



CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**SPARK NS Translational Research
Program**
2026 Cohort

Overview

Program Duration: Two years

Milestone-based Project Support: Up to \$2,000,000 per project during the two-year program, including discretionary funding for the principal investigator (PI) of \$50,000 per year.¹

The Program

SPARK NS is an independent non-profit translational research organization dedicated to efficiently advancing promising neuroscience discoveries from the lab to the clinic. For the SPARK NS Translational Research Program, 2026 Cohort, SPARK NS will select academic PIs with therapeutic discoveries in Parkinson's disease or autism at any stage of development between target identification and entry into clinical trials. For selected projects, SPARK NS will provide funding, education, mentorship, and networking opportunities focused on advancing the translation of novel science to first-in-class therapeutics. The duration of the program is two years. Projects selected will receive milestone-based support of up to \$2,000,000 during the two-year program, including discretionary funding for the PI of \$50,000 per year.

Application Information

This **Call for Proposals** document provides detailed information about how to apply to the program and a timeline. For more information on the program and additional guidance on applying, see the document **[Program Description and Applications Guidelines](#)**.

Eligibility

SPARK NS will accept applications from biomedical researchers at academic or nonprofit research institutions in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe. We value diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive research environment. Applicants from all backgrounds and experiences are encouraged to apply.

¹ Total discretionary funding for the PI during the two-year program will not exceed \$100,000. This discretionary funding will be paid to PIs' institutions. In addition to the discretionary funding, SPARK NS will reimburse PIs' institutions for their indirect costs (IDC) and discretionary amount not to exceed \$5,000 per year (that is, an IDC rate of 10%) during the two-year program.

Selection Criteria Overview

Proposed projects must:

- Address an unmet clinical need in Parkinson's disease or autism
- Use a robust and novel approach
- Have a high probability of success at accomplishing proposed translational objectives

What Makes This Program Different

SPARK NS programs use a proven model for translational research developed and refined since 2006. The model has an exceptional 50%² success rate at advancing discoveries through the translational phase. Other differences from other sources of funding include:

1. Comprehensive program. SPARK NS uniquely combines funding, education, mentorship, and networking opportunities to ensure that each project meets its translational objectives. SPARK NS works directly with PIs and their research teams on planning and executing their projects.

2. Expertise. SPARK NS does not expect PIs applying to the program or their team members to have all the necessary experience and skills required to translate their research. SPARK NS provides guidance, assistance, and funding needed to fill gaps that might exist. The need for outside services and/or collaboration does not negatively impact a project's chances of being selected for a program.

3. Collaboration. PIs and team members of selected projects are grouped into cohorts and collaborate with their peers and industry expert advisors. Cohort activities include education and training, project updates, and progress meetings where teams share their challenges, successes, and failures to learn from each other.

4. Milestone-based funding. Funding awarded through SPARK NS is dispersed based on milestones identified in a development plan jointly created by SPARK NS and PIs after a project has been selected. Not all funds awarded will go to a PI's laboratory. For example, funds for work done by contracted research organizations or academic research facilities will be paid by SPARK NS directly to these organizations from the awarded funds.

5. IP rights and financial stakes. SPARK NS does not claim ownership of any IP rights or take any financial stake in commercial products developed during or prior to a program. In addition,

² Kim, J.S., Kargotich, S., Lee, S.H. et al. SPARKing academic technologies across the valley of death. Nature Biotechnology 42, 339–342 (2024) .

SPARK NS will not disturb any present or future allocations of such IP ownership among the PIs, co-investigators, other team members, the applicant's institution(s), and/or other third parties.

Participation Requirements

Meetings associated with the program will be held virtually and in person. Given the unique nature of the SPARK NS program, project PIs must attend in-person meetings. Barring unforeseen circumstances out of their control, PIs submitting an application are confirming their availability and commitment to attend these in-person meetings. The schedule of ***in-person*** meetings for the 2026 cohort is as follows:

- **January 26-30, 2026:** An introductory course on translational research, product development, and commercialization of therapeutic discoveries, to be held in Arizona
- **April 2026:** Progress reports and additional education and training, exact date and location TBD
- **November 2026:** Progress reports and additional education and training, exact date and location TBD
- **March 2027:** Progress reports and additional education and training, exact date and location TBD.
- **March 2028:** Final project presentations, exact date and location TBD

Attendance at in-person meetings by other team members, including co-investigators, postdoctoral fellows, senior scientists, and students, is optional and left to the discretion of PIs. For these in-person meetings, SPARK NS will cover the travel and accommodation costs for PIs and potentially other attendees from each selected project on a case-by-case basis.

Application Process and Timeline

The SPARK NS application is a two-part process. Applicants will initially submit an application that will be reviewed by a selection committee of SPARK NS scientists and industry expert advisors for administrative compliance and scientific validity as well as fit for the program. All reviewers will sign and abide by a confidentiality agreement, and all communications will be confidential. Finalists will be selected from the pool of initial applicants and invited to present virtually to the selection committee. After these finalist presentations, SPARK NS will select projects for the 2026 program.

