

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: MCW-Led Seed Grants

Applications Due: Monday, Aug. 3, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. CT

Supporting MCW faculty to develop new approaches, test innovative ideas, and foster greater collaboration to build a foundation for future efforts to address Wisconsin's leading health challenges



AW ADVANCING A HEALTHIER
WISCONSIN ENDOWMENT

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Contents

Overview..... 3

 Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment Overview 3

 Funding Summary..... 3

 Application and Review Process Timeline 3

 Application Checklist 3

Funding Details 4

 Description 4

 Additional Proposal Considerations 4

 Applicant Eligibility 5

 MCW Principal Investigator..... 5

 Co-Investigators..... 5

 Collaborators 5

 Budget Requirements..... 5

 Supplanting Criteria 6

 Allowable Expenses and Funding Restrictions 6

 Application and Review Process..... 6

 Application Process 6

 Review Process 9

 Conflict of Interest..... 10

 Award Determination 10

 Human and Animal Research Protection 11

 Non-Discrimination..... 11

Application Resources 12

 AHW Online Resources..... 12

 Pre-Application AHW Consultation 12

 MCW Libraries Resource 12

 Catchafire Access..... 12

Overview

Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment Overview

At the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment (AHW), we are driven by a vision for a healthier Wisconsin.

As Wisconsin's largest health philanthropy, AHW seeks to propel the most promising work and ideas to improve health and advance health equity in Wisconsin today, and for generations to come. From urban centers to rural and agricultural communities and self-governed tribal nations, we are committed to maximizing the health of ALL Wisconsinites. We do that by providing funding and resources to researchers, organizations, and communities devoted to the health and well-being of the people they serve.

We accelerate innovation, collaboration, and impact by fueling research- and community-identified opportunities. Learn more about [our story](#) and AHW's [areas of focus](#).

Funding Summary

AHW's Call for Applications: MCW-Led Seed Grants supports eligible MCW faculty to develop new approaches and methodologies, test innovative ideas, and foster greater collaboration to address Wisconsin's leading health challenges and produce deeper impact on health and health equity in Wisconsin. Successful seed grants will build a foundation for future research or health workforce development endeavors beyond the project period. Applicants may request up to \$50,000 for projects completed within a 12-month period, beginning Jan. 1, 2027.

To foster a collaborative approach to award selection, applicants will participate in a peer review process to assess proposals submitted to this funding opportunity by their fellow applicants. For the submitted application to be considered for funding, completion of all assigned reviews is required.

Application and Review Process Timeline

June-Aug., 2026

Consult with AHW to review proposed project scope and fit with the call for applications

By July 20, 2026

Draft application for AHW feedback via draft review form

Aug. 3, 2026 (required)

Applications due by 5:00 p.m. CT via online application form

Within three business days of signature request (required)

Electronic signatures due from key personnel via an AHW-initiated DocuSign process

Aug. 24-Sept. 16, 2026 (required)

Review process conducted via online review platform

Oct. 2026

Notification of funding decisions

Jan. 1, 2027

Project start date

Application Checklist

Please see pages 6-9 below for more details on the following required application components:

- ✓ Online form
- ✓ Narrative (PDF attachment to online form)
- ✓ Budget workbook (Excel attachment to online form using AHW-provided Excel Template)
- ✓ Budget justification (PDF attachment to online form using AHW-provided Word Template)
- ✓ Non-supplanting attestations (PDF attachment to online form using AHW-provided Word Template)
- ✓ Signatures (collected via DocuSign after the application is submitted)

Funding Details

Description

AHW's MCW-Led Seed Grants funding opportunity supports eligible MCW faculty to conduct initial exploration and test innovative ideas to serve as a foundation for future larger, sustainable efforts to improve health. Applicants can request up to \$50,000 for projects to be completed during a 12-month period, beginning Jan. 1, 2027. Eligible proposals may be focused on a variety of activities, such as but not limited to:

- Exploring novel research strategies
- Pursuing innovative workforce development and educational initiatives to advance the current and future health workforce
- Promoting new approaches to advance health
- Gathering and analyzing data to inform future ventures and disseminate novel evidence and findings

MCW-Led Seed Grant proposals should align with AHW's areas of focus—health-focused research or health workforce education and development.

