



## **LEARN awarded \$800K by National Science Foundation to Accelerate Research and Education at Small Colleges in Texas**

Lubbock, Texas (October 9, 2019) - Texas-based LEARN (Lonestar Education And Research Network) announced that it has been awarded its first National Science Foundation grant as a lead organization. This two-year \$800,000 award titled *Accelerating Research and Education at Small Colleges in Texas via an Advanced Networking Ecosystem Using a Virtual LEARN Science DMZ* (Award Number: 1925553) will help develop a program for regional network connectivity for smaller colleges and universities in Texas.

LEARN has identified an initial set of five diverse colleges with various needs related to advanced cyberinfrastructure to take part in this project. The five participating schools are: McLennan Community College, South Plains College, South Texas College, Texas Wesleyan University, and Trinity University. LEARN will provide this group of colleges with a suitable combination of advanced network technology at both local and regional levels designed to meet their current and projected research and education needs, with training and expertise to manage the technology, and with assistance through its national collaborations and partnerships to increase utilization of the technology across each campus.

Pankaj Shah, Principal Investigator (PI) for this grant and CEO at LEARN said, "This NSF grant enables us to expand LEARN's role in Texas as a statewide research and education network. Our vision is to establish a community of similarly engaged scholars and administrators at similar campuses in Texas beyond this initial set of five."

Through partnerships with Internet2, The Quilt, Engagement and Performance Operations Center (EPOC) and through the proposed dissemination activities, a successful project is likely to be extended more broadly to other research and education networks across the United States and to the smaller campuses in their regions.

Jeff Graham, LEARN Board Chair and Vice President of Information Technology at University of Texas Rio Grande Valley said, "This NSF-funded program opens up many opportunities for small and medium-sized higher education institutions in Texas to participate in the same statewide and national forums as the various large University Systems and private universities, which are already members of LEARN."

"Being able to partner with LEARN and have access to their expertise is a force multiplier for us," said Jim Bradley, Co-PI for this grant and CIO at Trinity University. "This program will allow our researchers to access advanced computational services at scale without requiring us and many other smaller universities to replicate expensive local infrastructure. This serves everyone in Texas well and creates a great model for the country."

"This is a big technological leap forward for South Plains College – aside from this being our first NSF Grant, we will now have access to resources and training that has not been available in the past," said Ryan Fitzgerald, Co-PI for this grant and Dean of Dual Enrollment and Distance Education at South Plains College. "As a large, rural community college, this grant will allow our institution to provide the same network connectivity that large universities provide their students and staff."

Dan Stanzione, Associate Vice President for Research at University of Texas Austin and Executive Director of the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC) at University of Texas Austin said, “We wholeheartedly embrace the theme of this project whereby LEARN, as a regional cyberinfrastructure (CI) organization in the Southern U.S., can and should play a substantial role in expanding utilization and access to research and education CI to less resourced colleges and universities.”

About:

LEARN (The Lonestar Education And Research Network) is a consortium of 41 organizations throughout Texas that includes public and private institutions of higher education, community colleges, libraries, the National Weather Service, and the K-12 public schools. The consortium, organized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, connects its members and over 500 affiliated organizations through high performance optical and IP network services to support their research, education, healthcare and public service missions. LEARN is also a leading member of the national community of advanced research networks, providing Texas connectivity to national and international research and education networks, enabling cutting-edge research that is increasingly dependent upon sharing large volumes of electronic data.