

Key SPARK Program Selection Criteria

Guidance for External Reviewers

Purpose: This document provides guidance for external reviewers to evaluate the commercial potential of a technology. It is not intended to be prescriptive but to provide guidelines for approaching the review of technologies. This rubric applies to the written application only. Down-selected teams also complete the CCTSI I-Corps program, which is assessed independently; written application scores and I-Corps outcomes are combined during the selection committee meeting to determine the final 5 teams.

Background

Has sufficient background been provided to help evaluate:

- The need and the solution?
- The market "space" in which this product would operate?
- The current standard of care?

Unmet Need

- Has the clinical need clearly been stated?
- Has the expected need from the perspectives of the relevant stakeholders been articulated? Has evidence of the need been provided?

Proposed Product/Solution

- Does the application capture the patient subset to which this is applicable?
- Is the expected benefit with this solution/product clear? Is there sufficient evidence to support the expected benefit (stakeholder opinions)?
- Is there a clear characterization of the benefit, e.g., exponential or incremental, faster, smaller, cheaper, easier, safer, more effective, more accurate?
- Does the applicant describe how it would fit with the current physician practice/standard of care?

Market Size

- Has the applicant identified the total market? Has the applicant provided adequate justification for the market size and considered future trends and projections?
- Has the applicant identified the specific addressable target market size and the expected pricing of the product/solution? Is the basis for the justification reasonable (comparable, value/price trade-offs)?

Competitive Landscape

- Has the applicant identified current and anticipated players in the space and the competitive products they are developing and/or selling?

- Has the applicant described the adjacent spaces and substitution options along with how the landscape is shifting or projected to shift?

Intellectual Property

- Has the applicant described the IP protection strategy in sufficient detail?
- Are the types of IP proposed, or filed, appropriate to protect the invention?
- Are there other forms of IP protection that the applicant should consider that may be more appropriate (e.g., protecting by trade secret instead of filing patent applications)?
- Is the IP tied to the commercialization plan?

Differentiation

- Has the applicant described how the product/solution is better than others that are currently in use and how the product/solution is better than what is expected to come to the market?
- What data should be generated to support differentiation?

Funding Requirements

- Are the financing requirements realistic as they are described?
- Are they tied to Go/No-go decisions?

Product Development Milestones

- Does the applicant describe the ultimate goal of the product development plan and when that goal would be achieved?
- Does the applicant describe the major milestones that need to be achieved in order for the plan to be successful? Would the achievement of the milestones increase the value of the product? Does the applicant reference appropriate stakeholders or customers for this validation?
- Are the Go/No-Go decision points described in the plan appropriate?

Potential Risks / Mitigation

Are the potential risks well described with regards to the:

- Scientific goals
- Technical goals
- Personnel
- Market
- Commercialization

Does the applicant describe how those risks can be mitigated?

Personnel

Applicant teams are required to include three roles: a research lead, a clinical lead, and a business lead.

- Are the qualifications of each of the three team members appropriate for the work that needs to be done?
- Does the business lead bring relevant commercial, industry, or entrepreneurial experience to the project?
- Does the clinical lead bring relevant clinical expertise to help validate the unmet need and product fit?
- Is the team meaningfully complete — i.e., is there evidence each role reflects genuine engagement and capacity to contribute, rather than a role filled in name only?