



**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
SPONSORED PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2026

A New Era of Excellence in Research Administration

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 = FY26 EKU RESEARCH FELLOW

FY26 SPRA BY THE NUMBERS...



\$5,371,875

Total Sponsored Funding



\$801,992

Total Sponsored Research Funding



89

Proposals Submitted



44

Research Proposals Submitted



51

New Awards



180

Human Subjects Research Protocols



17

UFS Internal Awards



30

UFS Faculty Proposals



58

Student Research Internal Awards

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ON THE COVER...

Dr. Smita Joshi (*EKU Biological Sciences*) collaborates with a student research assistant in the laboratory

(Photo courtesy of *EKU Communication and Brand Management*)

EKU

THE PAST AS A PROLOGUE...

The Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration at Eastern Kentucky University is pleased to present the fiscal year 2026 annual report. This report highlights the achievements, growth, and impact of the university's sponsored program and research ecosystem over the past year. FY26 marked the beginning of a new era in sponsored programs administration at the university with a new investment in research. As ECU President David McFaddin noted...

"As the School of Opportunity, we have a responsibility to invest in ideas and people who drive innovation and discovery. The significant increase in faculty research funding reflects our commitment to providing opportunities for our students, strengthening our impact across the Commonwealth, and building momentum for excellence in research."

The new investment has brought new opportunities for faculty and students, new SPRA staff to work collaboratively with university faculty and staff, and enhanced policies and procedures to more effectively secure external funding and steward those resources responsibly. However, in looking to the future, it's important to reflect on the past to recognize progress, identify patterns, and cultivate gratitude. It's been said that *"a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots."*

The history of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University began in the mid-1970's at the ECU Million House under the guidance of Evans Tracy, who held the position until 1993. The office handled both grants/contracts and gifts. Consequently, a separate office called Grants & Contracts was formed in 1985, separate from the development office and Mr. Tracy was named its first director. Mrs. Donna Masters became the second Director in 1993 and held that position until 2000; she was preceded by Scott Tracy and then Gus Benson in 2004.

In 2005, Dr. Gerald "Jerry" Pogatshnik was hired by President Joanne Glasser as ECU's first Associate Vice President for Graduate Education and Research. In 2005, Dr. Tiffany Hamblin was hired and served as an Associate Director. After directing the operations of the office for more than twenty years, Gus and Tiffany both retired in 2025. Sponsored Programs moved from the Million House to the 4th floor of the Jones Building in 2008, where it currently remains.

...CATALYZING THE NEXT CHAPTER

In 2020, Dr. Pogatshnik was appointed EKU's Provost and the office moved under the leadership of Dr. Tom Martin from 2020-2022. When Dr. Martin became the Dean of the College of Business in 2022, Dr. Ryan Baggett, Dean of the Graduate School and Research Administration was appointed the Authorized Organizational Representative in charge of Sponsored Programs. In July 2025, Dr. Anne Cizmar was hired as EKU's first Associate Dean of Research Administration and Mrs. Melissa Gross was hired as the sixth Director of Sponsored Programs in November 2025.

As we reflect on the past, we ensure that the future is shaped by lessons learned over its fifty years of operation. We are committed to maximizing the research investment that has been made by Eastern Kentucky University, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, the federal government, and other entities. Despite the headwinds that are encountered, our Primarily Undergraduate Institution and Emerging Research Institution is propelled by our mission, vision, and values. From these, we will ensure that a culture of innovation, collaboration, and integrity remains our focus.

Please join us in celebrating the faculty, staff, and students whose efforts are represented in this report. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve those willing to invest their time and expertise in securing financial resources to support EKU's transformational work.


RYAN BAGGETT, ED.D.

*Dean of Graduate Education &
Research Administration*


ANNE CIZMAR, PH.D.

*Associate Dean of
Research Administration*



MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

MISSION:

In supporting the Eastern Kentucky University strategic priorities of knowledge, innovation, and transformation, the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration provides responsive and collaborative service to increase sponsored funding and the subsequent responsible stewardship of awards.

VISION:

By fostering an environment of research excellence that is grounded in collaboration, ethics, and financial responsibility, the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration will support a culture of discovery and innovation that transforms society.

VALUES:

Accountability: Working within the highest ethical and professional standards, transparency, responsiveness, and usefulness

Consistency: Providing reliable and uniform service

Collaboration: Forming alliances and partnerships with an array of people, organizations, and associations to increase outcomes and sustainable impact

Excellence: Believing in lifelong learning and striving for continuous improvement

Respect: Valuing and acknowledging the ideas, backgrounds, and experiences of others

ADVANCE THE EKU RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

Eastern Kentucky University will advance its research enterprise through sustained investment in faculty scholarship, graduate education, sponsored research, research infrastructure, and strategic partnerships. Building upon recent institutional momentum, the University will strengthen its capacity to secure external funding, expand scholarly productivity, increase student engagement in research, and elevate EKU's reputation as a regional leader in applied research and innovation.

Research and scholarship enrich teaching and learning, support student success, attract and retain high-quality faculty, strengthen graduate education, and contribute to Kentucky's workforce and economic development. Sustaining and expanding this impact will require thoughtful investment in institutional capacity, faculty support, technology, and strategic partnerships.

Strategic Context

EKU has established a stronger organizational foundation for research and graduate education. The next phase of institutional advancement will require translating that foundation into sustained institutional growth by investing strategically in faculty scholarship, sponsored research, graduate education, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Success should not only be measured by external funding, but also by the broader impact of scholarship on students, communities, workforce development, and institutional reputation and influence.

Strategic Priority 1 – Build a High-Performing Research Enterprise

Objective: Strengthen the organizational capacity, infrastructure, and support services necessary to sustain long-term growth.

Key Initiatives:

- Expand proposal development and pre-award support through process, people, and technology.
- Strengthen post-award administration, compliance, and stewardship.
- Enhance research analytics and performance reporting.
- Continue strengthening Graduate Education and Research Administration as the University's coordinating organization for research and graduate education.
- Establish a university Research Advisory Council.
- Develop a Faculty Research Fellowship program and faculty mentoring opportunities.
- Establish a monthly research seminar for faculty.

ADVANCE THE EKU RESEARCH ENTERPRISE

Strategic Priority 2 – Increase Sponsored Research and Scholarly Productivity

Objective: Expand externally sponsored research, faculty scholarship, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Key Initiatives:

- Increase competitive internal seed funding.
- Expand individualized proposal development support.
- Establish a summer faculty professional development program for research and grants administration.
- Develop a faculty publication support program to increase the visibility of faculty scholarship.
- Strengthen mentoring for emerging investigators.
- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Expand partnerships with government, industry, health care, and foundations.
- Leverage artificial intelligence to support appropriate research activities while promoting responsible institutional use.

Strategic Priority 3 – Increase Research Impact and Institutional Reputation

Objective: Increase the visibility, influence, and public value of EKU scholarship.

Key Initiatives:

- Expand undergraduate and graduate student participation in research.
- Increase dissemination of faculty scholarship.
- Strengthen partnerships supporting health care, biomedical sciences, workforce development, education, and regional economic development.
- Pursue interdisciplinary initiatives as well as collaboration with other institutions of higher education.
- Increase national recognition of EKU scholarship.
- Increase internal recognition of EKU scholarship with programs such as the EKU's President's Excellence Award and the Annual Research Showcase.

MEASURING THE ACHIEVEMENT

FY26 PERFORMANCE METRICS

FY26 PERFORMANCE METRICS:



1) ECU SPRA will assist in the development and submission of 10% more proposals (88) for external funding in FY26 as compared to FY25 (80).

Metric Source: SPRA Internal



2) ECU SPRA will assist in the development and submission of 25% more research proposals (36) for external funding in FY26 as compared to FY25 (29).

Metric Source: ECU Annual Report Goal



3) ECU SPRA will lead the institution in receiving \$6,150,000 in external funding in FY26.

Metric Source: ECU Excellence Scorecard



4) ECU SPRA will lead the institution in receiving \$650,000 in external research funding in FY26.

Metric Source: ECU Excellence Scorecard



5) ECU SPRA will increase the number of human subjects research protocols in FY26 as compared to the number of protocols processed in FY25 (176).

Metric Source: SPRA Internal



6) ECU SPRA will lead the enhancement of the University Funded Scholarship initiative and focus on doubling the number of faculty proposals in FY26 (12) as compared to FY25 (6).

Metric Source: SPRA Internal



7) Through the Student Research and Creative Endeavors Initiative, ECU SPRA will award double the number of awards in FY26 (32) than what was awarded in FY25 (16)

Metric Source: SPRA Internal

FY26 RESULT:

89 Proposals were submitted in FY26

44 Research Proposals were submitted in FY26

\$5,371,875 in total institutional sponsored funding was earned in FY26

\$801,992 in institutional research funding was earned in FY26

180 human subject research protocols were reviewed in FY26

30 UFS proposals were received over two competitions in FY26

58 SRCE awards were disseminated in FY26

FY26 STATISTICS

PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

During FY26, a total of **89** proposals were submitted on behalf of EKU's faculty and staff. Figure One displays a breakdown of the number of proposal submissions by quarter, while Figure Two shows the number of proposals submitted by source. Finally, Figure Three illustrates the proposal amounts requested by quarter, and Figure Four displays the number of proposals submitted by EKU Unit.

