028

## **Grant Application Procedures**

All grant applications will be submitted via Formstack. After submitting the Notice of Intent, applicants will receive instructions for uploading documents through Formstack. Applicants can upload proposals and verify submission through this process.

The application must include:

- Cover Sheet (see Appendix A)
- Table of Contents
- One-page Abstract/Project Summary
- Program Proposal: This section should be double-spaced, in twelve-point font, with one- inch margin
- *Note: Maximum document length is **fifteen pages**, excluding the cover sheet, data list, abstract, table of contents, budget, and appendices*
- Budget with applicable line-item details (Appendix B)

## **Notification**

Once each proposal has been received, a confirmation notice will be generated by Formstack and received by the project director. **If you do not receive your**

**confirmation notice within one (1) hour of submitting your proposal, please call Katie Staple at (615) 812-1288 or email the THEC Veteran Initiatives Team at [Veteran.Initiatives@tn.gov](mailto:Veteran.Initiatives@tn.gov).** *It is the sole responsibility of the proposed project director to verify receipt of the proposal and notify project partners.*

One week after the proposal deadline, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission will post all received proposals on the THEC website, accessible at [www.tn.gov/thec](http://www.tn.gov/thec). **If you have submitted a proposal but it is not listed, contact the THEC Veteran Initiatives Team at [Veteran.Initiatives@tn.gov](mailto:Veteran.Initiatives@tn.gov) immediately.**

### **Review and Award Process**

The Veteran Initiatives Grant proposals will be submitted to THEC and reviewed by a selection committee. Selection committee members will score proposals utilizing the standardized rubric which is included in the grant RFP as an appendix. The rubric ensures that all grants are reviewed objectively and selected proposals align with the state's military-connected education goals. Further detail on the scoring rubric is found in Appendix C. Final scoring by the committee members will determine which proposals are approved for funding.

### **Legal Information**

#### **Title VI**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that federally assisted programs be free of discrimination. Should you feel you have been discriminated against, contact your local Title VI representatives. The Title VI Coordinator at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission is Amber Walsh (615) 532-3500.

#### **Funding**

Funder reserves the right to fund any proposal in full or in part, to request additional information to assist in the review process, to reject any of the proposals responding to the RFP, and to re-issue the RFP and accept new proposals if the selection committee determines that doing so is in the best interest of the State of Tennessee. In addition, the funder may consider geographic parity in awarding.

All costs incurred in preparing a proposal shall be borne by the applicant. Proposal preparation costs are not recoverable from grant funds. THEC reserves the right to withhold funding if the program is not adhering to federal or state requirements or the objectives and goals outlined in this RFP. THEC staff reserve the right to attend

any project activity or meeting to ensure program fidelity and to conduct regular monitoring of the project.

## APPENDIX A: Cover Sheet

NAME OF LEAD ENTITY

Veteran Initiatives Grant [Program Title]  
[Lead Entity Name] [Fiscal Agent] IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:

1. [Higher Education Institution(s)]

[Project Director Name, Mailing Address]

[Director's Telephone]

[Director's E-mail Address]

Funding requested:

**[\$Dollar Amount]**

X

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President of Higher Education Institution  
(Fiscal Agent)

X

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Project Director (Lead Entity)



## **GRANT BUDGET LINE - ITEM DETAIL**

### **Line 1 Salaries and Wages**

On this line, enter compensation, fees, salaries, and wages paid to officers, directors, trustees, and full-time employees. An attached schedule may be required showing client wages or other included in the aggregations.

### **Line 2 Employee Benefits & Payroll Taxes**

Enter (a) the institution's contributions to pension plans and to employee benefit programs such as health, life, and disability insurance; and (b) the institution's portion of payroll taxes such as social security and Medicare taxes and unemployment and workers' compensation insurance. An attached schedule may be required showing client benefits and taxes or other included in the aggregations.

### **Line 4 Professional Fees**

Enter the organization's fees to outside professionals, consultants, and personal-service contractors. (A detailed description is required in the Grant Budget Line-Item Detail if this line-item is funded.)

### **Line 5 Supplies**

Enter the organization's expenses for office supplies, food and beverages, and other supplies. An attached schedule may be required showing food expenses or other details included in the aggregations.

### **Line 6 Telephone**

Enter the institution's expenses for telephone, cellular phones, FAX, E-mail, telephone equipment maintenance, and other related expenses.

### **Line 7 Postage and Shipping**

Enter the institution's expenses for postage, messenger services, overnight delivery, outside mailing service fees, freight and trucking, and maintenance of delivery and shipping vehicles.

### **Line 9 Equipment Rental and Maintenance**

Enter the institution's expenses for renting and maintaining computers, copiers, postage meters, and other office equipment used exclusively for this grant initiative.

### **Line 10 Printing and Publications**

Enter the institution's expenses for producing printed materials (not including posters, advertising, and other marketing materials), purchasing books and publications, and buying subscriptions to publications.

**Line 11 Travel**

Enter the institution's expenses for travel, including transportation, meals, lodging, and per diem payments.