- The ***Health-Focused Research*** area of focus supports novel basic, clinical, and population science research to pursue new paths of study addressing Wisconsin's leading health priorities. Successful applicants will conduct innovative research and discovery, strengthen academic research capacity, and increase translation and dissemination of new knowledge.
- The ***Health Workforce Education and Development*** area of focus supports development, implementation, and evaluation of programs and resources to better recruit, retain, and advance MCW-based health workforces that are responsive to Wisconsin's health needs. Successful applicants will implement strategies to nurture a multifaceted health workforce, including healthcare professionals employed by MCW and its affiliates, the next generation of healthcare and health leaders trained by MCW, and community-based health workforces that directly work with MCW programs.

Applicants will clearly identify a health research or workforce development need, an immediate gap in knowledge or practice, cited science-based evidence of the health need among the target population, and proposed research methods to test a new approach to address the gap and inform future efforts to impact the health need. Successful proposals will position the applicant to build upon promising efforts and demonstrate the potential to lead to improved health and well-being for Wisconsin residents. At the conclusion of the award, projects will be poised to continue, scale, or replicate successful approaches and take their efforts to the next level for long-term impact on health and/or health equity.

Additional Proposal Considerations

- All applications must clearly demonstrate how the proposed project will positively affect health and/or health equity in Wisconsin in the long-term.
- All applications must be submitted by an eligible MCW Principal Investigator (PI).
- Project aims must be distinct from existing funded projects.
- AHW funding is project-specific and not for general organizational support.
- It is not the intent of AHW funds to be used as bridge funding.
- All proposals must comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.

Applicant Eligibility

MCW Principal Investigator

All applications must be led by an eligible MCW Principal Investigator (PI). The PI must be a full-time or full professional effort MCW faculty member with the rank of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Professor. The PI will be responsible for compliance with fiduciary and reporting requirements, maintaining regular communication with AHW, and ensuring that all project team members receive communications, notifications, and instructions from AHW.

Co-Investigators

Co-Investigators (Co-Is) are optional but encouraged. Co-Is may be faculty at MCW or external institutions outside of MCW.

Collaborators

Collaborators are optional but encouraged and are not subject to the same eligibility requirements as the MCW PI or Co-Is. Collaborators may be MCW faculty, staff, students, or experts outside of MCW. Collaborators typically have a smaller role in the project than the PI and any Co-Is (e.g., technical expertise, provide clinical samples) and may or may not receive salary support through AHW funding. Any individuals and/or organizations listed as a collaborator should be committed to the proposed project and ready to engage in the project based on their specified role, if funded.

Budget Requirements

AHW's investment in this funding opportunity will total approximately \$1.5 million to support meritorious projects. The exact number of awards will depend on the merit of proposals received. Successful projects will demonstrate an appropriate budget and timeframe for their proposed scope of work. Applicants will be required to provide a detailed budget with justification for all personnel and project expenses. Project budget requests are limited to \$50,000 maximum, and project durations are limited to 12 months maximum.

- Project personnel salaries supported by AHW awards are subject to the applicable [NIH salary cap](#) at the project start date.
- The MCW PI must contribute effort to the project for the full award period.
- Award personnel may cost-share their effort with support from their departments or entities. Cost-sharing may support any or all salary put forth. AHW funds may not be used to cost-share effort on any other work.
- AHW awards should not fund relatives/significant others of the MCW PI unless the PI can provide a written justification for how the relative's scientific or technical expertise is required to complete the award/project's aims. It is the responsibility of the PI to disclose the relationships and provide written justification at time of application and request of personnel changes and indicate whether or not an evaluative relationship exists between the PI and relative. MCW PIs are encouraged to refer to [MCW Policy HR.EE.110](#) for further detail.
- All personnel support must be justified, and specific project roles outlined in the budget justification. AHW funds cannot support general operational activities or replace funding already available for a position.

