Pilot Funding Opportunities – Spring 2026

idea hub at the Boston University School of Public Health is dedicated to creating an innovative space to meet our core purpose to Think. Teach. Do. for the health of all. This RFA includes multiple funding opportunities to support the varied needs of faculty members and early career researchers at SPH. These opportunities are available thanks to generous donations to the school. For all awards, priority will be given to applications that align with our strategic directions, as articulated on our strategy map.

I.   PRE-DOCTORAL AND POST-DOCTORAL RESEARCH AWARDS

SPH Pre-doctoral Research Ignition Award. The SPH Research and Faculty Advancement Committee is seeking applications for SPH Pre-doctoral Research Ignition Awards from students enrolled in our PhD or DrPH programs. These awards are intended to provide resources to doctoral students so that they may advance their own research initiatives that are not already funded via other mechanisms, creating an opportunity to advance innovative ideas in ways that would not otherwise be possible. The awards may be used for the collection of preliminary data, equipment, supplies, and/or research support personnel. The expectation is that the funded project will be presented at a professional meeting or conference and result in a publication, and though not a requirement, projects intended to support the development of a dissertation award are encouraged. Applicants are expected to work closely with their faculty mentor during all stages of the process (ie application, research compliance, conducting project, presenting, and publishing results). The maximum award amount per recipient is $2,000 and the award period is one year. There is a limit of one award per student.

SPH Post-doctoral Research Ignition Award. The SPH Research and Faculty Advancement Committee is seeking applications for SPH Post-doctoral Research Ignition Awards from post-doctoral associates at SPH. These awards are intended to provide resources to these early career researchers so that they may advance their own innovative research initiatives, supporting preliminary research activities that will lead to the submission of a competitive grant application. The awards may be used for the collection of preliminary data, equipment, supplies, and/or research support personnel. Applicants are expected to work closely with their faculty mentor during all stages of the process (ie pilot application, research compliance, conducting project, grant application). The maximum award amount per recipient is $5,000 and the award period is one year. There is a limit of one award per postdoc.

SUBMISSION DETAILS FOR IGNITION AWARD APPLICATIONS: The spring 2026 submission deadline is March 2, 2026. Applications can be submitted to ideahub@bu.edu and will be reviewed

by the SPH Research and Faculty Advancement Committee. In this competitive process, the review committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Dean, who serves as the final step in the approval process. Applications must include:

- a cover sheet that includes the project title, the PI and faculty mentor, additional investigators (with their affiliations), and a brief abstract that can be shared with donors (maximum 250 words)
- a description of the background, specific aims, and approach (maximum two pages). Note that citations are not counted toward the two-page limit
- a budget and budget justification that includes an explanation of why the proposed pilot project cannot be conducted with existing funds (e.g. a grant of the faculty mentor)
- a letter of support from the faculty mentor (1 page limit) that describes how the mentor will support the PI throughout the project. For doctoral student PIs, the mentor should also confirm that the student is in good standing in the program.

While funds may be used to support undergraduate or masters students at BU or to engage BEDAC services, they may not be used to support other doctoral students or staff at BU (to avoid conflicts with existing reporting arrangements). Funds may not be used for publication fees, travel to conferences, faculty salaries, or indirect costs at other institutions.

II.   SEED GRANTS

SPH provides seed funding for faculty-initiated projects that will advance their education, research and/or practice activities. In this cycle, we are accepting applications for the following seed grant opportunities:

Early Career Catalyst Award. The SPH Research and Faculty Advancement Committee is seeking pilot project applications from junior faculty members with primary appointments at SPH (Assistant Professor rank, modified or unmodified titles). Research scientists, with the support of their supervisor, are also eligible. These awards are intended to assist early career researchers as they launch their independent research careers at SPH. The awards may be used for the collection of preliminary data, equipment, or research assistance necessary to strengthen a grant application to be submitted within one year of the award. Applicants who have not previously received R-level funding should include a letter of support from a faculty mentor (see the Research Pilot Application Form for more details). Applicants who have previously received R-level funding are also welcome to include a mentor letter. The maximum award amount per recipient is $20,000.

Established Investigator Innovation Award. The SPH Research and Faculty Advancement Committee is seeking innovative pilot project applications from established investigators with primary appointments at SPH (Associate or Full Professor ranks, modified or unmodified titles).

These awards may be used for the collection of preliminary data, equipment, or research assistance necessary to prepare competitive applications for larger extramural awards. Priority will be given to pilot proposals that are interdisciplinary in nature and that cross departments within SPH. The application for extramural funding is to be submitted within one year of the award. The maximum award amount per recipient is $20,000.

Educational Innovation Award. The SPH Education Committee is seeking promising pilot project applications from SPH faculty who are engaged in teaching a course or managing an educational program at SPH. These awards are intended to strengthen the School's competency-based educational programs through innovation and inclusive practices in teaching, assessment or evaluation. Priority will be given to pilot proposals that are interdisciplinary in nature, have the potential for impact, and have the capacity for implementation more broadly across SPH. Awardees are required to demonstrate scholarship generated by the pilot award and are required to present at least one Boston University educational symposia (i.e. McCahan Medical Campus Education Day, the Center for Teaching and Learning Educational Innovation Conference, the Annual Assessment Symposium, or a workshop for SPH faculty and staff). The maximum award amount per recipient is $20,000.