**Line 12 Conferences and Meetings**

Enter the institution's expenses for conducting or attending meetings, conferences, and conventions. Include rental of facilities, speakers' fees and expenses, printed materials, and registration fees.

**Line 15 Grants and Awards**

Enter the institution's awards, grants, subsidies, and other pass-through expenditures to individuals and to other institutions, including travel and equipment allowances outside the institution (this includes WBL salary reimbursements). This classification includes items used in direct support of this initiative. (A detailed description is required in the Grant Budget Line-Item Detail if this line-item is funded.)

**Line 18 Other Non-personnel Expenses**

Enter the institution's allowable expenses for advertising, the institution's and employees' membership dues in associations and professional societies and licenses, permits, registrations, and testing fees.

**Line 19 Capital Purchases**

Enter the organization's purchases of fixed assets and purchases with a minimum life expectancy of one year. Include land, equipment, buildings, leasehold improvements, and other fixed assets.

**Line 22 Indirect Costs**

This amount is intended to cover costs associated with administrative functions including providing the required project reports, financial information, and information to support project evaluation. Not to exceed eight percent of the total budget.

**Line 24 In-Kind Expenses**

This amount is for reporting the value of contributed resources applied to the

program. Approval and reporting guidelines for in-kind contributions will be specified by those contracting state agencies who allow their use toward earning grant funds.

**Line 25 Total Expenses**

Total Direct and Administrative Expenses, and Line 24, In-kind Expenses, goes on this line.

## APPENDIX C: Scoring Rubric

### Evaluation Guidelines

For each section, rubrics will be reviewed to determine which criteria have been addressed in the proposal and points will be assigned accordingly. For criteria with ranges, reviewers will select the statement that most closely aligns with the information provided in the proposal and award a score in the stated range. Criteria with set points are awarded on whether they are addressed in the proposal or not.

Each **essential component** of the proposal will be reviewed to determine which criteria have been addressed and points will be assigned accordingly. For **evaluation criteria** with ranges, reviewers will select the statement that most closely aligns with the information provided in the proposal and awards a score within the stated range. For **evaluation criteria** with set points, reviewers will award points for evaluation criteria that are clearly addressed in the proposal.

### Section 1: Program Narrative (5 points)

Successful proposals will provide a brief narrative describing how the proposed program will identify and address resource gaps and clearly identify any specific strategies that will be employed. This section should also demonstrate how military-connected students will be directly served by the proposed strategies

Essential Component: *Brief narrative of the proposed project.* Provide a clear and concise overview of the proposed project, identifying resource gaps and detailing specific strategies employed to address them. This section must demonstrate how military-connected students will benefit directly from the proposed strategies.

(5 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not provide a clear and concise overview of the proposed project. (0 points)
- Proposal is missing one or more of the following components: provides a clear and concise overview of the proposed project; proposal addresses resource gaps or clearly identify any specific strategies that will be employed; proposal demonstrates how military-connected students will be directly served by the strategy. (1-3 points)

- Proposal provides a clear and concise overview of the proposed project which identifies and addresses resource gaps and clearly identifies any specific strategies that will be employed. This section also demonstrates how military-connected students will be directly served by the strategy. (4-5 points)

## Section 2: Demonstration of Need (25 points)

Successful proposals will provide evidence of the need for the proposed project. Proposal will include a thorough overview of the proposed project and will align relevant mental health and well-being resources for military-connected students. Proposals must clearly describe the proposed project; any contracted services; and how the proposed strategies will address how the mental health and well-being resources will focus on quality of life, substance abuse, PTSD, anxiety, depression and other disorders.

Essential Component: *Demonstrating the need for action*. Using existing research, clearly identify current resource gaps on your campus, and explain how addressing these gaps will benefit military-connected students pursuing and completing their higher education. Research or data sources should focus on current or future needs related to mental health and well-being resources. (25 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not provide a demonstrated need or initiative to justify grant activities. (0 points)
- Proposal provides a demonstrated need or initiative to justify grant activities from at least **one** source (1-6 points)
- Proposal provides a demonstrated need or initiative to justify grant activities from at least **two** sources (7-12 points)
- Proposal provides a demonstrated need or initiative to justify grant activities from **three or more** sources (12-25 points)

## Section 3: Program Plan (25 Points)

Successful proposals will leverage research or data identified in Section 2 to provide a detailed description of the planned project including a timeline, objectives, and accountability plan.