Figure One: Proposal Submissions by Quarter

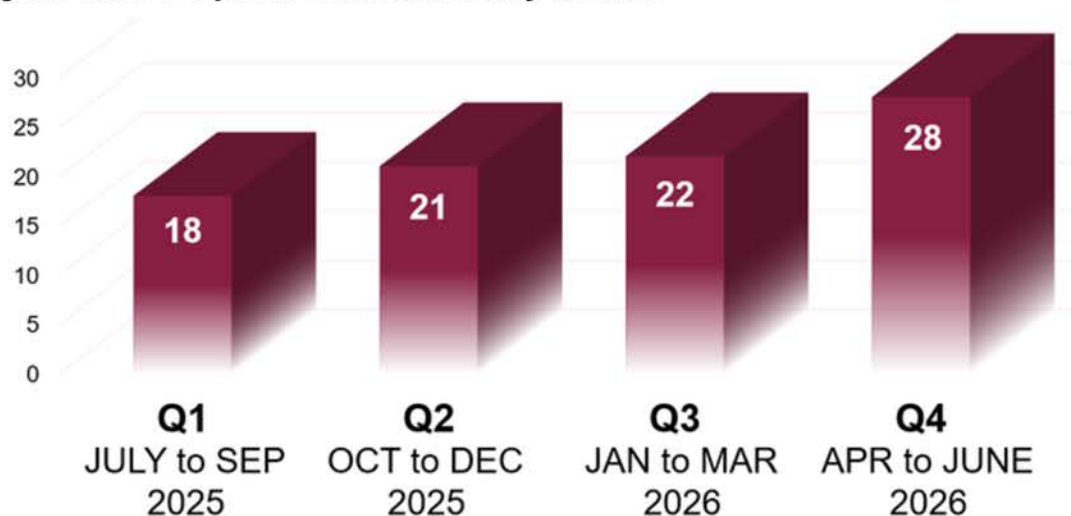
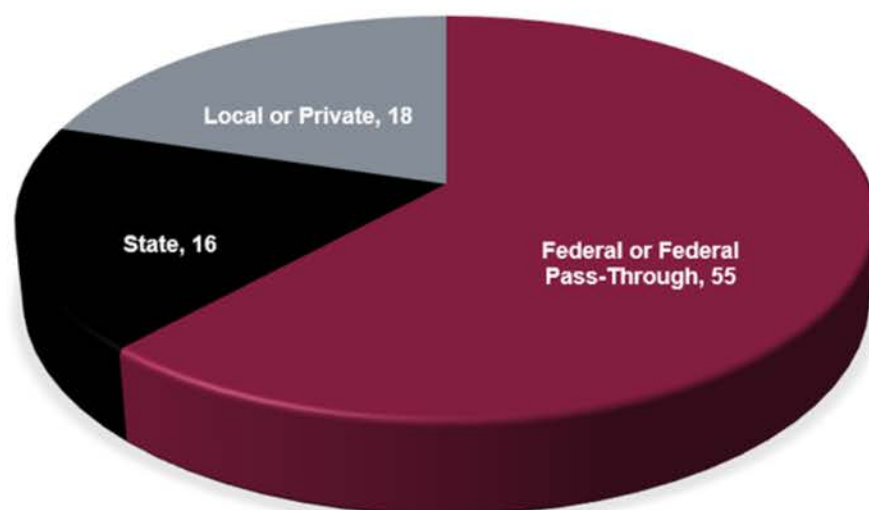


Figure Two: Proposal Submissions by Source



FY26 STATISTICS

PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

Figure Three: Proposal Requested Funding Amounts by Quarter

\$17,321,623 was requested in FY26 through the 89 proposals. That amount is broken down by quarter below:

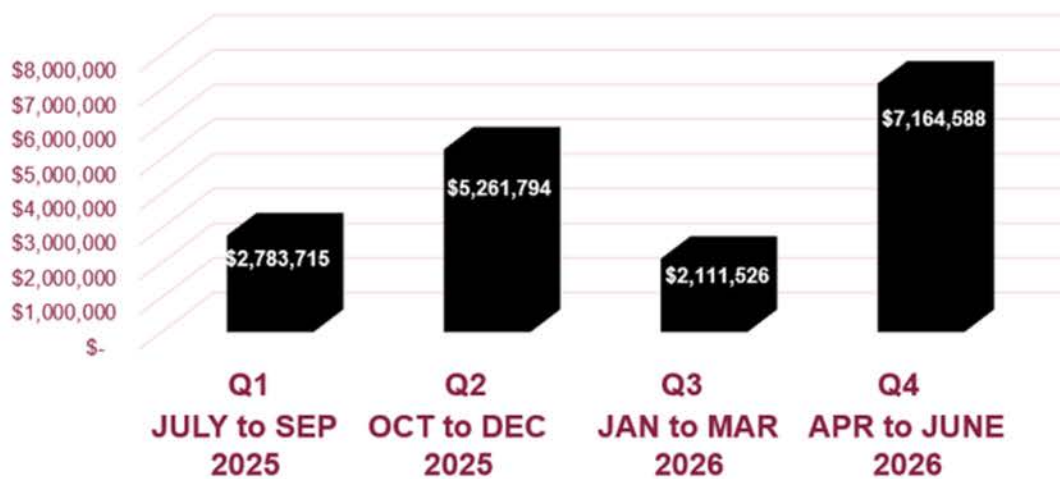
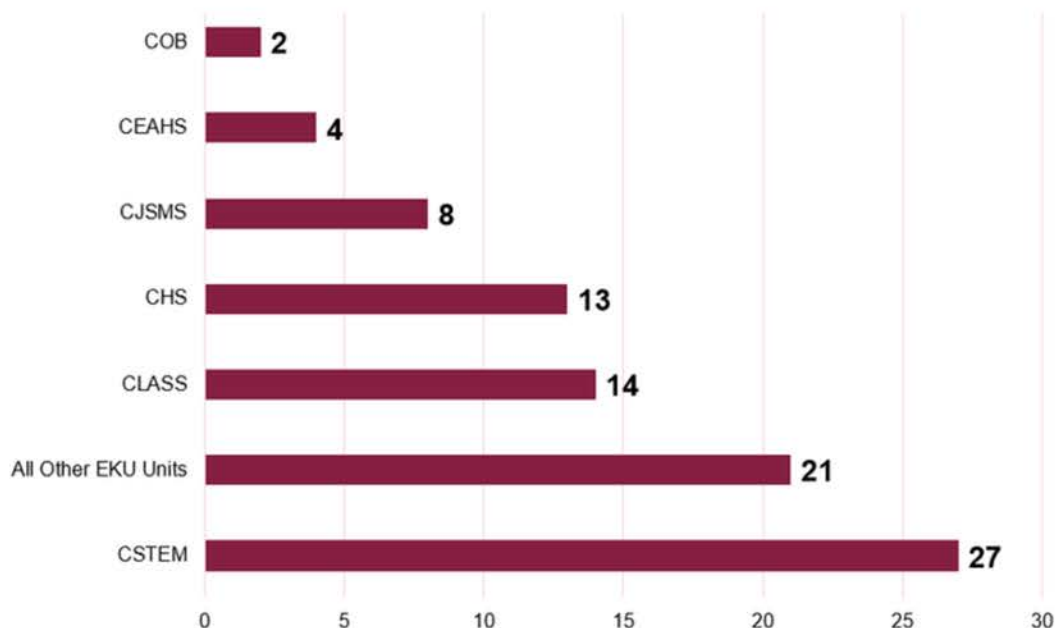


Figure Four: Proposal Submissions by ECU Colleges



FY26 STATISTICS

EXTERNALLY SPONSORED FUNDING

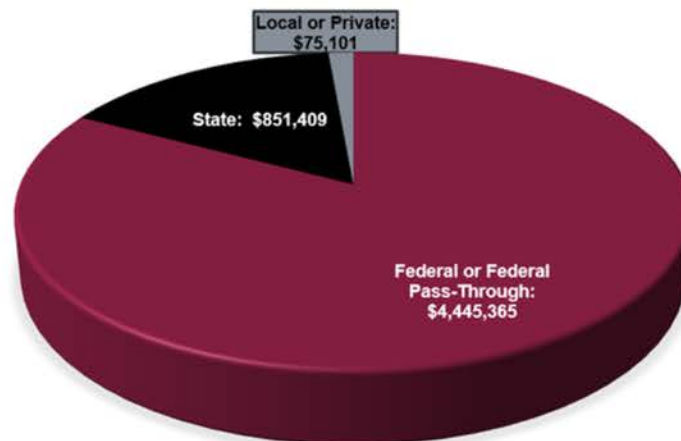
ALL CATEGORIES

In FY26, Eastern Kentucky University earned a total of **\$5,371,875** in sponsored funding. Sponsored funding refers to financial support from external organizations—such as *government agencies, corporations, or foundations*—given under a formal legal agreement to carry out specific research, training, or public service activity. Below, Figure Five identifies the amount earned by quarter while Figure Six looks at the sources of the \$5.37M.