Part I

- **June 2, 2025 - July 11, 2025**
 - The application portal will open for submissions at **9:00 am PDT on June 2, 2025**.
 - All application materials must be prepared as instructed in the provided **Call for Proposals** and **Program Description and Application Guidelines** documents. The proposal body must be prepared using the provided Microsoft Word Proposal Template and submitted through the application portal along with other required application information and materials.
 - The application portal will close at **5:00 pm PDT on July 11, 2025**. Applications submitted after this time will not be considered.
- **July 11, 2025 - August 18, 2025**
 - A selection committee of SPARK NS scientists and industry experts will review all properly submitted proposals and select finalists.
 - Finalists will be notified by email by **August 18, 2025**. Projects not chosen as finalists will also be notified by email.
 - Finalists will be assigned a time slot between **September 3-5, 2025**, to present virtually to the review committee via video conference.

Part II

- **September 3-5, 2025**
 - Finalists will have 10 minutes to present their proposals to the selection committee virtually via video conference, followed by 20 minutes of questions and answers.
 - Finalists will be provided with a **Microsoft PowerPoint Template** to be used in the preparation of their finalist presentations.
 - **Please note:** By submitting an application, PIs are confirming their availability for these virtual finalist presentations.
- **September 5, 2025 - September 26, 2025**
 - SPARK NS will select projects for the cohort from the presenting finalists.

- PIs of selected projects will be notified by **September 26, 2025**.
- A SPARK NS project manager will be assigned to each selected project and will work with project teams to create a two-year milestone-based development plan and budget.

Application Content

Applications must include the following and be submitted through the SPARK NS application portal. Note that while the application portal will not open until **June 2, 2025**, all application content can be prepared in advance. Required content is as follows:

- General application information
 - Title of proposed product
 - PI's name, degree(s), title, department, university/institution, and email address
 - Names of co-investigators and additional team members with their degree(s), titles, departments, universities/institutions, and email addresses
 - Up to 10 keywords describing the proposed product
 - Therapeutic modality proposed
 - Target validation and related drug development activities performed to date
- Biographies of all team members. Each bio should include the following:
 - Name
 - Current position, title, and institution
 - Previous professional positions
 - Education/training (institution, degree, field of study)
 - Summary of pertinent research contributions (limited to 250 words maximum)
 - Up to five relevant highlighted publications
- Topline description
 - A short summary of the proposed product (limited to 250 words maximum)

- Graphical abstract
 - A visual depiction of the topline description
 - Limited to one page
 - Uploaded to the application portal as a PDF document
- Proposal (strictly limited to three pages, at least 11-point Arial font, and 1-inch margins; applicants must use the provided **Proposal Template** when preparing their proposals)
 - Description of underlying biology/technology written for peer scientists who are not experts in the field
 - Clinical indication, targeted patient population, and brief scope of market
 - Unmet need and improvement over standard of care
 - Translational objectives that will be achieved with program support
 - Intellectual property (IP) status of the proposed product (secured IP is not a criterion for acceptance to the program)
 - Description of preliminary supporting data (figures should be submitted separately, see below)
 - Must be uploaded to the application portal as a PDF document.
- References should be submitted as a separate document from the body of the proposal and are not included in the three-page limit.
 - References should include all authors (if the number of authors is six or less), article title, journal, year of publication, and PMID
 - A maximum of 15 relevant references may be included
 - Applicants must use the provided **References Template** to ensure they are compliant with the formatting requirements
 - Must be uploaded to the application portal as a PDF document
- Figures (applicants are limited to three figures, not including the graphical abstract)
 - Figures should be referenced directly in the body of the application

- Figures should have full legends that are self-explanatory
- All figure fonts must be clearly legible. Legend fonts must be at least 11-point Arial font
- Each figure and the corresponding legend must fit on a single page with 1-inch margins
- All figures (not including the graphical abstract) must be uploaded online as a single PDF document
- Appendices
 - Do not include appendices with the application

Additional Resources for Applicants

- **Background Reading.** For background information on drug discovery and development, applicants may consult *A Practical Guide to Drug Development in Academia* (<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-34724-5>) when drafting their proposals.
- **Templates.** Applicants should use the provided **Proposal Template** for their three-page proposals and **References Template** to ensure that their application meets the formatting requirements.
- **Program Description and Application Guidance.** More information on the program and additional guidance on the application.

Inquiries

Potential applicants may contact SPARK NS with questions about application submission to the SPARK NS Translational Research Program, 2026 Cohort. Applicants are asked to contact SPARK NS well in advance of the **July 11, 2025** submission deadline so we can better assist in the preparation of application materials.

SPARK NS PROGRAM APPLICATION CONTACT

Marisol Urbano

Director of Programs

SPARK NS, Inc.

programs@sparkns.org