For information on financial compliance and reporting requirements for funded projects, please review the Funded Project Terms and Conditions for MCW-Led Seed Grants on the [AHW website](#). By applying for an AHW award, applicants agree to these terms and conditions.

Supplanting Criteria

AHW was established as the result of a generous financial gift made by Blue Cross & Blue Shield United of Wisconsin to the people of Wisconsin, giving AHW the extraordinary responsibility to steward this financial gift on behalf of Wisconsin residents. As such, AHW adheres to requirements as defined in a March 28, 2000, Order of the Commissioner of Insurance, which requires that AHW funds (the Funds) “may not be used to supplant funds or resources otherwise available.” AHW, via MCW, must report annually on its determination that the Funds do not supplant other resources that may be available to accomplish the same purposes. A [supplanting guide](#) can be found on the AHW website.

Prior to final funding recommendations and approval, AHW and/or its oversight body, the AHW Research and Education Advisory Committee (REAC), will assess whether other financial resources exist or are available for the project, including an assessment of whether the applicants have other financial resources available for the project. Applicants must certify that no financial resources will be supplanted and provide a complete listing of current funding sources for the project or similar other projects.

Allowable Expenses and Funding Restrictions

Funds can only be used for direct project-specific expenses, which include salary and benefits for personnel directly involved in the project and direct expenses including supplies, travel, etc.

Funds may not be used for:

- Projects conducted outside of Wisconsin
- Indirect costs such as ongoing operating expenses for routine functions, F&A and principal programs
- Debt reduction
- Entertainment or alcoholic beverages
- Faculty recruitment expenses
- Lobbying
- Reimbursement solely for patient care or clinical service delivery
- Publishing fees to benefit education or research in general
- Implementation expenses of educational programs, such as teaching and advising expenses once educational programs begin to matriculate students
- Stipends and flat fees/rates
- Supplanting

View a complete list of [Allowable and Unallowable Costs](#) on the AHW website.

Application and Review Process

AHW’s MCW-Led Seed Grants funding opportunity uses a one-stage application and multi-stage review process.

Application Process

Eligible applicants should submit an application via the online application form available on the [AHW website](#). Applications must be submitted via the online form by **5:00 p.m. CT on Monday, Aug. 3, 2026**. Late applications will not be accepted.

Please use the following instructions to prepare the application for final submission via the online form by the deadline. Applicants must answer all required fields and follow the restrictions set within the online form. No paper or emailed applications will be considered, and no attachments beyond those specifically requested in the following instructions will be accepted.

When filling out the online form, you may save your progress and resume at a later time by checking “Save my progress and resume later” in the upper right-hand corner of the form. Please note that attachments will not save in the form and should be added at time of submission. If saving, please follow the system prompts to save and re-access the form. Only one applicant team member may begin and save the online form by creating a login (email address and password) that will allow that individual to return to saved work. We recommend you designate one individual to enter the completed application information online.

The application includes the following sections:

1. **Online Form**

The application form provides general project information and must be completed via the online form accessible on the [AHW website](#). The online form includes:

- Project title, goal statement, and project summary
- Requested award amount and project duration
- MCW PI contact information
- Optional Co-I and collaborator information
- AHW alignment information
- Implementation plan listing the proposed project-specific aims and objectives
- Project team member serving as the peer reviewer

2. **Narrative** (attachment)

The narrative is the applicant’s opportunity to describe their project in detail. Project narratives must be uploaded as a PDF attachment in the indicated location within the online form. Responses to all sections of the narrative are required, and the narrative is limited to a maximum of four (4) pages, not including citations, using 0.5” margins and 11-point font, single-spaced.

Organize the narrative in the order specified below. Start each section with the appropriate section heading (bolded below), address each sub-point in your narrative response for that section, and use lay-friendly language as much as possible. We encourage applicants to be clear and concise, and insert graphics, tables, and charts when applicable and within the allowable page limit.

