

# Collaborative Spotlight

# ***THRC & SCALEUP: Fostering Economic Resilience through the Great Resilience in Texas (GRIT) Awards***

**By Jessica Schneider**

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Jessica Schneider, THRC Research Programs Director, and Jimmy Yen, CEO and founder of Achieve Integrative Health, a GRIT Award winner

The [GRIT Awards](#) is a collaboration between the [Translational Health Research Center](#) (THRC) and [SCALEUP](#) that recognizes Great Resilience in Texas (GRIT) among the small business community.

When sharing news about the GRIT Awards, we often get asked the following question: Why would a research center host an awards program for small businesses?

THRC aims to foster healthy and resilient people and places through applied, actionable research. Our Community Health and Economic Resilience Research (CHERR) initiative is central to this mission. We want to understand resilience at the economic, community, and individual levels, and develop community networks to disseminate and implement our findings and make a real impact in Texas. This work is put into action through our [Health+Resilience Faculty Fellows](#) program and innovative approaches to community outreach.

The partnership between THRC and SCALEUP developed from our shared goals to foster a resilient Texas economy. The SCALEUP program is an initiative of TXST's [Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship](#). SCALEUP aims to better understand the barriers that minority-owned businesses face when growing and develop user-friendly tools to help minority businesses grow. Resilient communities need healthy local economies, and SCALEUP is working to achieve this goal.

We formalized our partnership in Spring 2022 when Josh Daspit, SCALEUP Director and Associate Professor of Management, became a Health+Resilience Faculty Fellow. While finalizing the details of Josh's fellowship and how THRC could support his goals, the need became clear: THRC could help by identifying small businesses to serve as research participants for SCALEUP.

The GRIT Awards were initially conceived as a mechanism to this end. THRC executive director, Melinda Villagran, had recently participated in an NIH prize competition that recognized institutions for fostering gender diversity in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. The competition resulted in a network of institutions that shared their strategies with the broader NIH community. With this competition in mind, Melinda presented the GRIT Awards as an innovative way to build a network of businesses to participate in future research.



Chris Snider, President of Texas Tito's, a GRIT Award winner, and Josh Daspit, SCALEUP Director

Our objectives expanded beyond our initial goal as we developed the awards program. We realized that building this network offered an opportunity to position TXST as a hub for economic resilience and highlight the great work being done by small businesses in Texas. With these goals in mind, we launched the GRIT Awards in Fall 2022.

We requested nominations to recognize how small businesses in Texas demonstrated resilience in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, or similarly disruptive events. We leveraged a multi-pronged advertising campaign, reaching out to businesses and

Chambers of Commerce, advertising in the Austin Business Journal, and running ads on LinkedIn. Our outreach led to nearly 100 nominations for small businesses from all parts of the state.

Determining the winners presented a new opportunity to engage high-profile judges who are influential business community members. First, we assessed nominees for evidence of five attributes of resilience, as defined by Deloitte Global (2021): preparedness, adaptability, collaboration, trustworthiness, and responsibility. Then, our [GRIT judges](#) helped us select our winners.

In January 2023, [seven businesses were awarded the first-ever GRIT Awards](#). Collectively, these winners are examples of what it takes to be a resilient small business in Texas. When examining their testimonies, five themes emerged about building a resilient small business:

- Using new technologies in innovative ways,
- Shifting to new business or sales models,
- Fostering existing and new relationships,
- Collaborating and working as a team, and
- Developing a plan before crisis strikes.

Many nominees also commented on the process of reflection that the GRIT Awards required. Several business owners noted that revisiting challenges reminded them of what they did to overcome these challenges and that this reflection was, in some ways, “healing.”

GRIT Award recipients received a promotional video, created by a professional production crew, and were recognized at the [GRIT Awards Showcase](#) on April 25, where they shared their stories and lessons learned with other business leaders. The showcase also introduced the next steps for the small business network, which will include a virtual mentoring program to facilitate ongoing conversations and resource sharing among small businesses in Texas. Check out the event recording to hear from our winners and learn more about these upcoming initiatives.

By collaborating on the GRIT Awards, a strong partnership has been established between THRC and SCALEUP, and TXST is now positioned as a leader in research on economic resilience in Texas. Learn more about our GRIT Award Winners in the video below.