Essential Component: *Detailed project timeline and overview.* Provide a quarterly overview of the critical activities, and actions that will comprise the development and implementation of the identified project. (15 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not include a project timeline or an overview of the planned activities. (0 points)
- Proposal is missing one of the two components: includes a detailed project timeline; or detailed overview of the planned activities. (1-5 points)
- Proposal includes a project timeline and an overview of the planned activities but lacks detail. (6-10 points)
- Proposal includes a detailed project timeline with a quarterly overview of activities, critical meetings, and actions that will comprise the development and implementation of the project. (11-15 points)

Essential Component: *Identify key objectives for each phase of the project and describe how they will be measured.* Proposal must detail the metrics to be used to continuously track the project and associate student outcomes. (5 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not identify key objectives for each phase of the project. (0 points)
- Proposal identifies measurable objectives for each phase of the project but does not demonstrate alignment with student outcomes. (1-3 points)
- Proposal includes measurable objectives for each phase of the project that clearly align with student outcomes. (4-5 points)

Essential Component: *Project governance and accountability plan.* Clearly outline the plan for grant management, meetings, and decision-making structure, and identify a project director who will maintain oversight throughout the project period. (5 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- A project plan is not presented. (0 points)
- A project plan is presented but lacks sufficient details for governance, meetings, decision-making structure and who will maintain oversight of the

- project. (1-3 points)
- A project plan is presented and includes sufficient details for governance, meetings, decision-making structure and clearly articulates who will maintain oversight of the project. (4-5 points)

#### **Section 4: Sustainability (15 Points)**

Successful proposals will include a commitment and detailed plan for sustaining grant activities beyond the 24-month grant period. *If the proposal includes contracted services*, a detailed plan including the availability of long-term resources for maintenance or updates is included.

Essential Component: *Detailed plan for sustaining the program beyond the 24-month funding period*. Describe how the work supported by this grant will continue beyond the grant period and outline the roles and responsibilities thereafter. *If the proposal includes contracted services*, proposals need to provide a detailed description of long-term resources available to support student success. (15 points)

**Please note, securing another grant is not an acceptable sustainability plan.**

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not include a sustainability plan, **or** the proposed sustainability plan involves securing other grant funding. (0 points)
- Sustainability plan is incomplete and/or impractical, given the scope of the project. (1-4 points)
- Proposal includes a plan for sustaining the program after the grant period but lacks sufficient detail outlining roles and responsibilities. (5-9 points)
- Proposal includes a detailed plan for sustaining the program beyond the grant period that outlines the roles and responsibilities. (10-15 points)

#### **Section 5: Budget Plan (15 Points)**

Successful proposals will include a detailed financial plan and a complete budget using the template provided. Applicable "Grant Budget Line-Item Details" should be submitted **as a separate attachment with the completed budget** (see Appendix B).

Services purchased should provide resources that support students' success, retention, and completion. If the proposal seeks indirect costs, an explanation of any anticipated indirect costs associated with the implementation and

administration of the grant must be provided. Indirect costs are limited to eight percent (8%) of the total budget and dependent upon approval by THEC.

Subawards are not permitted.

Essential Component: *Clear alignment between funding requests and grant activities.* Proposals need to provide a detailed explanation of how each line item of the budget supports the goals and stated outcomes of the Veteran Initiatives Grant. Any proposals seeking contracted services need to include an explanation of how the services will be used specifically to address military-connected students' needs. All proposals need to describe in detail any anticipated indirect costs associated with the implementation and administration of the grant. (15 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Budget is not included. (0 points)
- Budget is incomplete and/or impractical, given the scope of the proposal. If required, the proposal does not include a description of any contracted services and/or an explanation of any anticipated indirect cost. (1-5 points)
- Budget lacks sufficient detail, but expenditures are practical given the scope of the proposal. If required, the proposal provides a description of any contracted services and/or an explanation of any anticipated indirect cost but does not provide sufficient detail. (6-10 points)
- Budget is complete and accurately reflected, with sufficient justifications and detail listed for each line item. If required, the proposal provides any contracted services and/or an explanation of any anticipated indirect cost. (11-15 points)

### **Section 6: Optional Criteria (Up to Fifteen Additional Points)**

Proposals may receive up to fifteen (15) additional points by incorporating a partnership (higher education, industry, local agency, or government agency, etc.) within the strategy. Partnerships must extend beyond mere contracted services, demonstrating a commitment to fostering ongoing relationships between the entities involved. While contracted services may be a part of the partnership, the plan should reflect a more comprehensive and sustainable collaboration. **The maximum points available under this section for any one proposal are capped at 15 points.**

Essential Component: *Detailed description of each partner's role and their capabilities in implementing the identified program.* Describe how each partner will carry out the grant project; provide a description of assigned tasks; and identify specific personnel and the roles they will play throughout the project. (10 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not include a partnership within the strategy (0 points)
- Proposal includes a partnership with the strategy but does not contain a detailed description of how each partner will carry out grant activities, roles, and assigned tasks throughout the project. (1-5 points)
- Proposal includes a partnership with the strategy and contains a detailed description of how each partner will carry out grant activities, roles, and assigned tasks throughout the project. (6-10 points)

Essential Component: *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining the partnership agreement(s).* Applicants must also submit a signed MOU with each partner outlining the benefits of the relationship. (5 points)

Evaluation Criteria:

- Proposal does not include a signed MOU outlining the partnership agreement. (0 points)
- Proposal includes a signed MOU outlining the partnership agreement(s) for each partner. (5 points)