- **Project Background**
 - Describe the health need to be addressed, why it is a priority for the target Wisconsin-based population, and the current gap that the project aims to address, including cited science-based evidence of the health need for the target population.
 - State the intended long-term impact on Wisconsin’s health as a result of the project.
- **Project Aims and Approach**
 - Describe in detail the key activities, research methods, and potential limitations to accomplish the project aims in alignment with and to share more details on the aims and objectives included in the implementation plan section within the online form.
 - Discuss key next steps to build on the Seed Grant efforts that may occur after the project period ends, including future research directions, dissemination efforts, and leveraging opportunities.
- **Project Recruitment and Evaluation Strategies**
 - Outline the recruitment strategies for any project or study participants (e.g., research study participants, survey respondents, focus group participants, pilot site enrollment,

etc.), if applicable. Study recruitment does not include recruitment of any project staff or team members.

- Explain the evaluation strategies, key metrics, and any statistical analyses to assess the project outcomes and demonstrate success to inform future efforts.

- **Project Team**

- State the roles and responsibilities of each project team member.
- Briefly describe the experience or expertise for each project team member that makes them best suited to carry out their role on the proposed project.
- Describe how the project team will ensure a successful collaboration or why a collaboration is not needed to carry out the project.

- **Citations** (not included in the page limit)

- Include all references cited in the narrative.
- Each reference should include the names of all authors, the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication.
- Applicants should be especially careful to follow scholarly practices in providing citations for source materials used in the preparation of the application.

3. **Budget Workbook** (attachment using the AHW-provided Excel form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))

Applicants must complete the Total Project Budget table (tab 2) following the guidelines detailed in the Budget Instructions (tab 1) in the budget workbook (Excel). The total budget amount on the Total Project Budget table must equal the amount requested for the project on the online form. If the amounts do not match upon submission, AHW will use the total project budget amount in the budget workbook as the final request amount, as long as it does not exceed the \$50,000 maximum request.

If needed, a separate Subaward Budget table (tab 3) should be completed for each subaward. If additional Subaward Budget tables are needed, please email AHW with the number of subaward forms needed, and we will provide your project team with a revised budget workbook.

When developing the budget, please refer to the detailed Budget Instructions (tab 1), the complete list of [Allowable and Unallowable Costs](#) on the AHW website, and the Budget Requirements section above.

4. **Budget Justification** (attachment using the AHW-provided Word form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))

Applicants must complete the Total Project Budget Justification section representing the total AHW budget request (Word). The budget justification must include descriptions of all funded positions on the project and all direct expense line items included in the budget workbook.

Applicants should follow the guidelines and descriptions provided in the Budget Instructions (tab 1) in the budget workbook.

If needed, a separate Subaward Budget Justification section of the budget justification form should be completed to accompany each separate Subaward Budget table. If additional Subaward Budget Justification sections are needed, please email AHW with the number of additional sections needed, and we will provide your project team with a revised budget justification form.

5. **Non-Supplanting Attestations** (attachment using the AHW-provided Word form accessible on the funding opportunities page on the [AHW website](#))

Non-supplanting attestations are used to identify existing or available funding for the proposed project and to determine whether such existing or available funding would be replaced with financial support by AHW funds. A separate non-supplanting attestation form must be completed by all key project partners, including:

- MCW PI
- Each Co-I included within the online form
- Any additional project partners labeled as investigators within the application

6. **Signatures**

Following successful submission of the completed application through the online form and technical review, signatures will be required via an AHW-initiated DocuSign process from the following individuals to indicate their awareness and support of the submitted application:

- MCW PI and their respective MCW Department Chair or Center leadership
- Each Co-I included within the online form
- Any additional project partners labeled as investigators within the application and completing a non-supplanting attestation

Following submission and technical review, each of the individuals above will receive an email with instructions to complete and submit their electronic signature. Required signatures must be submitted within three business days of receiving the signature request to complete the submission and advance it for review. AHW will send DocuSign requests as soon as possible, but please note that it may not be sent immediately. Any delays in AHW initiating the DocuSign process will be accommodated for when considering signature deadlines.