Figure Five: Amount of Sponsored Funding by Quarter



Figure Six: Funding by Source of Funds



FY26 STATISTICS

EXTERNALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH FUNDING

In FY26, of the \$5.37M noted on the previous page, **\$802K** was earned in sponsored **research** funding. At a university, sponsored research funding generally focuses on expanding knowledge (basic), addressing a specific problem (applied), or using research findings to create or improve processes, products, or services (development). Below, Figure Seven identifies the amount of research funding by quarter while Figure Eight overviews the amount of research funding by ECU academic college.

Figure Seven: Amount of Sponsored Research Funding by Quarter

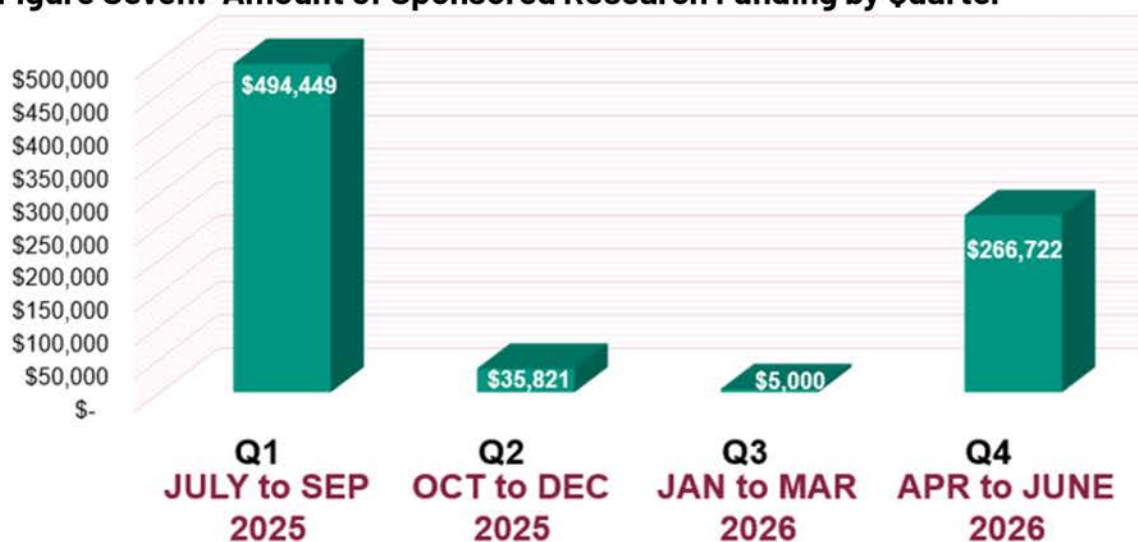
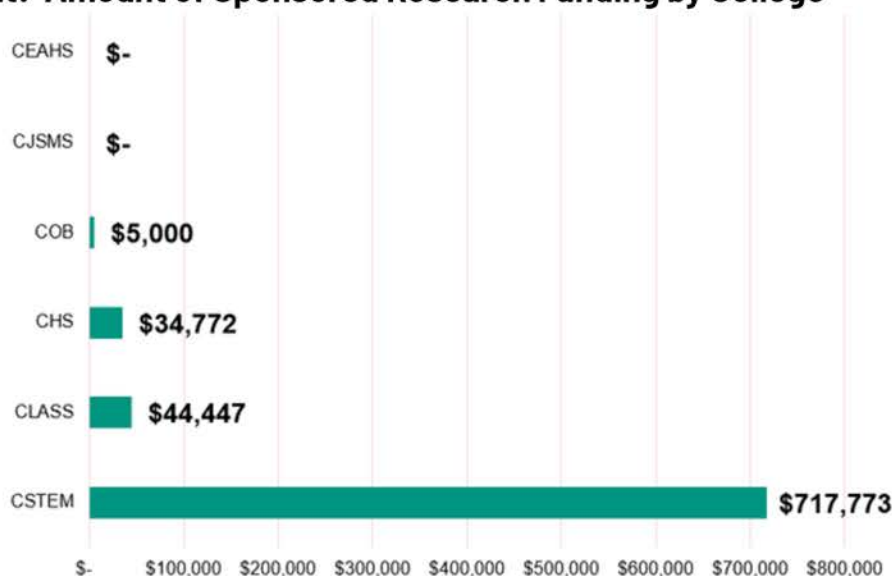


Figure Eight: Amount of Sponsored Research Funding by College

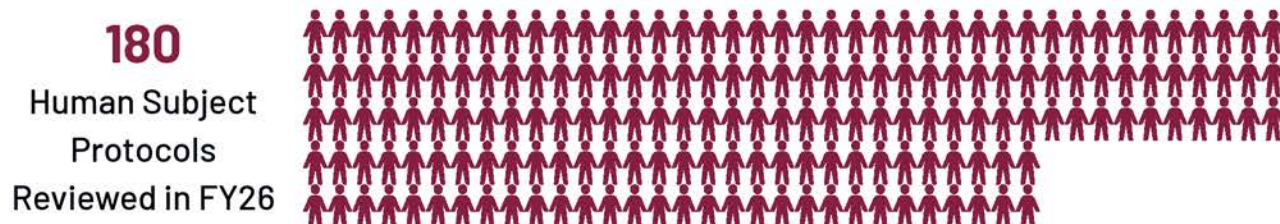


FY26 STATISTICS

HUMAN AND ANIMAL SUBJECTS

The Research Integrity and Compliance arm is designed to protect subjects (*human and animal*), ensure ethical research conduct, maintain regulatory compliance, protect institutional reputation, and preserve research funding.

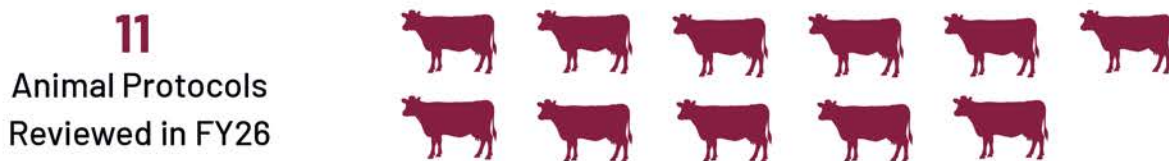
Figure Nine: FY26 Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Protocols



Before research involving human participants can begin at ECU, the Institutional Review Board must review and approve the human subjects protocols. These protocols are in place to protect the rights, welfare, privacy, and safety of participants.

Review Type:	1 July to 30 Sep 2025	1 OCT to 31 DEC 2025	1 JAN to 31 MAR 2026	1 APR to 30 JUNE 2026	TOTALS:
Exempt	12	30	42	46	130
Expedited	10	11	15	14	50
Full	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS:	22	41	57	60	180

Figure Ten: FY26 Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Animal Protocols



Animal protocols are formal research plans that describe how animals will be used in research, teaching, or testing activities. Before a researcher can begin work with vertebrate animals, the protocol must typically be reviewed and approved by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to ensure that animal welfare standards and regulatory requirements are met.



FY 2026 PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



Dr. Jason Fry, *Associate Professor*

Department of Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy (CSTEM)

"EKU Professor Secures Over \$1M to Expand Student Research Opportunities"

16



Dr. Michelyn Bhandari, *Professor &*

Dr. Heather Tudor, *Associate Professor*

College of Health Sciences

"EKU Public Health Leads Evaluation of Kentucky Lung Cancer Screening Program"

18



Dr. Smita Joshi, *Assistant Professor*

Department of Biological Sciences (CSTEM)

"EKU Researcher Explores Natural Alternatives for Cardiovascular Treatment"

20



Dr. Valerie Peters, *Associate Professor*

Department of Biological Sciences (CSTEM)

"EKU Researcher Leads Global Bee Conservation Efforts"

22



Dr. Shijin Kozhumal, *Associate Professor &*

Dr. Greg Gorbett, *Professor*

Department of Fire Protection and Paramedicine Science (CJSMS)

"EKU Awarded Grant for Fire Investigation Research"

24



Dr. Jason Marion, *Professor*

Department of Environmental Health Sciences (CHS)

"From Creek to Community: ECU Research Tracks Water Quality"

26



EKU TRIO Programs (U.S. Department of Education)

"Preparing the Next Generation of Scholars"

28



EKU PROFESSOR SECURES OVER \$1M TO EXPAND STUDENT RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Article courtesy of ECU Communication and Brand Management

Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Associate Professor Dr. Jason Fry has secured more than \$1 million in research funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), allowing students to gain hands-on experience in physics research at EKU and laboratories around the world.

“When students come to EKU, they have opportunities to work alongside renowned faculty in state-of-the-art labs on groundbreaking research projects,” said EKU President David McFaddin. “From our campus to international laboratories, these discoveries spark curiosity, fuel innovation, and expand EKU’s reach as the School of Opportunity.”

