



UTRUST FAQ's (Frequently Asked Questions)

Utrust Programs – General FAQs

What is Utrust?

Utrust is a Tennessee-based organization focused on employee recognition, appreciation, and building positive school culture to help make schools better places to work and learn.

What programs does Utrust offer?

Utrust offers:

- The **Utrust Appreciation Program (UAP)** with two components
 - Utrust Appreciation Days
 - **Utrust Culture Initiative**
- Appreciation Days Grants and Culture Grants
- Unemployment Compensation Administration and Assistance

Utrust Appreciation Days & Appreciation Days Grants – FAQs

What is the Utrust Appreciation Days Program (UAD)?

The UAD is a student-led program that encourages students to intentionally recognize and appreciate school employees through eight designated appreciation days each school year.

Who leads the Appreciation Days Program at a school?

Students lead through an 18-member **A-Team**, supported by adult advisers and a School Coordinator.

Why are appreciation days not scheduled on national appreciation holidays?

National appreciation days often fall in the same month. Utrust spaces appreciation days throughout the year to allow time for planning and to give each employee group focused recognition.

Why are Special Area Teachers celebrated on a different day than Teacher Day?

Special Area Teachers are honored separately to ensure their contributions receive focused recognition. This also allows classroom teachers and Special Area Teachers to support one another's celebrations.

Can we celebrate employees on different dates than the scheduled dates?

Yes. Schools may adjust dates as long as celebrations occur within **two weeks** of the Utrust-scheduled date to remain eligible for grants and awards.

What is an Appreciation Days Grant?

An Appreciation Days Grant is a **\$500 grant** provided by Utrust to support materials and activities for the eight appreciation days.

How can Appreciation Days Grant funds be used?

Funds may be used for:

- Decorations, posters, and signage
- Thank-you notes and tokens of appreciation
- Supplies for appreciation day activities
- Recognizing A-Team members

What are the requirements to remain eligible for an Appreciation Days Grant?

Schools must:

- Complete required Utrust University Appreciation certification
- Fully implement the Utrust Appreciation Program
- Celebrate all eight appreciation days using Utrust themes
- Submit required documentation by deadlines

What do we need to do to qualify for the Lucky Star Award (after each appreciation day)?

Schools must:

- Use the designated Utrust theme
- Submit at least five photos
- Include the full school name
- Provide a brief summary of activities
- Submit within two weeks of the appreciation day

What do we need to do to qualify for Awesome Notes of Appreciation?

Schools must:

- Submit no more than three student-written notes
- Address notes to a specific person
- Include the full school name
- Submit through the required process

Culture Initiative & Culture Grants – FAQs

What is the Utrust Culture Initiative?

The Culture Initiative expands appreciation beyond designated appreciation days and encourages year-round appreciation among students, staff, parents, and the community.

What are the four pillars of the Culture Initiative?

The Culture Initiative is built on:

- **Student Involvement** – Led by the G-Force through Culture Quests and the Birthdate Challenge
- **Staff Involvement** – Staff model and participate in appreciation activities
- **Parent Involvement** – Parents support and model appreciation at home
- **Community Involvement** – Local organizations reinforce a culture of appreciation

What is a Culture Grant?

Culture Grants provide funding to support culture-building activities such as Monthly Culture Quests and the Birthdate Challenge.

How are Culture Grants calculated?

Grant amounts are based on student population, so funding varies by school size. The minimum Culture Initiative grant is \$1000.

Who is eligible for a Culture Grant?

Only schools that participate in Utrust Appreciation Days and meet Culture Initiative requirements are eligible.

What are the requirements to remain eligible for a Culture Grant?

Schools must:

- Maintain required Appreciation and Culture certification
- Participate fully in the Utrust Appreciation Days Program
- Maintain an active **G-Force**
- Participate in the Birthdate Challenge
- Complete Monthly Culture Quests
- Submit required documentation

What are the duties of the G-Force?

The G-Force:

- Leads Monthly Culture Quests
- Promotes and participates in the Birthdate Challenge
- Encourages appreciation among students and staff
- Serves as role models for kindness and gratitude

What's the difference between the A-Team and the G-Force?

- **A-Team:** Plans and carries out the eight appreciation days
- **G-Force:** Leads year-round culture-building activities

What's the difference between the Appreciation Days Program and the Culture Initiative?

The Appreciation Days Program focuses on honoring employees through designated days. The Culture Initiative builds ongoing appreciation for everyone across the entire school community.

Who is responsible for filling out the Culture Grant application?

The **principal** is responsible for submitting the Culture Grant application.

App Submission FAQs

Why are submissions moving to the app instead of Facebook?

The app offers an improved submission experience. Entries are private, confirmed, and tracked, and you can easily access them anytime throughout the year. You'll also be able to download a report of your submissions whenever you need it.

Can we still submit entries in the Facebook group?

Yes. It is not required but schools may submit entries of special events if they choose. Once the app launches, **submissions must be made through the app even though Facebook entries have been posted..**

What will the Facebook group be used for now?

In addition to optional posts by schools, the Facebook group will be used by Utrust administrators to:

- Share communications and reminders
- Showcase winning and highlighted entries

Members may comment and engage, but submissions should not be posted there.

Do I need a Facebook account to submit entries?

No. A Facebook account is not required. All submissions happen in the app.

Who can submit entries?

School Coordinators, A-Team and G-Force Advisers or other designated staff members. We encourage asking students to submit entries once staff member is logged in.

Is the app hard to use?

