



ND AGTECH
NSF AgTech Engine in North Dakota

GROW* Community Innovation Awards Overview

***Grassroots Rural Opportunities for Workforce**

Supporting Local AgTech Workforce Innovation Projects

Background

In 2024, the National Science Foundation recognized North Dakota's leadership potential in agriculture and technology by establishing the AgTech Engine in North Dakota. This transformative investment aims to accelerate agricultural technology adoption while strengthening rural economies and workforce opportunities.

As part of this initiative, eight Community Workforce Partnership (CWP) sessions were held across the state from December 2024 to March 2025, gathering input from more than 220 participants across 44 counties. These sessions surfaced **critical workforce priorities and community needs**, including:

- Building AgTech talent through education and skill development
- Strengthening rural communities that support workforce growth
- Reimagining agriculture to inspire the next generation

Building on the successful pilot launched in Year 2 (2025/26) of the NSF AgTech Engine, the GROW (Grassroots Rural Opportunities for Workforce) Community Innovation Awards continue to invest in community-driven workforce innovation across North Dakota. In the inaugural funding round, 10 projects were awarded more than \$40,000 to support AgTech education, career pathway development, work-based learning, and workforce-ready communities.

For this round, Year 3 (2026/27), the NSF AgTech Engine will award **up to \$50,000** in GROW Community Innovation Awards. Individual awards of **up to \$7,500** will support locally led, high-impact projects that align with Community Workforce Partnership priorities and advance the AgTech Engine's workforce focus areas. The goal remains to fund quality projects throughout North Dakota's eight economic development regions; however, funds may be reallocated based on proposal volume and quality.

Purpose

The NSF AgTech Engine: GROW Community Innovation Awards are intended to initiate short-term, community-led projects that strengthen North Dakota's AgTech workforce and address workforce needs.

Projects must:

- Align with at least one CWP recommendation (see Focus Areas below)
- Demonstrate community leadership and collaboration
- Produce outcomes and lessons that can be shared and scaled across regions

Building on Success

During the inaugural GROW Community Innovation Awards (2025), 10 projects were funded across five economic development regions, supporting initiatives ranging from precision agriculture and AI education to workforce training, educator resources, youth engagement, and career pathway development. The Year 3 GROW Awards build on this momentum by expanding available funding and encouraging communities to continue developing innovative solutions that strengthen North Dakota's AgTech workforce.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include geographic communities/government entities (e.g., towns, counties, regions), non-profits, as well as communities of practice (e.g., educators, organizations, groups, industry) who are motivated to build AgTech workforce capacity.

Focus Areas

Projects must connect to at least one of the following focus areas which are connected to the Community Workforce Partnership priorities:

AgTech Education & Workforce Preparation

Projects that expand access to AgTech education and prepare learners of all ages for careers in modern agriculture.

- *Examples include:* K-12 programs, higher education, Extension, community-based learning, educator professional development, career exploration, dual credit, certifications, stackable credentials, and pathway development.

Applied Learning & Industry Partnerships

Projects that provide hands-on learning experiences and strengthen partnerships between education, employers, and industry.

- *Examples include:* internships, apprenticeships, educator externships, job shadows, mentorships, employer engagement, industry tours, work-based learning, and projects that align education and training with AgTech workforce needs.

AgTech Workforce-Ready Communities

Projects that strengthen a community's ability to attract, prepare, support, and retain an AgTech workforce.

- *Examples include:* community assessments, leadership development, employer engagement, workforce planning, or other related retention/attraction projects.

AgTech Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Knowledge Sharing

Projects that encourage innovation, entrepreneurship, technology adoption, and knowledge sharing to strengthen North Dakota's AgTech ecosystem.

- *Examples include:* AgTech demonstrations, producer or student innovation projects, entrepreneurship education, innovation challenges, startup support, peer learning, storytelling, and projects that develop and share replicable models and promising practices.

Alignment to NSF AgTech Engine Outcomes

Projects should also align with the broader AgTech Engine Outcomes:

- **Engage** – Connect experts and communities to address local workforce needs
- **Identify** – Pinpoint priorities for AgTech workforce and community growth
- **Implement** – Carry out projects with clear goals and trackable outcomes
- **Scale** – Share lessons learned to expand impact across rural communities

Eligible Project Use of Funds & Requirements

Funding through the NSF AgTech Engine: GROW (Grassroots Rural Opportunities for Workforce)

Community Innovation Awards is intended to support small-scale, community-led innovation pilots that create actionable insights, build momentum, and can be shared and expanded in other communities. **Awards are reimbursement based.**

Eligible expenses may include:

- Supplies, materials, or equipment directly connected to the proposed project
- Costs for hosting community engagement, education, or outreach activities
- Curriculum, materials, translation, or resource development connected to AgTech workforce advancement
- Local travel directly required to carry out the project activity.

Non-allowable expenses / not eligible for reimbursement:

- Personnel, wages, or salary costs for organizational staff
- General operating expenses not tied directly to the project
- Lobbying or political engagement activities
- Pre-award costs or expenses incurred prior to the official award period
- Capital construction or major infrastructure
- Cash awards/prizes not directly tied to outcomes

Reimbursement Requirements:

- All costs must be reasonable, allocable, necessary, and tied directly to the approved project activities.
- Itemized receipts will be required for all reimbursement requests.
- Reimbursement will not exceed the total award amount approved.
- A final outcomes report is required.

Timeline & Key Dates[^]

	Dates
Application Window	July 22 – September 4, 2026
Award Notifications	By September 15, 2026
Project Implementation Period*	September 16, 2026 – February 5, 2027 (award activity needs to be complete February 5, 2027)
Final Reimbursement Requests and Outcomes Report Due	No later than February 12, 2027

[^]Projects must be completed within the implementation period, and all reimbursement documentation must be submitted within the required timeline.

Grant Parameters

- **Total Funding Available:** Up to \$50,000
- **Award Amounts:** Up to \$7,500 per project

Project Period: September 16, 2026 – February 5, 2027

Reporting Requirements:

Award recipients will be required to submit:

- Brief Final Outcomes Report (*template will be provided*)
- Final invoice(s)
- Itemized receipts supporting all reimbursement requests/invoice(s)
- Any supporting photos or videos (*encouraged*)

Final reimbursement documentation must be submitted by February 12, 2027.

Application Process

- Applicants **MUST** complete this proposal form: [LINK TO PROPOSAL FORM & Budget](https://fmwfcchamber.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6nTQe32fKKDPSUC)
https://fmwfcchamber.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6nTQe32fKKDPSUC
 - An application planning worksheet is provided; all applications need to be submitted online
- Applicants must complete the online proposal form and submit a project budget (maximum request: **\$7,500**).
- Only proposals connected to at least one Community Workforce Partnership priority and aligned with the AgTech Engine workforce outcomes will be considered.
- An application planning worksheet is provided; all applications need to be submitted online

Questions and Contact

Interested individuals should contact Carmel Miller, NDSU Extension – Workforce Coordinator, at 701.426.9460 or via email at Carmel.Miller@ndsu.edu or Jane Vangsness Frisch, FMWF Chamber/NSF Workforce Workstream Lead at 701.866.0231 or jvfrisch@fmwfcchamber.com for more information or specific questions about the 2026 GROW Community Innovation Awards.