In EKU’s Department of Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy, Fry leads the Nuclear and Particle Physics Detector Lab. His work focuses on neutron decay, a fundamental process that helps scientists understand the building blocks of the universe. While the research takes place on a small scale, it has implications as vast as galaxy formation.

Over the last five years, Fry has secured more than \$800,000 in NSF research funding as a principal investigator, with an additional \$300,000 as a co-principal investigator. Grants such as RUI: Testing Fundamental Symmetries in Neutron Beta Decay and LEAPS-MPS: Precision Measurements of Neutron Beta Decay support students in building and testing equipment, analyzing data, and collaborating with scientists at national labs. Another award, the IRES Track I: Neutron Optics Parity and Time Violation Experiment in Japan, funds a 10-week international research experience for EKU undergraduates at Nagoya University.



"The main impact of all this funding is to help students," said Fry. "I came to ECU because I wanted to create opportunities for students that didn't exist here before."

Students in Fry's lab are directly involved in projects with national significance. From developing particle physics detectors and computing systems to presenting at conferences, ECU undergraduates gain résumé-building experiences and expand their professional networks. Students have the opportunity to travel to Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), a federally funded research center in Tennessee, and participate in international collaborations.

"We can actually tell students that they'll have the chance to work on projects at national labs and even travel abroad to study fundamental science," said Fry. "That brings a whole new meaning to what it means to be the School of Opportunity."

Jasmine Shim, a senior physics major from San Francisco, is one of the students working in Fry's lab, where she has been timing energy calibrations for a larger project at ORNL. She believes the department has been incredibly welcoming, especially Fry, who she says takes time to build relationships with his students.

"Once I met Dr. Fry, the opportunities were endless," said Shim. "It's an honor to work with him, because he truly cares about our education and being the next generation in the research industry. I'm not surprised he has secured that much funding, because he's a pioneer in the field."

Shim was selected as the undergraduate representative for the ECU Research Advisory Council (ERAC), a council that guides the university's research efforts. She's excited to use her role to help cultivate stronger research programs for all students.



EKU PUBLIC HEALTH LEADS EVALUATION OF KENTUCKY LUNG CANCER SCREENING PROGRAM

Article courtesy of ECU Communication and Brand Management

More Kentuckians screened. Lung cancer detected earlier. Longer, healthier lives. Put simply, that's the goal of a research project in Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) College of Health Sciences.

November is Lung Cancer Awareness Month, which puts the spotlight on the prevention and education measures being implemented across the country. Kentucky has the highest incidence and mortality rates of lung cancer in the country, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. To help address the crisis, Kentucky became one of the first states in the country to pass legislation establishing a screening program in 2022. The Kentucky Lung Cancer Screening Program (KLCSP) strives to increase lung cancer screening, reducing morbidity and reducing cost.

EKU plays a crucial role in this state-led effort with EKU Associate Dean and Professor of Public Health, Dr. Michelyn Wilson Bhandari, along with Associate Chair and Associate Professor Dr. Heather Tudor and Assistant Professor Dr. Brittani Moberly, conducting externally funded research to evaluate the KLCSP.

"Our goal is to provide clear, actionable information that tells the story of the program—its successes and its impact toward the program's aims," said Bhandari, lead researcher on the project. "Specifically, we aim to deliver an annual evaluation report, refine the evaluation plan as needed and support KLCSP."

The research project helps KLCSP find answers to several questions related to lung cancer screening in the Commonwealth.



"We're working hand-in-hand with state partners to address the most pressing issues facing Kentuckians," said ECU President David McFaddin. "From providing educated and trained graduates for the workforce to conducting research on critical healthcare topics, ECU is improving the quality of life in our communities at every turn."

With funding of more than \$74,000 over two years, the team at ECU looks at ways the KLCSP can improve the screening process across the state through questions regarding efforts to reduce lung cancer mortality over time and detection rates of early-stage lung cancers compared to late-stage cases.

"Progress on these questions has direct implications for lives saved and for healthcare costs," said Bhandari. "We want to see our recommendations adopted to improve the program's effectiveness."

With preliminary results, researchers on the project already make informed suggestions for the program, such as expanded targeted outreach, especially in rural areas.

In addition to making an impact at the state and community level, this research also helps ECU build stronger partnerships and establishes the school as a health evaluation resource for the state.

"It positions ECU's College of Health Sciences as a trusted statewide partner for rigorous, actionable public-health evaluation—showcasing ECU's capacity to design evaluation plans, analyze data, and translate findings into program improvements for Kentuckians," said Bhandari. Students in ECU's College of Health Sciences work hand-in-hand with faculty researchers and apply their learning throughout communities. In programs like Public Health, Healthcare Administration, and others, ECU students gain valuable experience while preparing for impactful careers to make a difference in the Commonwealth.



EKU RESEARCHER EXPLORES NATURAL ALTERNATIVES FOR CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE TREATMENT

Article courtesy of EKU Communication and Brand Management

In a state where heart disease remains a leading health challenge, an Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) researcher is turning to natural alternatives for affordable, effective treatment.

“At EKU, we are innovating solutions to common concerns in many areas of healthcare,” said EKU President David McFaddin. “Our faculty and our reputable healthcare programs provide qualified graduates for the healthcare workforce and help to improve health outcomes for Kentuckians.”

Kentucky currently ranks 48th in the United States for cardiovascular disease, with nearly 13% of the adult population living with a history of heart attack or stroke, according to America’s Health Rankings. EKU Assistant Professor of Biological Sciences, Dr. Smita Joshi, examines the role of platelets in cardiovascular disease and thrombosis.

“Think of platelets as the body’s ‘first responders’ to an injury,” said Joshi. “When they work correctly, they stop bleeding. When they become hyperactive, they form dangerous clots, called thrombosis, that block blood flow.”

Though some current blood thinners can prevent these clots, Joshi said they can be expensive and still carry a risk of spontaneous, dangerous bleeding. Joshi’s research aims to determine whether compounds found in common dietary sources like ginger and garlic can offer a safer, more affordable alternative without disrupting the body’s natural safety mechanisms.

To achieve this goal, Joshi uses an approach similar to how medicines are identified in the pharmaceutical industry.



"We start at the molecular level, identifying how specific compounds bind to platelet receptors," she said. "We then move to functional tests, checking combinations where two compounds—like a specific extract from garlic and ginger—work more effectively together than alone."

Joshi says the impact of this research is twofold, not only making necessary medications more affordable, but also making them safer. By developing blood clot therapies that are natural-product based, patients are given more cost-effective options for long-term preventative care. Additionally, healthcare professionals will have a better understanding of how supplements interact with common blood thinners.

"Our goal is to widen the therapeutic window for thrombosis treatment," said Joshi. Noting that the line between "preventing a clot" and "causing a bleed" can be dangerously thin, she said, "If we can prove that dietary compounds can achieve this balance, we establish a scientific basis for non-toxic, accessible preventive therapies."

Beyond the clinical potential for the treatment of thrombosis, Joshi's research also offers immediate benefits for current ECU pre-med students, allowing for hands-on training in a laboratory setting. In her lab, students learn advanced physiology and pharmacology techniques—important skills for future cardiovascular care and research.

"My goal is to build a nurturing research environment where ECU students feel excited to ask questions, take ownership of their projects, and contribute to meaningful discoveries," said Joshi. "I want my students to leave the lab feeling prepared for their future careers in healthcare and science."

Joshi's research is supported by the Kentucky IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (KY-INBRE) and conducted in collaboration with researchers at the University of Kentucky.



EKU RESEARCHER LEADS GLOBAL BEE CONSERVATION EFFORTS



Article courtesy of EKU Communication and Brand Management

20,000. That's the number of described bee species worldwide. In tropical Costa Rica, there are almost 700. And Kentucky is home to approximately 400 bee species, according to the Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves.

With these bees working as powerful pollinators to support crop production, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Associate Professor Dr. Valerie Peters focuses her research on bee conservation through plant diversity—determining which plants in Kentucky and tropical areas like Costa Rica support bee populations.

Peters received a National Science Foundation (NSF) Faculty Early Career Development Program (CAREER) grant to support her research, a multi-year award worth more than \$700,000. According to the NSF, the CAREER program “supports early-career faculty who have the potential to serve as academic role models in research and education and to lead advances in the mission of their department or organization.”

EKU President David McFaddin said, “As EKU’s first NSF CAREER grant recipient, Dr. Peters showcases excellence in research and the impact of EKU faculty on student learning experiences and within communities at home and far beyond Kentucky’s borders.”

Peters works with farmers in Kentucky and Costa Rica to study bee and plant interactions across environments, promote bee-friendly practices and help to protect farming businesses. Without bee pollination, many popular crops like bananas, coffee, and pineapples wouldn't be able to prosper.



"Farmers are usually interested in biodiversity conservation because of the importance of bees," Peters said. "They know that if they take conservation action, it could protect bee communities and benefit their livelihoods."

