



Here
and
Next

Spark Funding Grants

Proposal Development Track
Convening Track

2025 Dates and Deadlines

Informational Webinars	January 17 at 1 PM and January 23 at 12:30 PM
Proposal Deadlines	Proposals are accepted during the academic year until funds are exhausted or until April 30, 2025 for FY 25. A new portal will be released in FY 26.
Award Period	9 months maximum
Award Ceiling	\$20,000 with smaller amounts encouraged. \$20,000 awards are rare.

Program Scope

The Spark Funding: Research Development Grant supports collaborative ideation and grant-making for WashU faculty in areas that align with the Here & Next Research Excellence priority areas of **Public Health, Global Health, Environmental Research, Digital Transformation, and Research Impacting the St. Louis Community**. This grant aims to encourage a culture of multidisciplinary, convergent, team-based research by assisting these teams in developing collaborative research agendas and preparing and submitting complex, large-scale proposals to external sponsors.

There are two tracks of Spark Funding available to researchers the **Convening Track** for projects in their nascent stages and the **Proposal Development Track**, for teams engaged in the advanced planning for complex external grant submissions.

The Convening Track supports teams as they begin working around a nascent idea they would like to take from idea to reality. Over a short period (no more than 9 months), the team will emerge with a conceptual deliverable such as a white paper, funding roadmap, concept note, etc. in preparation for a larger research initiative with an eye towards sustainability and targeted external funding. This grant is *not* project support, but rather, a mechanism through which researchers can take concentrated time to develop potential pathways for collaboration around that special initiative. **Convening funds should not be used in support of regular meetings of national professional organizations.**

The Proposal Development Track supports teams in the advanced planning necessary for successful external grant submissions, such as developing a compelling research vision, securing buy-in from external collaborators and partners, and establishing a track-record of robust teamwork amongst investigators across multiple disciplines. This grant is **not** a general project support grant, if any funds are requested for research activities, you must explicitly connect them to the proposal’s development and explain how they will be accomplished within the 9-month

award period to enhance the proposal's competitiveness. Teams must submit a proposal by the end of the 9-month award period.

Eligibility

- Co-PIs must be full-time faculty at Washington University at the time of application and continue in that role for the duration of the award.
- There must be a tangible interdisciplinary collaboration from at least two Washington University schools (minimum of two Co-PIs with a primary appointment in different schools is required). Each collaborator should have salient research expertise that they are bringing to the team.
- Each applicant may submit one proposal as a Co-PI to each Here and Next Research Grant program for the Academic Year. They may not be a co-PI on more than one proposal per program.
- Previous awardees must be current with all previous awards' reporting to be eligible for subsequent funding under the Here and Next program.
- It is the applicant's responsibility to justify their proposal's fit within the Here and Next Research Priority areas of Public Health, Global Health, Environmental Research, Digital Transformation, and Research Impacting the St. Louis Community.
- **Proposal Development Track applicants must have a single, targeted opportunity for which the team is applying, not a list of opportunities to which they could potentially apply.** The proposal must clearly articulate how Proposal Development funds will increase their likelihood of funding. For instance, connecting the proposed grant activities to the appropriate merit review criteria or based upon feedback received on a previously submitted external proposal would increase your proposal's competitiveness.
- **Proposal Development Track:** Washington University must be the prime awardee of the proposal under development. If WashU is a sub awardee, the prime institution must also be contributing funds to the proposal's development equal or surpassing that being requested from the Here and Next award.
- **Proposal Development Track** If the targeted opportunity requires an LOI and an invitation to full proposal, applicants must either have received that invitation to full proposal or explain in detail how they will pivot to another opportunity should they not be invited to submit a full proposal (i.e., specify the contingent opportunity and how the work proposed will still be relevant).
- **Proposal Development Track:** Similarly, if the targeted opportunity is a limited submission/internal selection opportunity, applicants must have either secured the institutional nomination or explain in detail how they will pivot to another, specific, opportunity if not nominated.
- **Proposal Development Track:** If institutional match is required by the sponsor, the applicant must have secured such institutional match or explain how they will acquire that match. Spark Funding: Proposal Development Grant funds may not be used as such match.

