ACC INNOVATION INITIATIVE

2025-2026

Request for Proposals

The Atlantic Coast Conference, in partnership with the Center for Research in Intercollegiate Athletics at UNC-Chapel Hill, is pleased to extend a request for proposals for the sixth annual **ACC Innovation Initiative Research Grant Program**. This competitive program aims to support data-driven decision-making among conference athletics administrators by funding innovative research. Multiple grants will be awarded to financially support faculty members and students from ACC member institutions who conduct research related to issues deemed critical by conference athletics administrators. Priority will be given to research related to the following topical areas:

1. Student-athlete welfare:
   a. Mental health
   b. Time management and scheduling
   c. Psychological well-being
   d. Physical health/nutrition/athletic performance/load management/recovery
2. Revenue generation and finance/budgeting:
   a. Donor relations and donor activity
   b. Ticket sales
   c. Reducing expenditures
3. Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL):
   a. NIL legislation
   b. Agents, marketing managers, and boosters in a NIL landscape
   c. NIL Collectives
   d. Title IX and equity considerations
4. Organizational behavior and managerial issues:
   a. Work-life balance among athletics administrators
   b. Salaries and benefits
   c. Work culture and environment
5. Current issues:
   a. House settlement and revenue sharing
   b. Governance structure of the NCAA / FBS Football
   c. Diversity/systemic racism/implicit bias
   d. The professionalization of college athletes and college sports
   e. Sports wagering – impact on student-athletes, sentiment of fans, etc.
   f. Transfer portal – impact on academics, mental health, etc.
   g. Artificial intelligence
   h. Scholarship levels and amounts
6. Directed research / case studies
   a. ACC Network – fan feedback/sentiment of content and delivery
   b. Revenue & expense comparison of athletic departments
   c. Technology innovations/implementation – successes and challenges
   d. Athletic department challenges – areas schools are thriving/struggling

Award Details

This year, a total grant pool of $25,000 is available to fund research. An anticipated five to eight grants will be dispersed. Applicants should consider this when developing proposal budgets. Faculty-led project budgets should fall in the range of $2,500 to $7,500, while student-led project budgets should range between $1,000 to $3,000. Upon approval of a proposal, funding will be sent from the ACC conference office to the institution's Office of Sponsored Programs (or equivalent). NOTE: Institutions may not charge indirect costs.

All approved research projects should be completed within a 12-month period. Researchers awarded a grant will be expected to deliver a white paper (three-page maximum) summarizing their study's results to the conference office for dissemination at the conference's fall meeting in October of 2026. Researchers may also be asked to present their findings through video conferencing. ACC administrators anticipate research projects will be submitted for publication to scholarly journals and presented at scholarly conferences, but authors should note, the ACC will make white paper results available to conference members upon submission.

Submission Requirements

In order for a proposal to be considered, the Principal Investigator (P.I.) of the submission must be a faculty member or student at an ACC institution throughout the duration of the grant. Further, preference will be given to research grant proposals that include investigators from multiple ACC institutions and from research teams comprised entirely from ACC institutions. If the research involves the use of human participants, the proposed study must receive approval from the appropriate Institutional Review Board(s) prior to any data collection. Data collection does not need to be exclusive to ACC institutions, but ACC institutional data should be incorporated extensively in the research design.

Submission Deadline

Grant applications should be submitted via Qualtrics ([ACC-CRIA Grant Survey](#)) by **5 pm (EDT) on Monday, September 22, 2025.** Any questions about grant eligibility or submission requirements should be directed to Ellie Rudd (merudd@live.unc.edu).

Application Requirements

Proposals not conforming to the required format (outlined below) will not be reviewed. Proposals have a six-page maximum limit. All sections of the proposal are limited to 8.5″x11″ pages with one-inch margins on all sides, double-spaced, in 12-point font. Applicants are encouraged to use headers for each section. Submissions should be merged into a PDF document with no references to the author(s) or their institutions of the submission for purposes of blind review. Contact information including all researchers' names, titles, email addresses, institution(s), grant manager(s), and grant distribution address(es) should be included in the submission survey.

Proposal Elements

- Abstract (150 word maximum)
- Introduction
- Problem statement/rationale for the study
- Brief review of literature (two-page maximum)
- Methodology
- Significance/potential implications
- Project timeline
- Budget and budget justification
- Bibliography/references (*Not counted as part of the page limit*)
- Copies of instruments, protocols, etc. (*Not counted as part of the page limit*)

Research Proposal Review Criteria

All submissions will undergo double-blind review. The review committee is composed of the 18 ACC Faculty Athletics Representatives or their institutional designees. If FARs are on the grant proposal, they will not review their own submission. Proposal review will be guided by the criteria listed below.

1. Alignment of the project with the stated topic areas listed above
2. Practical implications for administrators
3. Methodological strength
4. Appropriateness of the budget (funds requested vs. impact of results)
5. Percentage of research team members from ACC institutions (P.I. must be from an ACC school)

Note: *As indicated above, the ACC Athletics Administration Research Grant program will prioritize projects of an applied nature. However, the ACC encourages P.I.'s to develop projects which have both applied and theoretical implications. Grant submissions should focus specifically on studies containing results which administrators can utilize to inform decision making, but this should not restrict the scope of projects which may have broader theoretical implications.*

All submissions will receive funding notification in mid-November.