

What are CRI Spark Fund grants?

- Spark Fund grant awards support the development of commercially valuable inventions (from any field) currently in earlier stages of readiness
 - Spark Fund awards are for \$50,000 and run for a year
 - 5+ awards are available per cycle

When do Spark Fund applications open?

- Applications open in June for disbursement of awards in September and January for disbursement of awards in April.
- Visit <https://sparkfund.cri.northeastern.edu/> to learn more about Spark Fund award application eligibility and deadlines.

What is the Spark Fund application and award process?

- Submit your Spark Fund application by the general application close date; no late applications are accepted
- Applications are reviewed by internal and external Spark Fund judges
- Applicants selected as finalists will be asked to virtually pitch their proposed project(s) to a group of Spark Fund judges
- Spark Fund award recipients are provided the first tranche of funding (\$25,000) at project start
- Spark Fund award recipients meet with CRI staff to report on progress against defined project deliverables and use of funds quarterly, progress reports determine when the second tranche of funding (\$25,000) is disbursed
- Spark Fund recipients are expected to use all Spark funding to advance a technology or suite of technologies within one year and provide a closeout report at the project's end.

What general awards are open to all eligible applicants?

- Spark Fund applicants may apply for up to \$50,000 per cycle to advance a technology or suite of technologies towards commercialization. Recipients of past Spark Fund or GapFund360 awards may apply for additional funding up to \$150,000 total on a technology or suite of technologies. Prior award recipients must use active award funding for a full year prior to applying again to further advance that technology or suite of technologies towards commercialization. Note, new applicants and past awards recipients applying for funding may only have one active Spark Fund award at a time. While you may apply to advance multiple technologies or suites of technologies through the Spark Fund simultaneously, you will only receive funding to advance one technology or suite of technologies at a time.

What are the expectations regarding advancement towards commercialization ready if I am applying for a second or third Spark Fund award for the same technology or suite of technologies?

- When you apply for and are awarded a Spark Fund grant, you must provide information about your current technology readiness level and milestones that you will work towards with your newly awarded funding. You will meet with Spark Fund staff throughout the duration of your Spark Fund grant, one-year, to report on progress against milestones, barriers you may face, and changes to use of your Spark Fund grant. If you choose to apply for follow on funding from the Spark Fund to further advance the same technology or suite of technologies through the Spark Fund, your progress against set milestones for your first Spark Fund award, barriers to advancement, and technology readiness level will be assessed as part of the application process.
- Below is a chart detailing technology readiness levels for reference. Below are a couple of examples of what Spark Fund judges seek in successful applications.
 - Technology Readiness Levels 2 – 3 (see chart, below)

- Successful applicants will have formulated novel concepts, applications, methods or compositions and partially validated their theories.
- In the life sciences, experimental proof-of-concept has been established via *in vitro* results. In all other fields, laboratory-based studies and validating strategies should be underway.
- Technology Readiness Levels 4 – 5 (see chart below)
 - For successful life science applicants, the invention will have been validated *in vitro* with *in vivo* testing underway or complete.
 - For all other fields, technologies are approaching near final commercial performance and will use the Spark Fund to complete minimum viable commercial products.

In addition to the general awards, are there any special awards?

- The CRI is partnering with the College of Science on an award earmarked for COS researchers.
- The College of Engineering is joining with the CRI to co-sponsor an award dedicated to advancing research from the lab of a COE Assistant Professor.

Do the Spark Fund staff provide assistance in preparing Spark Fund applications?

- Spark Fund staff will offer advance review and feedback to all early applicants, prior to applications being submitted for final review and assessment to an external panel of Spark Fund judges. Early applications are accepted in the first two weeks after applications open. Feedback will be provided either via email or a meeting with the applicant within 2 weeks after early applications close. Applications are open for 6 weeks total.

What are Spark Fund grants typically used for?

- Spark Fund grants may be used to advance the commercial prospects of leading-edge inventions in many different ways, including:
 - Building a commercially ready prototype
 - Animal testing to generate *in vivo* data needed to attract commercial partners
 - Developing manufacturing processes that enhance yield, speed, or cost
 - Repurposing or enhancing technology to meet industry-specific needs
- With a handful of exceptions, grant funds are spent at Northeastern.

Who is eligible to apply?

- Eligible applicants include Northeastern University Principal Investigators (PIs) with novel, pioneering, and commercially valuable technologies currently in the proof-of-concept stage.
- Your technology must be disclosed to the Center for Research Innovation before applying.
- At least one Northeastern PI with the duty to assign must either lead or oversee the proposed project.
 - No outside PIs will be allowed.
 - Any prior intellectual property must also be assigned to Northeastern.

May I apply for a Spark Fund grant with more than one technology?

- A lab may apply for a Spark Fund grant with more than one technology but may only have one active Spark Fund grant at any given time.

What are the selection criteria?

- Team strength
 - Principal investigator & team
- Technical merit
 - Intellectual merit
 - Novelty and technical advantages

- Commercial value
 - Market opportunity
 - Commercialization strategy
 - Broader impacts
- Project feasibility

What expenses are allowed?

- Salaries for research faculty, postdoctoral researchers, Ph.D., graduate, and undergraduate students; materials, supplies, travel expenses excluding conference attendance, and equipment and supplies necessary for the performance of the research provided that equipment costs do not exceed \$2,000; costs related to animal care and research; and external consultant or advisor costs approved by the Spark Fund.

What expenses are disallowed?

- Overhead or indirect costs; tuition; visa fees; scholarships; sabbatical leave; salaries for staff, visiting faculty, visiting researchers, tenured or tenure track faculty (including but not limited to the Lead Researcher) and other personnel not named in Allowable Expenditures above; conference attendance and travel; patent expenses; entertainment; equipment in excess of \$2,000; sales, marketing, or other business development; and debts, fines, or penalties.

What deliverables are required to apply?

1. SPARK FUND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, maximum three pages of text
2. SPARK FUND SLIDE DECK, 10-15 slides

You will be asked to cover the following topics in the EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and the SLIDE DECK:

- Need/Problem
- Research Overview
- Use of Spark Fund grant
 - Major Project Milestones
- Current & Anticipated Research Grant Support
- Technology and Product
- Target Markets
- Commercialization Strategy
 - Spinout Plans, if any
 - Potential licensees/ acquirers/ collaborators/ early adopter customers
 - Feedback from the above
 - Letters of Support
- Competition
- IP status
- Regulatory Path (If Applicable)
- Research Team
- Names of any advisors and consultants
- Summary

3. SPARK FUND BUDGET

4. SPARK FUND TIMETABLE

Does the CRI require equity in any spinout companies that license Spark Funded IP?

- The CRI does not require equity as a result of the Spark Fund grant, but there is a grant repayment provision.

- If a Northeastern researcher is involved in an entity that licenses funded IP and that entity raises more than fifteen million dollars in an IPO or is acquired for more than fifteen million dollars, the researcher agrees that the licensee shall reimburse Northeastern an amount equal to three times the total Spark Fund grant awards.
- The repayment noted above is in addition to any fees or payments agreed to in any license agreements – and those license agreements could have equity provisions.

For more information: [Spark Fund | The Center for Research Innovation \(northeastern.edu\)](#)

For any questions: SparkFund@northeastern.edu