Connected with local groups by Earthwatch, Peters and her team look at bee activity in areas of research interest. She examines flowers to find out whether bees are active on the plant and then captures all of the bee interactions with the plant. Analyzing this data, she can identify the most important plant species the bees are foraging on in that area.

With the potential for global impact from her research, Peters said, "Ecosystem services are gifts that nature gives to us free of cost. If we lose them, we lose an important economic gift. The goal of my research is to help people make the best decisions, because we don't have a lot of land dedicated to conservation."

Peters' research also gives ECU students opportunities to get hands-on experience in the field, collaborating with local communities in Costa Rica. She's taken approximately 15 students abroad, and many of those students have gone on to publish papers, continue pollinator-focused projects across the country, and pursue careers in research and conservation.

"One of my former students is leading pollinator conservation efforts at Kentucky State University," she said. "Kentucky is one of the least researched states in terms of the bee community, so we need more people engaging in bee-related activities." Looking ahead, Peters hopes to create demonstration plots with local farmers to showcase sustainable land use.

"We're creating plots where 50% of the trees are for biodiversity conservation and 50% are for livelihoods," she said.

Peters not only advances bee conservation but also cultivates opportunities for students and communities to take part in impactful, globally connected research. ECU's Department of Biological Sciences offers a wide range of educational opportunities, allowing students to work alongside renowned faculty, like Peters, on research with a global impact. With undergraduate and graduate degree options, ECU prepares students for a wide range of career opportunities and further education.



EKU AWARDED GRANT FOR FIRE INVESTIGATION RESEARCH

Article courtesy of ECU Communication and Brand Management

Faculty in Eastern Kentucky University's (EKU) College of Justice, Safety, and Military Science, Dr. Shijin Kozhumal and Dr. Greg Gorbett, received a competitive research grant from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the U.S. Department of Justice's research, development, and evaluation agency, to research drywall and burn patterns. The NIJ forensic science research and development grant, announced in late 2023, awarded ECU more than \$290,000.

"Due to their fire resistance, gypsum boards—or drywall—are a common building material," said Kozhumal, ECU associate professor of fire protection and safety engineering technology. "When exposed to fire, they leave behind patterns that can help investigators determine the fire's origin and cause."

EKU's faculty received one of 33 grants from the NIJ. The organization awarded projects that will "increase the body of knowledge to guide and inform forensic science policy and practice" or "lead to the production of useful material(s), device(s), system(s), or method(s) that have the potential for forensic application."

EKU's project aims to analyze different types of drywall to develop models that predict how different wall-lining materials will react to fire under various conditions. The model predictions will be compared with experimental measurements to ensure accuracy and reliability. ECU researchers hope to build a property database for selected wall-lining materials under fire exposure to improve future fire investigations.



"By improving our understanding of drywall behavior and providing new analysis tools, we can help fire investigators draw more accurate and reliable conclusions about the origin of fires," said Kozhumal.

As a result of the grant, students have increased hands-on learning opportunities with modern fire investigation systems. Kozhumal added this will also allow students to engage in experiences that directly translate to their careers.

This current grant is ECU's second research award from the NIJ. The first, which was awarded in 2020, was also related to drywall burn investigation.

"Obtaining this grant and our demonstrated ability to perform high-level research with previous grants is helping to set the ECU Fire, Arson and Explosion Investigation degree program apart from similar academic programs," said Gorbett, associate professor in the fire protection and safety engineering technology program.





FROM CREEK TO COMMUNITY: EKU RESEARCHER TRACKS WATER QUALITY

Article courtesy of EKU Communication and Brand Management

Before a swim in a lake or a walk through a creek, few people think about bacteria or toxins from algae. But what lives in that water can affect health days later. At Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), research led by Dr. Jason Marion helps explain the unseen contaminants in waterways and why it matters for public health.

Marion, professor of environmental health science, studies water quality, antibiotic resistance and how people, animals, and the environment affect one another. Known as One Health, this approach looks at human health, environmental health, and wildlife health as one connected system.

"Our faculty's passion for their fields, collaboration with students, innovative studies, and community impact exemplify excellence in research," said EKU President David McFaddin. "As we build momentum in research, faculty like Dr. Marion are leading by example in securing funding and several first research awards for EKU."

Marion has spent 14 years at EKU, originally drawn by the university's strong environmental health science program and its reputation as a leader in the field. Growing up in Appalachia, he spent most of his time exploring nature and playing in creeks, developing a lifelong curiosity about the outdoors and the ways the environment shapes human health.

"There's no way of escaping the air that we breathe or the water that we drink," said Marion. "It's extraordinarily important because we are inextricably linked to the health of not just our fellow humans around us, but also the environment that we live in."

Marion's research focuses on bacteria in the environment and how it affects health. In recreational lakes, Marion tested and measured *E. coli* bacteria and toxins from algae in the water. The study found some swimming beaches to have *E. coli* and toxin levels above health guidance standards, as well as a link to higher reported rates of gastrointestinal illness among swimmers.



In Appalachian Kentucky streams, Marion and students look at the prevalence of *E. coli* and explore how land uses like mining, farming, and development impact the types (or strains) that can persist. The research found higher levels of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in disturbed sites, especially after rain, and lower levels in forested areas. Marion's related studies of wildlife feces and roadkill show how resistant bacteria moves between water, animals, and humans.

Students play a vital and active role in this research, from collecting water samples in local creeks to analyzing data in the lab.

"We like to provide opportunities for students to be able to learn and have hands-on educational experiences where they can take this knowledge and continue to use it in their professional careers," said Marion.

Tyler Sullivan, '24, an ECU graduate from Corbin who earned his bachelor's degree in environmental health science and sustainability, jumped at the opportunity for an internship with Marion studying *E. coli* in local waterways. The project took him across Madison County, collecting water samples from streams and small bodies of water, then returning to the lab to conduct tests and document the results.

"We got to get out in nature multiple times every week and explore new sample locations," said Sullivan. "This process created a ton of memories I'll have for the rest of my life regarding Dr. Marion, my coworkers, and ECU in general. I don't think I could have asked for a better experience." Sullivan is now pursuing a master's in safety, security, and emergency management from ECU.

For both Marion and Sullivan, the work goes beyond data and samples. It's about contributing to the safety and health of the community.

With more than 30 publications to his name, Marion has also led or co-directed externally funded research efforts exceeding \$1 million. His funding sources have included the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. Notably, he secured ECU's first National Science Foundation Major Research Instrumentation award in 2023 and ECU's first Small Business Technology Transfer Research award in 2024 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2021, Marion received the Global Health Innovation Prize for developing a novel method to quantify *E. coli* in water.



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TRIO PROGRAMS

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SCHOLARS

In FY26, Eastern Kentucky University continued their work as the grant recipient on five TRIO grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Each program is highlighted below.

Upward Bound

Upward Bound provides essential college preparation support to high school students from limited-income families and from households in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The program provides academic instruction as well as tutoring, counseling, mentoring, cultural enrichment, work-study programs, and education or counseling services with the goal of increasing the rate at which these students complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. In addition to tutoring, ACT prep, college visits, cultural trips, college admission and financial aid assistance, monthly on-campus Saturday sessions, and other academic support services, ECU Upward Bound students participate in a summer residential program which culminates the students' learning throughout the academic year and concludes with an end-of-summer trip.

Veterans Upward Bound

Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) is designed to motivate and assist veterans in the development of academic and other requisite skills necessary for acceptance and success in a program of postsecondary education. The program provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and academic instruction in the core subject areas. The primary goal of the program is to increase the rate at which veterans enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs. VUB provides help with veterans' benefits, college admission, financial aid assistance, access to college visits, monthly veterans lunch events, and other academic support services. VUB also helps students with issues specific to being a veteran such as transitioning back home, understanding how benefits can be used, and navigating the many requirements and processes involved with setting up and maintaining a civilian life.



NOVA (Student Success Services)

NOVA (*EKU's TRIO Student Success Services program*) seeks to increase the college retention and graduation of first-generation students, limited-income students, and students with disabilities by providing opportunities for academic development, assisting students with basic college requirements, and motivating students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education. Through academic advising, financial aid counseling, cultural trips, peer mentoring, leadership development, and NOVA-specific coursework, NOVA students are empowered to become well-rounded, self-actualized, global citizens who aspire to achieve their full potential and contribute to the betterment of the world.

McNair Scholars

The McNair Scholars Program prepares students from disadvantaged backgrounds for doctoral studies through involvement in research and other scholarly activities. The goal is to increase the attainment of Ph.D. degrees from underrepresented and first-generation students. The ECU McNair Scholars program offers services and activities like scholarly mentoring, small-group graduate school preparation workshops, and personalized academic performance reviews designed to prepare students for successful entry into select graduate programs and excellent graduate-level scholarly performance. Program staff and ECU faculty work closely with McNair Scholars to develop the knowledge and skill sets needed to become competitive candidates for graduate programs.