Application Information

All proposals must be submitted via InfoReady for consideration. Faculty applicants can assign research administrators proxy access.

General Tips and Guidelines

- Each of the elements under Evaluation Criteria in this document should be clearly addressed in the applicant's responses.
- All responses should be written so that it is understandable and compelling to non-specialists. Thus, they should be free of jargon.
- While we are interested in research objectives and goals of the proposal, we are most concerned with how the proposed activities will advance the team's successful submission to an external sponsor.

Part I: Team Contact Information

- Enter the names, appointments, schools, departments, and emails of the Co-PIs
- Enter the name of the individual who would be the post-award administrator, if awarded
- **Track Selection:** Convening Track or Proposal Development Track (this selection will trigger the appropriate proposal questions)
 - **Proposal Development Track** What is the opportunity that you are targeting?
 - Targeted Submission Date
 - Provide a link to the solicitation. You may choose to upload the CFP/NOFO in the Optional Uploads section
 - Estimated Amount Requested from the External Sponsor
- **Amount Requested.** Please keep in mind that amounts totaling the full \$20,000 are rarely issued unless need is demonstrated clearly.
- Here and Next Priority Area Alignment

Convening Track: Part II: Team Ideation Activities and Collaboration

1. What is the proposed initiative? What is the anticipated research output? Explain the goals and significance of the convening or team ideation session. What are the potential pathways of activity you hope to pursue or target after the initial period of performance?
2. What activities do you propose undertaking during your convening? You may choose to present a short program or agenda for the initiative or convening as a supplemental upload.
3. How does the proposed Convening align with the Here and Next priority areas you selected?
4. Please explain the roles and duties of the various investigators on this proposal. How did this team form and how do you see the role of diversity and innovation with your team's structure?

Proposal Development Track: Part II: Proposal Development Activities

1. Explain your proposed project and how it is aligned and competitive for the targeted opportunity selected.
2. What are the activities you plan to undertake with the Proposal Development funds? How will these activities move the needle towards your proposal's success with the sponsor?
3. Who is on the team and how does each member contribute to the proposal? What role will they play in proposal development and project execution? Include external collaborators and community stakeholders as appropriate.
4. Please describe any communication with the targeted funding agency (communication with Program Officer, feedback on prior submissions, invitation to apply, etc.)

Part III: Budget & Budget Justification

List the top-line budget items for the Spark Funding grant. Explain those high-level expenses and their necessity to the team's progress in the justification. Please pay careful attention to what expenses are allowed for each track.

- Maximum award of \$20,000, with smaller amounts encouraged
- Award period of 9 months
- No-cost extensions are not allowed

Proposal Development Allowed Costs:

Funds may be used to support various proposal development costs such as:

- Proposal/Project management
- Grant writing and editing services
- Mock Review, such as Red Team Review
- Graphic Design and Scientific Illustration
- Stakeholder outreach & engagement
- Meeting and Collaboration costs (to develop the team's relationship with collaborators, program officers, etc.)

Unallowable costs are:

- Project costs such as materials, data sets, equipment, etc., unless extremely well justified
- Salary support
- Postdoc, staff, and student support
- Indirect costs

Convening Track Costs

Funds may be used to support various convening costs such as:

- Space and Facility rental
- Travel, lodging, and meals for collaborators
- Supply or equipment rentals for convening
- Summer Salary for WashU researchers

Funds may not be spent on:

- Pilot Data
- Research materials, activities, or equipment
- Postdoctoral, staff, or student support
- Regular meetings of national professional organizations

Part IV: Additional Information and Uploads

- Upload CVs for each co-PI, combined into a single .pdf file. Include only most recent and relevant publications and research, no more than 4 pages per co-PI.
- Please list any current sources of funding for this project including pending opportunities both external and internal.
- Convening Track (optional): Uploads of agendas for convening and ideation sessions
- Proposal Development Track: (optional) Uploads of Solicitation Document – Materials uploaded other than CFPs will not be evaluated.