Review Process

Technical Review

Submitted applications will undergo technical review by AHW staff to ensure that all requirements are met, including but not limited to eligibility criteria and adherence to the guidelines and restrictions. AHW will follow up with all applicants as part of the technical review process. Applicant teams should be prepared to respond quickly to communications from AHW following the application deadline.

Peer Review

Peer reviews will be conducted for applications that pass technical review by a review body consisting of other applicants who applied to this funding opportunity. Each applicant team will identify one faculty-level project team member in their application to serve as a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer must complete all assigned peer reviews for the submitted application to be eligible for funding consideration.

Programmatic Review

Applications that pass technical review will be reviewed for alignment with the call for applications and AHW funding requirements to ensure that funded projects are set up for successful efforts.

REAC Review

The AHW Research and Education Advisory Committee (REAC) will review the recommendations from the reviewers and approve a slate of proposals to fund. AHW may request that applicants adjust their scope, budget, or timeline based on the outcome of the review process. If necessary, these applicants will be notified and asked to resubmit their adjusted application materials for further review. No negotiations or appeals will be accommodated. Final funding decisions will be advanced to the MCW Board of Trustees for approval.

Review Criteria

All applications will be reviewed using the following criteria:

- Addresses an important health-related issue in the field, explains why it is a priority, and includes cited science-based evidence of the health need for the target population
- Describes innovative approaches and planned evaluation or assessment to directly inform future efforts to advance health and/or health equity in the long-term
- Demonstrates high-quality, rigorous, appropriate research methods that appear likely to achieve the stated aims
- Demonstrates the potential to positively impact health and/or health equity in Wisconsin, either as a direct result of project activities or over the long-term
- Provides convincing evidence that the project could lead to scaled, replicated, or continued efforts in the future
- Is led by an MCW PI with optional Co-Is and collaborators who appear to bring the necessary experience and expertise to carry out the project
- Describes a scope which appears feasible to complete within the requested project budget amount and duration
- Appears to be aligned with the intent of the call for applications, the selected AHW area of focus, and AHW funding requirements

Reviewers will provide scores and written comments for each proposal. The scoring system uses a nine-point scale based on the rating scale used by the National Institutes of Health. The nine-point rating scale is anchored according to the following descriptions:

1. Exceptional (exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses)
2. Outstanding (extremely strong with negligible weaknesses)
3. Excellent (very strong with only some minor weaknesses)
4. Very Good (strong but with numerous minor weaknesses)
5. Good (strong but with at least one moderate weakness)
6. Satisfactory (some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses)
7. Fair (some strengths but with at least one major weakness)
8. Marginal (a few strengths and a few major weaknesses)
9. Poor (very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses)

- Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact
- Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact
- Major Weakness: A weakness that severely lessens impact

Conflict of Interest

Each review process follows a conflict of interest policy. A conflict of interest is apparent whenever a reviewer's objectivity may be perceived as compromised by the nature of a personal or professional relationship or obligation to an applicant. Reviewers with a conflict of interest pertaining to a proposal's review and/or funding are self-identified and recused from review of that proposal.

Award Determination

Following completion of the review process, notification of conditional award determination, pending supplanting review and completion of the award initiation requirements, is anticipated to be shared with the MCW PI in October 2026.

Human and Animal Research Protection

According to the [MCW Office of Research's Standard Operating Procedure for the Definition And Determination Of Human Subjects Research](#), it is the responsibility of the MCW Institutional Review Board (IRB), staff, and committee members to ensure the proper application of the definition of human subjects research and to provide investigators with guidance regarding this definition. Federal regulations define research as a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. It is the responsibility of PIs to ensure the proper application of this definition to their human subjects research projects and apply to the IRB for its review. Investigators must submit their proposed research projects to the IRB for review prior to initiating the research regardless of whether their activities involve human subjects. Investigators may not independently make the determination whether an activity involves research; the IRB will make the independent determination regarding human research subject involvement.