Educational Talent Search

The Educational Talent Search (ETS) program identifies and assists individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have the potential to succeed in higher education. The program also encourages persons who have not completed education programs at the secondary or postsecondary level to enter or reenter and complete postsecondary education. ETS provides opportunities for personal skill development, career exploration, interest inventories, guidance and mentoring, referrals to tutoring programs, information on postsecondary institutions, financial aid and scholarships, financial literacy, STEM (science, technology, engineering & math) activities, civic learning and engagement, guidance on and assistance in secondary school reentry, and workshops for families of participants.



FY 2026 SPRA INTERNAL INITIATIVES

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FY26 FACULTY PUBLICATION SUPPORT AWARDS

With a goal of promoting and further improving the visibility of faculty research publications, funding is awarded on a competitive basis to pay for journal open access publication fees (*article processing charges*) and print publication page buys / charges. Publishing in estimable, high-impact factor journals validates research quality, elevates both individual and institutional prestige, and opens doors to external funding opportunities and new collaborations.

Funding is competitively awarded on a rolling basis throughout the year. Applicants submit their applications through InfoReady, and they are reviewed by the Publication Support Subcommittee of the ECU Research Advisory Council (ERAC), with a decision generally reached within two weeks.

The recipients of ECU Publication Support Awards for FY26 were:

Dr. Autumn Whitson - Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences (\$1,250)

Reliability Analysis of In-person and Virtual Goniometric Measurements for Select Shoulder and Forearm Motions

International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy

Co-Authors (all ECU): A. Whitson, T. Cook, L. Middleton, C. Humphrey, & A. Sciascia

Dr. Valerie Peters - Associate Professor, Biological Sciences (\$2,000)

Ecological Network Theory Boosts Land Moxing Benefits for Biodiversity: An Example with Tropical Bee-Plant Interactions

Insects

Co-Author: E. Cardona

Dr. Jason Marion - Professor, Environmental Health Sciences (\$2,000)

Assessment of Lightning Mortality in the United States from 1979 - 2023

Natural Hazards

Co-Authors (all ECU): E. Lanning & D.G. Brown

Dr. Judy Jenkins - Professor, Chemistry and Forensic Science (\$1,500)

Hybrid Fabrication of Electrochemical Electrode via Inkjet Printing on 3D-Printed Substrates

ACS Omega

Co-Authors: M. Rahman, J. Bone, T. Roussel, & A. Huckaba

Dr. Jason Marion - Professor, Environmental Health Sciences (\$2,219)

Combined Measure of Hand Grip Strength and Body Mass Index for Predicting Excess Body Fat in a University Population

Diagnostics

Co-Authors (all ECU): M. Shenkel, L. Larkin, & J. Larkin



EKU EXPANDS FACULTY RESEARCH FUNDING

The University Funded Scholarship (UFS) program supports faculty research with the goal of positioning projects for competitive external funding. A University Research Committee (URC), composed of faculty from all six academic colleges, reviews proposals and recommends projects for funding. This year's URC included:

Dr. Jason Fry (CSTEM) - *Chair*

Dr. Jade Robinson (CEAHS)

Dr. Smita Joshi (CSTEM)

Dr. Kerem Kalkan (CLASS)

Dr. Laurie Larkin (CHS)

Dr. Tahsin Huq (COB)

Dr. Shijin Kozhumal (CJSMS)

Dr. Heather Campbell (CEAHS)

Dr. Melinda Moore (CLASS)

Dr. John Harter (COB)

Dr. Eric Fuchs (CHS)

Dr. Brian Simpkins (CJSMS)

Dr. Jason Fry, chair of the URC, said the committee was especially impressed by the strong emphasis on student involvement within this year's funded projects.

"Our faculty continue to show their dedication to our students by providing them with new research opportunities," said Dr. Fry. "The funding allows students to be employed by our researchers and get more involved with their excellent research."

In addition to supporting student engagement, seed funding provides faculty with early-stage resources to test methods, generate preliminary data, and demonstrate feasibility—critical steps for securing competitive external grants.

The research projects seek to find creative and innovative solutions to issues facing their respective fields, holding potential for community, state, and national influence. Spanning a variety of disciplines, the funded research projects include teacher recruitment and hiring, DNA recovery, assessments of law enforcement agencies, deepfake detection, and food insecurity, among other topics.

"The university's increased investment in research underscores our strategic priorities of knowledge, innovation, and transformation," said ECU Dean of Graduate Education and Research Administration Dr. Ryan Baggett. "The investment demonstrates confidence in the university's faculty and students, strengthens capacity for externally funded research, and positions ECU to address regional, state, and national challenges through impactful scholarship."

FY26 UNIVERSITY FUNDED SCHOLARSHIP *INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH SEED FUNDING*

The FY26 University Funded Scholarship program awarded approximately \$160K in seed funding to 17 recipients. In comparison, \$15K was awarded in FY25 to six recipients.

FY26 University Funded Scholarship Awards

Brent, John; Copenhaver, Allen (Justice Studies). Taking Stock: An Organizational Assessment of Law Enforcement Agencies. \$14,914.

Brown, David (Biological Sciences). The Effect of Imidacloprid on Red Maple Syrup Production. \$2,757.

Cook, Tracy (Parks, Recreation, Exercise and Sport Science). A Descriptive Study of Peri-Menopausal, Menopausal, and Post-Menopausal Avid Recreational Cyclists. \$14,985.

Franklin, Alan (Psychology). Seeing Isn't Believing: A Personal Construct Theory Workshop to Improve Deepfake Detection. \$2,912.

Fredericks, Jaime (Chemistry and Forensic Science). Evaluating a Novel Collection Device for DNA Touch Recovery from Fabrics. \$15,000.

Gorbett, Greg (Fire Protection and Paramedicine Sciences). Experimental Investigation for the Forensic Analysis of R600A (Butane) Refrigerant in Residential Refrigerators in the United States. \$2,926.

Gore, Jonathan; Simpson, Kendall (Psychology/Biological Sciences). Who I Am: The Link between Self-Definition and Sex Hormones. \$5,632.

Jansky, Timothy; Miller, Jason (Education). Evaluating Preservice Teachers' Reflection Through AI-Mediated Dialogue. \$15,000.

Kang, Sangwook (Applied Human Sciences). Bridging Food Insecurity and Culinary Education: A USDA-Funded Food Preservation and Regional Partnership Initiative. \$3,000.

Kirby, Ashlee; Altheide, Travis; Marion, Jason (Environmental & Public Health, Administration, and Medical Sciences). Legionella in Windshield Wiper Fluid and Air: Assessing Emerging Sources and Methods for Exposure Detection. \$14,963.

Matheyambath, Ajila (Chemistry and Forensic Science). Screening of Microbial Enzymes from Spent Grain for the Degradation of Microplastics. \$2,500.

Miller, Jason (Education). Informing Teacher Recruitment and Hiring: Teacher Preparation Students' Job Searches, Hiring Processes, and Employment Outcomes. \$14,991.

Moore, Michael (Biological Sciences). Family Dinner: Refining Non-lethal Diet Analysis Techniques for Darter Species to Set the Table for the Conservation of their Endangered Relatives. \$4,615.

Perrin, Ryan (Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy). Boltzspynn: A Framework for Modeling Electrostatically Gated Spin Transport. \$14,326.

Rowe, Laura (Chemistry and Forensic Science). Comparing the Chemical and Microbial Diversity of Extreme Aquatic Environments. \$15,000.

Simpson, Kendall (Biological Sciences). Improving Health Outcomes for African American Males via Combination Therapy in vitro. \$11,715.

Smethers, Ashlee; Townsend, Scott (Education). Understanding the Perceptions of Students, Teacher Candidates, Volunteers, and Families for an Inclusive STEM Summer Camp for K-6th Students With and Without Disabilities. \$3,000.



FACULTY RESEARCH KICKSTART PROGRAM

The inaugural, six-week Faculty Research Kickstart program was designed to equip EKU's faculty with the skills and resources to prepare competitive grant proposals that will result in new externally funded awards. As a result, faculty will better understand the internal and external procedures for grants development and research administration so it can be replicated for future opportunities.

Each faculty participant is mentored by an experienced faculty member and by staff of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration. There are a variety of in-person and online meetings with each week featuring a different theme:

- The Grants Process and Pre-Proposal Considerations
- Expert Panel - Success in External Funding
- Proposal and Budget Development
- Importance of the Scholarly Profile and Other Required Proposal Sections
- Compliance and Post-Award Administration
- Report Out

In addition to weekly assignments, faculty participants are required to develop a full proposal through a scaffolding method that will be submitted during the next academic year.

The program is limited to tenured or tenure-track faculty or university librarians. The proposal process includes the identification of a substantial externally funded research Request For Proposal (RFP) or Notification of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) at the federal or state level.



