

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Department of Surgery Innovation Shark Tank

OVERVIEW

The University of Wisconsin (UW) Department of Surgery is hosting an Innovation Shark Tank Competition as part of our 2026 Research Summit. This initiative aims to incubate high-potential surgical research ideas that will catalyze additional intra- or extramural funding within 1–2 years. We seek cutting-edge concepts with clear translational pathways and capacity to generate innovation, improve patient outcomes, and advance the field of surgery. Proposals may be basic science, translational, or health services/implementation research projects that address significant surgical challenges. The Shark Tank award is designed as seed funding to establish proof-of-concept, generate preliminary data, and position projects for successful grant submissions to federal agencies, foundations, or industry partners. All projects must exemplify team science through collaboration with at least one partner from within the UW research enterprise.

ELIGIBLE RESEARCH CATEGORIES

We welcome proposals across the full spectrum of surgical research:

- **Basic Science:** Mechanistic studies, pre-clinical models, or fundamental investigations of surgical phenomena (e.g., tissue engineering, cellular biology, physiology)
 - **Translational Research:** Studies bridging basic discoveries to clinical application (e.g., novel surgical techniques, devices, biomarkers, or interventions tested in early-stage clinical settings)
 - **Health Services & Implementation Research:** Studies focused on optimizing surgical care delivery, improving outcomes, reducing disparities, enhancing efficiency, or accelerating adoption of evidence-based practices (e.g., care coordination, quality improvement, implementation science, patient-centered outcomes)
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ELIGIBILITY

- Faculty and PI-eligible scientists from the Department of Surgery
 - All proposals must include at least one UW faculty, staff, or research collaborator who is in a complementary discipline. The Department of Surgery applicant is required to be the lead investigator.
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SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

One-page proposal (single-spaced, 11pt font) including:

1. **Project Title**
2. **Research Category:** Indicate whether this is basic science, translational, or health services/implementation research
3. **Problem Statement & State of Science** (3-4 sentences): Clearly articulate the clinical problem, mechanistic gap, or health services challenge. Summarize the existing state of scientific knowledge or clinical practice. Identify what is currently unknown, inefficient, or suboptimal that your project will address. What does the field need?
4. **Innovation & Approach** (3-4 sentences): Novel methodology, technology, intervention, or framework; how it differs from current practice or existing knowledge; why this approach is innovative
5. **Team Science & Collaboration** (2-3 sentences): Identify UW collaborators and their disciplines (e.g., biomedical engineering, data science, basic science, implementation science, patient engagement). Describe

how each team member contributes to the project's innovation and feasibility. Explain the complementary expertise that strengthens the proposed work.

6. **Anticipated Impact** (2-3 sentences): Describe the clinical outcomes, mechanistic insights, efficiency gains, scalability, commercialization potential, policy implications, or societal benefit that is expected from the proposed research
7. **Pathway to Funding** (2-3 sentences): Identify target funding agencies (NIH, foundation, industry) or grant mechanisms for follow-on funding applications; outline how Shark Tank funding will generate preliminary data or proof-of-concept to strengthen a future proposal
8. **12-Month Milestones** (2-3 sentences): Identify the specific deliverables (publications, pilot data, prototype, IRB approval, validated instruments, policy briefs, etc.) that will position the project for external funding submission within 18–24 months

Additional Materials:

- CV or biosketch of lead investigator (1 page)
 - Summary of each UW collaborator including name, title, department/unit, and specific role/contribution
 - Letters of commitment from UW collaborators confirming their participation and roles
 - Additional letters of support (optional)
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EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- **Problem Significance & State of Science:** Is the problem or gap well-articulated and compelling? Is the existing state of science or practice clearly described? Does the proposal demonstrate understanding of the current literature or landscape?
 - **Scientific Merit & Innovation:** Does the idea represent a meaningful and novel advance in surgical science, clinical care, or health outcomes? Is the approach well-justified for the research category?
 - **Team Science Strength:** Does the proposed team have complementary expertise? Are the collaborations well-integrated and credible? Does the collaboration strengthen the innovation?
 - **Translational Potential & Fundability:** Can this idea realistically generate impact and move forward within the research continuum? Is there a credible pathway to additional funding?
 - **Feasibility as Seed Project:** Can meaningful proof-of-concept, preliminary data, or other fundable deliverables be generated within 12 months using the requested budget and team resources?
 - **Impact:** Does it address a significant clinical, mechanistic, or health services need with broad applicability, commercial potential, or policy implications?
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COMPETITION FORMAT

Pitch Session:

- Lead investigator presents a 5-minute pitch (plus 1 minute for slides/visual aids), with the option to briefly highlight team collaborators and their roles
- Followed by 2–3 minutes of Q&A with a panel of expert judges ("Sharks")
- Judges include department leadership, faculty innovators, representatives from campus research institutes (ICTR, WARF, WPP), philanthropic leaders

Award:

- Up to a maximum of \$25,000
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FUNDING EXPECTATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Award recipients are expected to:

- **Maintain active team collaboration** throughout the funding period, with documented communication and co-authored milestones
- **Submit preliminary findings** (e.g., pilot data, publications, IRB approvals, technology prototypes, validated instruments, policy briefs) to the Department of Surgery Research Office within 12 months
- **Apply for external funding** (NIH, foundation, industry, or institutional mechanisms) within 18–24 months of award
- **Report on grant outcomes** (funded/unfunded) and team contributions to the Department at 24-month follow-up
- **Share** findings from work with the Department by submitting an abstract to the 2028 Research Summit

The goal of this award is to create a pipeline of fundable, team-science ideas spanning the research continuum that advances departmental research productivity, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration across the UW research enterprise, and secures sustainable external support for innovative surgical research.

TIMELINE

Milestone	Date
Proposal Submission Deadline	January 7, 2026
Notification of Finalists	Week of January 12, 2026
Shark Tank Competition Event	January 29, 2026

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

- Submit proposals via https://uwmadison.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8rkGU7VidxWS3Hg
- All materials must be received by January 7, 2026, 11:59PM CST

QUESTIONS?

For questions regarding this RFP, please contact:

Hannah Clark, clarkh@surgery.wisc.edu

Mehreen Kisat, kisat@surgery.wisc.edu

Patrick Varley, varley@surgery.wisc.edu