Evaluation Criteria

Convening Track Criteria

1. **Team Qualifications**

The following should be explained clearly:

- a. the relevant experience and expertise of the co-PIs as it relates to the proposed Pop-Up Initiative
- b. the team's plans to grow the research capacity on the initiative's topic, including specific skills or abilities of the team
- c. the duties, roles, and responsibilities of the team participating on the initiative.

2. **Interdisciplinary Nature of the Team**

At a minimum, two (2) schools must be represented by the co-PIs' primary appointments. Otherwise, proposals should clearly delineate the interdisciplinary, team-based approach that will be incorporated into the convening or ideation session. Pay close attention to explaining how your work—not just your team—is interdisciplinary. Each PI should bring something unique to the table. Draw attention to innovative, novel, and atypical collaborations that will break down previously siloed groups.

3. **Generative Capacity**

There must be a clear deliverable that will be completed at the end of the period of performance such as a white paper, concept note, funding roadmap, etc. The proposed convening must have a clear plan to generate future research pathways. Proposals will be evaluated based on how they describe their hopeful trajectory.

4. **Significance of Proposed Research and Alignment with Here and Next Priority Areas**

All applicants should discuss the alignment of the project's priorities, significance, and impact, as well as its potential impact on WashU research excellence, St. Louis, the region, or the globe. Applicants should also discuss pathways for targeting future external funding opportunities with research in the Here and Next Research Excellence Priority Areas: Public Health, Global Health, Digital Transformation, Environmental Research, and Research Impacting the St. Louis Community. Applicants must ensure that their proposals are free of discipline-specific jargon, and the initiative is clearly outlined

Proposal Development Track Criteria

1. **Team Composition vis-à-vis Targeted External Funding Opportunity**

The team will be evaluated based upon the relevant experience, expertise, and capacity of the Co-PIs as it relates to the targeted grant opportunity. A clear description of plans to grow the grant-seeking capacity, including specific skills or abilities of the team and projected need for consultant services to ensure funding success is required.

2. **Interdisciplinary Nature of the Team and the Project**

Two schools must be represented by the Co-PIs primary appointments at a minimum. In addition to school representation, the team must have clearly delineated interdisciplinary team-based approach that will be incorporated into the resulting proposal's design and execution.

3. **Targeted Grant Opportunity**

Must be working towards a **clearly identified large-scale grant opportunity** that is significant in the proposed field. An explicit strategy for securing external funding must be included. Proposals should include specific activities the team(s) will undertake to lead to an external funding proposal by the award period's end. A detailed description and timeline for proposal

development process, from inception to submission is required. Feasibility of the plan to pursue external funding and likelihood of a competitive proposal will be evaluated.

4. **Alignment with Here and Next Priority Areas**

A concise discussion of the proposal's alignment with the Here and Next Research Excellence Priority Areas of Public Health, Global Health, Environmental Research, Digital Transformation, and Research Impacting the St. Louis Community is required. Applicants should also discuss the significance and impact of the proposed proposal/research upon WashU and/or the region for the targeted external funding opportunity.

Review Process & Timeline

Spark Funding proposals are accepted on a rolling basis during the academic year for as long as funds permit. Proposals will be reviewed by the Research Development Office, with feedback and approval from Provost's Office, based on the above criteria for each track.

For the **Proposal Development Track**, we expect these proposals to be time sensitive. Thus, we will make every effort to deliver decisions within one month of submission.

Reporting Requirements

Convening Track: A final fiscal and activity report will be due within 60 days of award end via InfoReady. There will be a required follow-up report one year after award period that will include questions about the group's status on their current research activities and collaboration, etc.

Proposal Development Track: A copy of the submitted external proposal is due to the Research Development Office (send to researchseedfunding@wustl.edu by the end of the 9-month award period. Additional reporting will be required 60 days after the award period's end via InfoReady. RDO will follow up with awardees regarding their external proposal's status.

Questions and More Information

For questions about this or other Here and Next Research Grants or InfoReady, please reach out to researchseedfunding@wustl.edu.