FY26 Faculty Research Kickstart Program PARTICIPANTS were:

Dr. Travis Altheide, Associate Professor, Medical Laboratory Science
College of Health Sciences

Dr. Barbara Jones, Assistant Professor, Agriculture
College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Dr. Olivia Williams, Assistant Professor, Psychology
College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences

Dr. Sergio Sgro, Assistant Professor, Engineering and Technology
College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Mr. Aaron Kuster, Assistant Professor, Aviation
College of Justice, Safety, and Military Science

Dr. Laura Rowe, Associate Professor, Chemistry and Forensic Science
College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Dr. Thomas Jarvis, Associate Professor, Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy
College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

FY26 Faculty Research Kickstart Program MENTORS were:

Dr. Jason Fry, Associate Professor, Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy
College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Dr. Jason Marion, Professor, Environmental Health Science
College of Health Sciences

Dr. David May, Chair and Professor, Justice Studies
College of Justice, Safety, and Military Science



SEPTEMBER 2026

FACULTY FELLOWSHIP BUILDS MOMENTUM FOR EKU RESEARCH



Article courtesy of EKU Communication and Brand Management

Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) announces the 2025-26 Faculty Research Fellowship program—an initiative designed to expand research opportunities and engagement for faculty and students while strengthening EKU's impact on the region and beyond.

"Research is the catalyst for innovation, student success, and community impact," said EKU President David McFaddin. "Our new research fellowship program is an investment in our people—faculty who lead by example, mentor the next generation, and strengthen the university's role as a driver of knowledge and opportunity across the Commonwealth."

The fellowship program is part of EKU's broader commitment to enhancing research in externally funded projects across all areas of the university. Fellows will serve in roles focused on outreach to raise awareness of available funding and support for research; mentorship and leadership among colleagues and funding committees; and visibility, serving as ambassadors to celebrate research success. Fellows will also help faculty and students navigate EKU's research infrastructure.

"The goal of the initiative is to cultivate a stronger institutional research culture, foster professional growth and skill development, and advance our institution's research ecosystem," said Dean of Graduate Education and Research Administration Dr. Ryan Baggett. "In year one, we will focus on the development of new processes and programming that will mark the start of a new era of research excellence at EKU."

Three experienced researchers and EKU faculty members have been selected as the inaugural fellows for the 2025-26 academic year: Dr. Jason Fry, associate professor in the Department of Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy; Dr. Mike Lane, professor in the Department of Parks, Recreation, Exercise and Sport Science; and Dr. Jason Marion, professor of Environmental Health Science. In addition to the general responsibilities for the program, each fellow focuses on a specialty area to advance research at EKU—Fry on research-related professional development and mentoring, Lane on advancing student research, and Marion on publication support and commercialization opportunities.



Fry's research in the ECU Nuclear and Particle Physics Detector Lab centers around student learning and training. His students build, test, and characterize equipment in the lab space at ECU to then conduct larger experiments at national labs, where they are active collaborators in national nuclear physics experiments. Fry has secured over \$1 million in intended funds from the National Science Foundation (NSF) as either Principal Investigator (PI) or co-PI. Additionally, Fry is a co-spokesperson on a NSF project for the next-generation neutron lifetime measurement, BL3.

Lane teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in exercise science, as well as conducts research on supplementation, load carriage, and long-term athlete tracking. He has directed ECU Student Research and Creative Endeavors for the past two years. He also consults and coaches a variety of athletes and individuals.

Specializing in environmental health sciences and epidemiology, Marion's research focuses on water quality, antibiotic resistance, and public health. He has authored more than 30 publications and served as lead investigator or co-director on more than \$1 million in externally funded research. His funding sources have included the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control. Notably, he secured ECU's first NSF Major Research Instrumentation award in 2023 and ECU's first Small Business Technology Transfer Research award in 2024 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 2021, Marion received the Global Health Innovation Prize for developing a novel method to quantify E. coli in water.

The Faculty Research Fellowship program's primary focus is to support ECU's faculty and student research initiatives. Marion noted, "Supporting ECU as a research fellow is rewarding because we contribute to connecting them with timely external resources which enables impactful research and student engagement not possible otherwise."

Fry, Lane, and Marion strengthen ECU's mission through innovative research, student engagement, and nationally funded projects across the sciences and health fields. Designed for impact and adaptability, the ECU Faculty Research Fellowship program is continuously evaluated to ensure relevance and effectiveness. By empowering faculty leaders, ECU lays the foundation for a more engaged, informed, and innovative research community.



EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The EKU Research Advisory Council (ERAC) is a structured, collaborative body that provides expert guidance and recommendations regarding the university's research ecosystem. During its inaugural year in FY26, the ERAC provided front line knowledge and critical feedback on strategies to stimulate growth in scholastic and externally funded research, policy implementation, special initiatives, and other research related topics. The ERAC consisted of 16 members, including at least one representative from each college, an EKU Libraries representative, a graduate student, and an undergraduate student (*see inside front cover of this report for the ERAC membership directory*).

During the academic year, the ERAC met monthly on a variety of topics including:

- Current EKU Research Ecosystem
- EKU Research Investment and Associated Performance Metrics
- Internal Opportunities (Process and Marketing) such as:
 - University Funded Scholarship
 - Faculty Publication Support
 - Student Research and Creative Endeavors
 - Summer Faculty Kickstart Program
- Outreach Opportunities
- Research Related Policies and Procedures
- Presentations from other EKU entities such as the Library, Statistical Consulting Center, and Data Initiatives

In FY27, the ERAC will continue to drive meaningful improvements in EKU's research ecosystem through strategic initiatives that enhance knowledge, transformation, and innovation.



STUDENT RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ENDEAVORS

The Student Research and Creative Endeavors (SRCE) program is dedicated to empowering students through research, creative projects, and professional development. SRCE provides opportunities, resources, and support to help students succeed with their academic and career goals.

In FY26, over \$20,000 was awarded to ECU students through 58 individual awards in five different SRCE programs:

- **Travel Awards** - Student Conference Presentations
- **Supply Awards** - Project Materials and Equipment
- **Poster Printing Awards** - Conference Research Posters
- **Undergraduate and Graduate Thesis/Dissertation Support Awards**
- **Research Assistant Funding** - Assist Faculty with Research Projects

In addition to award administration, the SRCE can assist ECU students with finding a research mentor for project ideas, research designs and methodologies, and identifying professional development opportunities.

The SRCE also awards the mentor of the month award. In FY27, the inaugural SRCE Mentor of the Year honor will be awarded.

Find out more by visiting <https://www.eku.edu/IN/SRCE> or email StudentResearch@eku.edu

Below: Dr. Mike Lane (SRCE Director) with four ECU students at the 2026 Posters at the Capitol Event



EKU SPRA *NEW ERA OF ADMINISTRATION...*



Anne Cizmar, Ph.D. serves as the Associate Dean of Research Administration where she oversees pre-award management, post-award administration, and research compliance. Dr. Cizmar is also a Professor of Government at ECU and earned a Ph.D. in Government and Politics from the University of Maryland, College Park, where she specialized in American politics and quantitative research methods.



Melissa Gross, MS recently joined SPRA as the Director of Sponsored Programs with oversight of the Proposal Development and Post-Award Specialists. She earned a degree in Business Administration from Morehead State University and her masters in Justice, Policy, and Leadership from ECU. She transitioned to ECU after years of working in non-profit grants management.



William Prince serves as the Research Compliance Specialist where he safeguards institutional research activities through alignment with federal, state, and university guidelines. William holds an undergraduate degree in Political Science and International Affairs from Eastern Kentucky University. He enjoys playing tennis, history, and spending time with his family.

EKU SPRA ...A TEAM OF DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS



Lisa Royalty serves as the Research Protection Specialist where she is an administrator for the Institutional Review Board, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, and the Institutional Biosafety Committee. She holds a B.A. in Paralegal Science from ECU and has been working in Sponsored Programs at ECU for over 16 years helping to facilitate research projects from both faculty and students.



Janee Schrader serves as a Proposal Development Specialist, applying an analytical approach to manage complex grant requirements. She focuses on detail-oriented problem solving to align proposal details with sponsor guidelines and institutional priorities. Janee holds a degree in Mathematics from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.



William "Jeff" West, Ph.D. serves as a Proposal Development Specialist and works with the university community to plan, write, and submit competitive grant proposals. Dr. West holds an undergraduate degree in Electrical Engineering from Virginia Tech and a doctoral degree in Geography from the University of Kentucky. He recently joined the Office of Sponsored Programs after a number of years working in higher education accreditation and assessment. In his free time, Jeff likes to run, write historical fiction, and explore national parks with his family.

EKU PRESIDENT'S EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD

The annual ECU President's Excellence in Research Award celebrates a full-time faculty member who has demonstrated outstanding achievement in scholarly research exemplifying innovation, rigor, and impact within their academic discipline and beyond. Recipients of the award have significantly advanced knowledge through scholarly contributions such as publications, external funding, innovations, interdisciplinary collaboration, and/or other meaningful contributions to the university's research standing. The award serves to highlight the importance of research and to inspire continued excellence in scholarly inquiry and discovery.

The faculty member must demonstrate evidence of significant research output and impact while at ECU to include but not limited to 1) high-impact, peer-reviewed publications, 2) success in securing competitive externally funded research, 3) innovations to include novel methodologies, approaches, developments, or intellectual property, 4) other significant contributions to the university's research culture and associated strategic goals and/or 5) involvement of students in research work.