AHW funding will be contingent upon institutional approvals for the use of human subjects, laboratory animals, or biosafety materials for those projects determined to be research. Research projects funded by AHW must ensure that human and animal participants are protected during the collection of information from award participants and/or the publication or dissemination of award results.

The MCW PI of an AHW-funded award is expected to:

- Confirm with the appropriate regulatory approval offices if IRB, IACUC, or Biosafety regulatory approval is necessary for the proposed project prior to submitting a proposal to AHW.
- Ensure appropriate training and ongoing education necessary to protect the rights and welfare of human participants before and during the award, including maintaining compliance with all human subject policies, regulations, and reporting requirements.
- Obtain Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval through a Human Research Protection Program at MCW, Froedtert Health, the Veterans Administration, or Children's Wisconsin or Reliance institutions prior to the award commencing. Each institution has an Institutional Review Board that evaluates awards for compliance with applicable human subject laws and regulations.
- Be accountable for conforming to the basic regulations and policies governing animals at MCW. Obtain approval through Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), if applicable, prior to the award commencing.
- Receive documentation of IRB, IACUC, and/or Safety Committee review and approval prior to the award commencing.

All applicable IRB, IACUC, and Safety Committee protocols must be linked to the funding proposal in the MCW eBridge system (eBridge), which allows MCW researchers to submit, track, report, and archive research activities involving human and animal research conducted at MCW, prior to the completion of account setup and the award number for the project being issued. **AHW will initiate the eBridge funding protocol for all projects approved for funding.**

Non-Discrimination

The Medical College of Wisconsin offers all its educational programs and services, including admissions, and all employment opportunities, conditions and benefits, including recruitment, selection, promotion, pay, use of facilities, and retirement, without discrimination, as defined by applicable federal and state laws, executive regulations and orders. MCW is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in education and employment. MCW does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of age, race, creed, religion, color, disability, marital status, sex, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, arrest record, conviction record, membership in the national guard, state defense force or any other reserve component of the military forces of

the United States or the State of Wisconsin, or use or nonuse of lawful products off MCW's premises during nonworking hours in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, employment policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other MCW administered programs and activities, but may favor Wisconsin residents in admissions. Research and programs aimed at advancing health equity among specific groups must provide evidence of disparity with the general population. All communications and questions concerning this policy should be directed to the Vice President of Human Resources.

Application Resources

Our goal is to support applicants through the application process to the best of our abilities, and we encourage applicants to contact AHW staff with questions throughout the application process.

AHW Online Resources

AHW's website provides information, application resources, and answers to frequently asked questions related to each funding opportunity and the AHW funding process. Visit the AHW website at www.ahwendowment.org.

A fillable template of the online application form is available for download via the AHW website. The template will not be accepted as a final submission but is designed to be used by the applicant team to prepare their collaborative responses prior to completing and submitting the online form by the application deadline.

Pre-Application AHW Consultation

For an efficient application process, applicants are encouraged to connect with AHW to discuss their proposed project scope and ensure it is in alignment with the funding opportunity. After reviewing the RFA and associated materials, applicants are encouraged to connect as early in the development of their proposal as possible. Complete the consultation request form on the [AHW website](#) to set up a time to discuss your proposal idea.

MCW Libraries Resource

Applicants are encouraged to explore [Pivot-RP](#), a funding search tool for federal, state, philanthropic, and association grants accessible through the MCW library, to inform the discussion of future research directions and potential funding sources within their application.

Catchafire Access

AHW has teamed up with [Catchafire](#) to provide support to AHW applicants by matching them with professional, skilled volunteers ready to lend their expertise on general projects related to marketing, IT, finance, design, fundraising, human resources, and more. Within five minutes, you can post a project and get connected to a global network of professionals looking to use their skillsets to directly support causes they care about. You'll also have unlimited access to nonprofit experts, with coaching and professional development opportunities to help you along with the way.