Practice Innovation Award. The SPH Practice Advisory Committee is seeking promising pilot project applications from faculty members engaged in advocacy around specific policy initiatives. This award furthers the School's mission to think, teach, do for the health of all by translating faculty research and educational interests into action, and ideally, change. Projects should strengthen the School's commitment to effecting change to improve the conditions that promote health in local, national, and global communities. The project can be related to faculty member's current research, advocacy activities, and/or teaching interests. Pilot awards will be considered for projects that foster engagement of faculty in any or all aspects of advocating for policy or programmatic change at the local, state, national, or global level. Such activities may include but are not limited to writing a policy paper; developing and implementing a strategic advocacy or communication plan; and building a sustainable collaborative of advocacy partners. Priority will be given to projects that demonstrate timely impact and encourage school-wide involvement. The maximum award per recipient is $20,000.

The Carlin Foundation Pilot Award for Public Health Innovation. With generous support from the Carlin Foundation, applications are being accepted for a pilot project focused on infectious disease research. This pilot may be focused on the collection of preliminary data, equipment, or research assistance necessary to prepare competitive applications for larger extramural awards. Applicants must have primary appointments at SPH. There will be one award of $20,000.

SUBMISSION DETAILS FOR SEED GRANT APPLICATIONS: The Spring 2026 submission deadline is

March 2, 2026. Applications should be submitted to ideahub@bu.edu.

Applications to the Early Career Catalyst Award, Established Investigator Innovation Award, Carlin Foundation Pilot Award for Public Health Innovation, or CFAR Developmental Grants Award should be submitted using a Research Pilot Application Form. All research pilots are expected to result in a subsequent application for external funding.

Applications to the Education Innovation Award and Practice Innovation Award must include:
- a cover sheet that includes the project title, investigators (with their affiliations), and a brief abstract that can be shared with donors (maximum 250 words)
- a description of the background, specific aims, approach, and timeline (maximum two pages). All pilot applications, whether focused on research, education, or practice, are expected to yield a quantifiable return on investment. The benefit is often in the form of a subsequent proposal for external funding, though applicants are welcome to describe other potential benefits as well. Note that citations are not counted toward the two-page limit.
- a budget and budget justification that includes an explanation of why the proposed pilot project cannot be conducted without the requested funds.

Seed grant funds may not be used for publication fees, travel to conferences, faculty salaries, or indirect costs at other institutions. The expectation is that these pilot awards are for one year. Applications are reviewed by the Research and Faculty Advancement Committee, Education Committee, or Practice Committee, as appropriate. Applicants are encouraged to discuss their application with their departmental representative to the relevant committee prior to submission.

III.   STRATEGIC INITIATIVE AWARDS

SPH also provides funding opportunities for the purpose of advancing strategic initiatives of the school. Opportunities within this category vary over time and are specified on each RFA. Currently, we are accepting applications for the following opportunity:

Training Grant Development Award. Externally funded training programs provide critical resources for pre-doctoral and post-doctoral trainees, which also more broadly benefits our faculty and advances the mission of our School. An inherent challenge of pursuing a new externally funded training program is that Principal Investigators must be willing to lead this non-trivial effort primarily for the benefit of the broader community. Accordingly, the purpose of this award is to provide support for the development of new training grant applications that will support doctoral students and/or post-doctoral fellows via the NIH T32 funding mechanism (or a comparable mechanism).

Established investigators with primary appointments at SPH (associate or full professor ranks, modified or unmodified titles) are eligible to apply. Each award will include 15% salary coverage for the PI (prorated for multiple PIs) during the 12-month period prior to submitting the training grant

application. The award also includes a $1,000 overbase for a member of the staff designated to support the PI in this endeavor. The bonus will be included in the payroll cycle following submission of the application. Finally, when the training grant is funded, the PI will receive 10% salary coverage for serving as the director (prorated for multiple PIs) for the duration of the award period.

SUBMISSION DETAILS: The application is limited to a maximum of two pages and should include the following: an overview of the proposed program (i.e., the need/rationale, objectives, and design), trainee details (i.e., number and type of trainees, eligibility, intended outcomes), and the submission plan (i.e. specify the funder, funding mechanism, due date, estimated budget). Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis and should be submitted to ideahub@bu.edu.

IV.   FAST-TRACK FUNDING MECHANISM

Funds are sometimes needed to pursue time-sensitive opportunities, such that waiting for the normal submission deadlines is not possible. Accordingly, SPH offers a fast-track funding mechanism when modest resources are required to pursue (a) an opportunity to resubmit a proposal that received a competitive score (i.e., $\leq 30^{th}$ percentile), or (b) a 'quick turnaround' funding opportunity.

SUBMISSION DETAILS FOR FAST-TRACK FUNDING: Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and should be submitted using a Research Pilot Application Form to ideahub@bu.edu.

As for seed grants, funds may not be used for publication fees, travel to conferences, faculty salaries, or indirect costs at other institutions. The expectation is that these pilot awards are for one year. Applications are reviewed by the Research and Faculty Advancement Committee.

V.   PILOT ACCOUNT ADMINISTRATION

Pilot award recipients must obtain all necessary approvals (e.g. IACUC, IRB) prior to receiving access to pilot funds, as appropriate. The expectation is that the PI will obtain the necessary approvals within the first three months of the award period. All pilot project accounts are located in a central SPH Pilot Accounts Fund Center, and expenses can be charged to the pilot account via the department administrator at the request of the PI and in accordance with the approved pilot budget. PIs are expected to complete pilot award progress reports as requested.