No. The app provides a clear, guided process and works on phones, tablets, and computers.

How many entries can we submit?

Each school may submit **one complete entry per appreciation day, Culture Quest, or Awesome Notes per year.**

Why only one complete entry?

- Keeps photos and details in one place
- Reduces missing or conflicting information
- Ensures accurate review
- Prevents follow-up requests

How do I know my submission was received?

You will receive a confirmation screen and email after submitting.

What if we forget to submit?

The app tracks required submissions and allows Utrust to send alerts if something is missed.

If you fail to submit entries completely, you may not be eligible for grants in the future.

Who can see submissions?

Photos and descriptions can be viewed by those with an app login on the Celebration Showcase page. Schools may also view highlighted entries on the Utrust Coordinators Facebook Group.

Do we need hashtags or special post formatting?

No. The app removes the need for hashtags, specific wording, or Facebook formatting.

How does the Documentation Report help our school?

The report:

- Captures a record of all submissions by your school
- Is ready to download when documentation is required
- Eliminates the need for screenshots or recreating evidence
- Turns submissions into official, usable documentation

Unemployment Benefits – FAQs

Why do we pay unemployment benefits for someone who left voluntarily and found another job?

Benefits are charged proportionately based on wages paid during the employee's base period (the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters).

How does proportional charging work?

If an employer paid 38% of an employee's base-period wages, that employer may be responsible for 38% of each benefit payment during the benefit year.

Why do we pay unemployment for part-time substitute teachers?

A claimant may qualify if they earned an average of at least \$780.01 across two quarters during the base period, even if employment was part-time.

If a former employee is later found ineligible, do we receive a credit?

No. Reimbursing employers do not receive credits for benefits already paid. Repaid funds are applied to future benefits.

Can someone receiving retirement benefits also receive unemployment?

Sometimes.

- If the employee contributed to the retirement plan, benefits are not reduced.
- If the employer paid 100% of the retirement or pension, benefits may be reduced and must be disclosed.

What should we submit if an employee was terminated for misconduct?

Employers must provide detailed documentation showing willful, work-related misconduct when submitting the separation notice. The burden of proof is on the employer.

Tennessee School Counseling Standards Alignment – FAQs

Can Utrust Appreciation Day activities support Tennessee school requirements?

Yes. Utrust Appreciation Days, when paired with the provided counselor lesson plans, support key Tennessee expectations related to:

- School climate and culture
- Social-emotional development
- Student engagement and positive behavior
- Relationship-building within the school community

These activities combine instruction, student work, and schoolwide participation in a way that aligns with existing school expectations.

What types of state expectations do Appreciation Days support?

Utrust Appreciation Days support documentation and implementation related to:

- Positive school climate and sense of belonging
 - Social-emotional learning and relationship skills
 - Student engagement and participation
 - Staff recognition and morale
 - Bullying prevention through protective factors
 - Schoolwide counseling instruction (when using lesson plans)
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How do the Utrust provided counselor lesson plans support alignment?

The Utrust counselor lesson plans provide:

- Structured, schoolwide instruction
- Opportunities for student reflection and discussion
- Writing activities tied to real audiences and purpose

Each lesson reinforces character development, empathy, and respectful communication while allowing schools to document instructional delivery alongside school climate efforts.

Do Appreciation Days replace required instruction?

No. Appreciation Days do not replace academic or required instructional time.

However, when paired with the counselor lesson plans, they:

- Function as structured instructional time
 - Reinforce social-emotional and character development goals
 - Support multiple school priorities within one coordinated activity
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What documentation should schools keep?

Schools typically retain:

- Monthly counselor lesson plans and lesson logs
- A downloadable Utrust app participation report, which includes:
 - Three uploaded Awesome Notes (representative student writing samples)
 - Photos of Appreciation Day activities

These materials provide clear evidence of both instruction and implementation.

How does the Utrust app support documentation?

The Utrust app simplifies documentation by:

- Capturing participation in a structured format
- Storing uploaded student writing samples and photos
- Generating a downloadable report for school or district use

This allows schools to maintain organized documentation without creating additional systems.

Do schools need to track the total number of notes written?

No. Schools are not required to track total participation counts.

The three uploaded Awesome Notes serve as **representative student work samples**, which are sufficient to demonstrate implementation and student engagement.

Can Culture Initiative activities also support alignment?

Yes. Culture Initiative activities (such as Culture Quests) support similar goals related to:

- School climate and connectedness
- Student voice and participation
- Inclusive environments
- Family and community engagement

Schools may choose to include these as additional supporting evidence.

Do schools need to use both Appreciation Days and Culture Initiatives?

No. Schools may choose to use Appreciation Days alone.

Appreciation Days, when paired with the lesson plans and app documentation, already provide strong support for school climate, engagement, and counseling-related expectations.

However, schools are strongly encouraged to participate in both Appreciation Days and Culture Initiatives, as using both throughout the year provides more consistent opportunities to reinforce positive culture, strengthen relationships, and deepen student engagement.

Who determines whether activities meet specific requirements?

Final determination always rests with the school or district.

Utrust provides aligned activities, instructional support, and documentation tools that make it easier for schools to meet those expectations.

Does participation guarantee compliance with Tennessee mandates?

No. Participation does not guarantee compliance.

However, Utrust provides:

- Structured, repeatable activities
- Instructional support through lesson plans
- Clear, organized documentation

These elements strongly support many Tennessee expectations related to school climate, counseling, and student engagement.
