

Tennessee Extension Leadership Academy

2026 - 2027

Background

UT Extension embraces its mission and vision by investing in the development of highly engaged personnel who serve their community, office, and Extension through the Tennessee Extension Leadership Academy. During TELA, employees will explore their strengths and learn how to utilize those strengths to lead others and to contribute to an organizational culture where employees thrive. Extension aims to enable participants to better serve as leaders in any role or capacity and to prepare employees for leadership roles across the organization.

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."
 — John Quincy Adams

Program Structure

TELA utilizes a variety of learning strategies including multi-day events, hands on activities, webinars, partner site visits and two opportunities for skills application:

Group Leadership Book Application

Participants will read a pre-selected book and work with a group to facilitate a leadership activity for the rest of the cohort members during the third session.

Individual Leadership Journey Plan

Participants will develop a culminating plan to apply leadership concepts and skills gained over the course of TELA in a way that aligns with each individual's personal and professional interests. This plan will be presented during the fourth session.

Participants

Employees with a regular, full-time Extension appointment who have been employed for at least three years are eligible to apply. Qualifying applicants include but are not limited to: administrative assistants, agents, county directors, program assistants, specialists, or support staff.

Time Commitment

Applicants agree to fully participate in all TELA events and fulfill program requirements. Before applying, please make sure that you have all dates available and are willing to commit additional time for independent projects.

Dates	Format	Location
August 4, 2026	Virtual	Zoom 9:00-11:00 CST
September 15-17, 2026	In Person	Pigeon Forge
October 1, 2026	Virtual	Zoom 9:00-11:00 CST
November 17-19, 2026	In Person	Memphis
December 10, 2026	Virtual	Zoom 9:00-11:00 CST
January 5-7, 2027	In Person	Knoxville
February 11, 2027	Virtual	Zoom 9:00-11:00 CST
March 10-11, 2027	In Person	Nashville

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Program Overview

Session 1: Discovering You

Goal: Build leadership capacity through self-exploration.

Participants will:

- Identify personal strengths and areas for growth.
- Reflect on individual leadership journeys and develop a leadership philosophy.
- Discover ways to implement work/life balance.
- Engage in networking and build relationships with other cohort members.

Session 2: Leading Others

Goal: Build interpersonal skills to effectively lead others.

Participants will:

- Recognize and value teamwork.
- Demonstrate an understanding and acceptance of different work styles and strengths.
- Seek solutions that foster and enhance relationships.
- Demonstrate commitment to diversity and inclusivity.

Session 3: Leading within the Organization

Goal: Lead and empower others to support the mission and vision of Tennessee Extension.

Participants will:

- Develop collaboration and partnership skills.
- Recognize the importance of advocacy and accountability in Extension.
- Use visionary leadership skills to achieve goals and navigate change.

Session 4: Graduation

Goals: Showcase knowledge gained and skills learned.

Participants will:

- Establish personal accountability for continued leadership development.

Application Requirements

Applications can be submitted at TELA.tennessee.edu between February 2 and March 2, 2026. A complete application must include:

1. A document that adequately addresses:
 - What you would like to gain from this program?
 - A leadership experience that you have had that was impactful for you.
 - Your Extension leadership goals.
2. A letter of support from your direct supervisor.
3. A favorite leadership quote.

Selection Process

All complete applications will be reviewed by the TELA Committee and approved by the appropriate Region Director and/or Department Head. Submission does not guarantee program admission. Applicants will be notified by May 1, 2026 of their acceptance status.

Additional Information

- Personnel who are 100% funded by grant contracts are encouraged to apply after receiving approval from their department head.
- All necessary travel expenses and resources for selected participants will be covered by Tennessee Extension Administration.

For more information:



TELA@utk.edu



TELA.tennessee.edu