Dr. Fry (Left) with ECU President McFaddin at the 2026 President's Excellence Awards

The FY26 recipient of the ECU President's Excellence in Research Award was Dr. Jason Fry, Associate Professor of Physics. His work in nuclear physics has advanced scientific knowledge and improved the university's research standing through his publications, external research grants, contributions to ECU's research culture, and student involvement in his research activity. Dr. Fry is a prolific researcher with peer-reviewed publications in many journals and has obtained multiple externally funded research grants.

In addition to his own research accomplishments, Dr. Fry is a steadfast mentor to ECU's students. One of his National Science Foundation projects, entitled "Testing Fundamental Symmetries in Neutron Beta Decay and Neutron-Nucleus Interactions," provides students with hands-on experiences in the laboratory and travel experience working on large scale collaborations.

FY 26 LISTING

EKU EXTERNALLY SPONSORED AWARDS...

Akers, Jon (Kentucky Center for School Safety). Kentucky Center for School Safety FY27. Kentucky Department of Education. \$607,728.

Anderson, Sierrah (Student Success, Engagement, and Opportunity). ECU NOVA Student Support Services. US Department of Education. \$417,888.

Bhandari, Michelyn (Environmental & Public Health, Administration and Medical Sciences). Kentucky Lung Cancer Screening Program Evaluation FY27. Commonwealth of Kentucky, CHFS DPH Division of Prevention & Quality Improvement, Health Promotion Section. \$24,772.

Bhandari, Michelyn (Environmental & Public Health, Administration and Medical Sciences). Workforce Development Educational Assistance Program - FY 27. Commonwealth of Kentucky, CHFS DPH Division of Prevention & Quality Improvement. \$178,225.

Botts, Theresa (Psychology). Southeast Center for Agricultural Health and Injury Prevention-Agricultural Community Mental Health. University of Kentucky. \$18,683.

Brin, Andrea (TRIO Educational Talent Search Program). TRIO Educational Talent Search Budget 25-26. US Department of Education. \$441,359.

Brown, D Gary (Environmental & Public Health, Administration, and Medical Sciences). Central Appalachian Regional Education and Research Center: Industrial Hygiene Core. University of Kentucky. \$115,958.

Brown, David (Division of Natural Areas). Continued Status Assessment of the Yellow-Spotted Woodland Salamander in Kentucky. Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. \$15,000.

Bundy, Myra Beth (Psychology). Developmental Disabilities Clinic Autism Social Skills and Coping Therapy Groups. WHAS Crusade for Children. \$4,200.

Bundy, Myra Beth (Psychology). Kentucky Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and other Related Disabilities (Year 5). University of Kentucky. \$20,558.

Couture, Jackie (Research Center for Special Collections and Archives). Say My Name: Enslaved People of Madison County. Kentucky Historical Society. \$9,825.

Dunlap, Scotty (Safety and Security). Central Appalachian Regional Education Research Center. University of Kentucky. \$109,390.

FY26 LISTING

...BY PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Ellis, Kellie (Clinical Therapeutic Programs). ALL Voices Heard: Assistive Learning and Language Tools for Children with Special Education Needs. WHAS Crusade for Children. \$8,000.

Flannery II, David (EKU Police Department). ECU Police 2025 Vest Grant. Kentucky Office of the Attorney General. \$2,286.95.

Flannery II, David (EKU Police Department). ECU Soft Body Armor (Bullet Proof Vest). Kentucky Office of the Attorney General. \$38,561.

Fry, Jason (Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy). RUI: Testing Fundamental Symmetries in Neutron Beta Decay and Neutron-Nucleus Interactions. National Science Foundation. \$280,000.

Gaither, Dekia (Environmental Health & Safety). ECU Safety Grant. Kentucky Employers' Mutual Insurance. \$2,270.

Haile, Estifanos (Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy). Climate Resilience through Multidisciplinary Big Data Learning, Prediction, and Building Response Systems (CLIMBS). Kentucky NSF EPSCoR. \$30,629.

Haile, Estifanos (Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy). Climate Resilience through Multidisciplinary Big Data Learning, Prediction, and Building Response Systems (CLIMBS). Kentucky NSF EPSCoR. \$42,724.

Hill, Mary (Niki) (Languages, Culture, Anthropology, and Sociology). Interpreter Training Program FY 27. Kentucky Department of Education. \$366,817.

Howell, Dana (College of Health Sciences). Workforce Training Equipment for ECU College of Health Sciences. Kentucky CPE. \$109,931.86.

Hunter, Gill (McNair Scholars, Academic Affairs). McNair Scholars. US Department of Education. \$272,364.

Jackson, Martina (Center for Inclusive Excellence and Global Engagement). Ask Every Student Initiative. Students Learn Students Vote Coalition. \$380.86.

Jarvis, Thomas (Physics, Geosciences, and Astronomy). Experimental improvements for two-photon laser spectroscopy. Kentucky Academy of Science. \$5,000.

Jenkins, Judith (Center for STEM Excellence). First2 Network. High Rocks. \$38,942.21.

Jenkins, Judith (Center for STEM Excellence). STEM Connections: Department-Selected August Student Engagement Events. First2 Network. \$3,750.

FY 26 LISTING

EKU EXTERNALLY SPONSORED AWARDS...

Joshi, Smita (Biological Sciences). Synergistic and Antagonistic Interaction Effects of Phytochemical Combinations in Thrombosis Therapy – Year 1. University of Louisville (KY-INBRE). \$73,000.

Joshi, Smita (Biological Sciences). Synergistic and Antagonistic Interaction Effects of Phytochemical Combinations in Thrombosis Therapy – Year 2. University of Louisville (KY-INBRE). \$73,000.

Kirunchyk, Derek (EKU Police Department). DOCJT / ECU PD Training MOA. DoCJT. \$7,840.

Krile, MaryJo (Teaching, Learning, and Educational Leadership). Graduate Special Education Scholarships. WHAS Crusade for Children. \$22,000.

Marion, Jason (Environmental & Public Health, Administration, and Medical Sciences). KCV IMPACT: EquiFlow: Novel 8-Channel Disposable Pipette Manifold. Kentucky Commercialization Ventures. \$10,000.

Maynard, Joshua (Veterans Upward Bound). Veterans Upward Bound Budget Approval Request. US Department of Education. \$299,038.

McHone, Richard (TRIO Upward Bound). Summer Food Service Program. Kentucky Department of Education. \$18,837.

McHone, Richard (TRIO Upward Bound). Upward Bound – FY 27. US Department of Education. \$627,410.

Moreland, Robyn (Center for Student Parents). FY 27 Center for Student Parents- Post Secondary Services. Cabinet for Health and Family Services. \$461,984.

Naugle, Kyle (Financial Services). ECU – Save the Children FY 26. Commonwealth of Kentucky CPE. \$66,000.

Peters, Valerie (Biological Sciences). CAREER: Advancing Scientific Knowledge of Tropical Mutualistic Network Science and Public Knowledge of Tropical Bee Importance. NSF. \$110,820.

Reed, Tanea (Chemistry and Forensic Science). KY INBRE Lead Faculty Award. University of Louisville (KY-INBRE). \$19,551 & \$22,365.

FY26 LISTING

...BY PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Saulnier, Stephanie (Social Work). Child Welfare Preparation Program. University of Kentucky. \$27,241.

Saulnier, Stephanie (Social Work). Student Voices: Supporting Postsecondary Students with Dependent Children. Kentucky CPE. \$8,625.

Savage, Mike (WEKU). CPB Distribution Grant. Corporation for Public Broadcasting. \$22,300.

Simpson, Kendall (Biological Sciences). Addressing Racial Disparities of Prostate Cancer via Combination Therapy In Vitro. University of Louisville (KY-INBRE). \$73,000.

Simpson, Kendall (Biological Sciences). Utilization of antioxidants for the Improved Efficacy of Established Prostate Cancer Treatment Strategies. University of Louisville (KY-INBRE). \$14,600.

Stevenson, Erin (Social Work). SEKY Restorative Justice Project. Volunteers of America. \$35,821.

Vorbeck, Jonathan (Environmental & Public Health, Administration, and Medical Sciences). Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure - FY 27. Commonwealth of Kentucky, CHFS DPH Division of Prevention & Quality Improvement. \$140,000.

Weglarz, Michael (Risk Management and Insurance). Risk Management and Insurance Student Travel Support. Spencer Educational Foundation. \$15,000.

Wentzel, Starr (First-Year Courses). Communicating the Value of the Kentucky Graduate Profile. Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. \$30,000.

White, Jennifer (Education Abroad). USAC Ambassador Student Worker for Education Abroad Office. University Studies Abroad Consortium. \$3,250.

Wies, Jennifer (Provost's Office). CPE Faculty Leadership Academy 2025-2026. Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. \$19,950.

Xiao, Qian (Business). K-Care: A Community-Powered Safety Net for People Living Alone in Kentucky. Kentucky Commercialization Ventures. \$5,000.

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