

Request for proposals for short-term, high-impact research projects Fall 2025

UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

The Dairy Innovation Hub, which launched in 2019, is a \$7.8 million per year investment by the State of Wisconsin to build a world-class talent pool and enable bold discoveries to ensure that Wisconsin's dairy community is at the global forefront in producing nutritious dairy products in an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable manner.

As one aspect of enabling novel research within the priority areas of the Dairy Innovation Hub, funds are available for short-term, high-impact projects that fit within one of the four priority areas of the Hub (*visit the [Hub website](#) for more information*):

1. Stewarding Land and Water Resources
2. Enriching Human Health and Nutrition
3. Ensuring Animal health and Welfare
4. Growing Farm Businesses and Communities

The objective of short-term, high-impact research and outreach projects is to leverage existing UW-Madison expertise to provide timely outputs that address pressing issues, concerns, or needs in the Wisconsin dairy community.

Dairy Task Force 2.0 recommendations

As plans for the Dairy Innovation Hub were finalized, the state's [Dairy Task Force 2.0](#) committee was completing their work. Please review the full list of the [published recommendations](#).

Examples of Task Force recommendations that the Hub is well suited to address include, but are not limited to the following:

- Outreach to encourage young people to pursue careers in agriculture (*Recommendation #3*)
- Further market understanding of value-added and specialty cheese in Wisconsin (*Recommendation #45.1*)
- Understand the impact of dairy and agriculture on local communities (*Recommendation #5*)
- Development of educational programming for non-farm audiences ranging from cow biology to land, water, and crop management (*Recommendation #11*)

- Creating an app for dairy producers and associates for timely messages on major topics
(*Recommendation #34*)

Additionally, short-term, high-impact projects should return immediate benefit to the dairy community or answer a pressing, emerging question are encouraged.

A. RFP overview, submission, and funding

- Project budget cannot exceed **\$50,000**
- Nature of projects may range from implementation, outreach, education, or applied research projects
- Focus should be on providing tangible outcomes to end-users such as farmers, cheesemakers, veterinarians, agronomists, etc.
- **Salary dollars** will only be available for use in fiscal year 2026 (Jan. 1 to Jun. 30, 2026) – approx.. six (6) months

Visit [DIH Research Funding](#) for more information specific to Hub RFP opportunities.

Proposals *MUST* be submitted via [Qualtrics](#) by 5:00 p.m. (CST) on Friday, November 21, 2025. Proposals should be submitted as a single merged PDF document. Proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted.

To be considered for funding, approvals (chairperson, department administrator, and co-PIs) must be determined and included at the time of application, as indicated in Qualtrics form. Confirmation emails will be sent to all applicants following the submission deadline. *If you do not receive an email within the week of Nov. 21, please follow up with [Elisabeth Berndt](#).*

Funding decisions will be announced by January 2026. ***If awarded, funds will be available for projects to start after January 20, 2026.***

B. Eligibility requirements

One-year proposals for \$10,000 to \$50,000 will be considered. Funding rate will depend upon quality and range of proposals. Preference will be given to projects that show direct impacts for Wisconsin's dairy community.

- Primary PI must be faculty or staff within CALS, UW-Madison
- Staff members must have [Blanket PI status](#) or one-time, [Limited PI status](#) prior to submission of application¹
- Co-PIs or collaborators outside CALS may be included in the proposal, but they cannot serve as the primary PI



- Receiving prior DIH funding does not preclude a primary PI from applying to this call
- Projects should generate tangible products like publications, apps, videos, survey results, briefing papers, etc. by the end of the proposed timeline (*1 year, maximum*)

¹ To request Limited PI status, contact your department chair. Briefly, the process consists of submitting a completed request form co-signed by your department chair and an up-to-date CV to the CALS Assistant Dean for Research, Sandy Fowler (sandy.fowler@wisc.edu) for approval. Visit [CALS Principal Investigator \(PI\) Status](#) & [UW-Madison Principal Investigator Status](#) websites for more information.

C. Proposal format

Please upload application materials in Qualtrics as a **single PDF file** containing the five (5) components in order as they appear below. Omission of section(s) OR multiple PDF documents outside section guidelines, may result in refusal of proposal.

1. Title page (1-page limit) with the following elements **MUST** be included:

- Full descriptive title for the project proposal
- Names of project participants: primary PI, co-PIs, faculty, staff, students, ect.
- Maximum of two Dairy Innovation Hub [priority areas](#) in which the project addresses
- Current primary PI Hub funding status (New or Previously Funded)

New Hub PI is defined as a primary PI who has not yet received previous Hub funding.

- Faculty startup support excluded
- New primary PI status is independent of career stage

Please refer to the [DIH Project Showcase](#) to verify current Hub PI status.

- A 250-word non-technical summary of the proposed research that addresses the following:
 - Importance of the project
 - Major objectives of the project
 - Basic methods used to collect and produce data
 - Ultimate goals, impacts, and tangible outcomes the project hopes to achieve
- Indicate which [Task Force 2.0 Recommendation](#) will be addressed. Please provide the verbatim challenge noted in the document (*link above*) OR identify the emerging challenge/need.



2. **Brief proposal narrative** (3-page maximum, single spaced, size 12-point font with standard 1-inch margins) providing/identifying the following:

- Description for how the project intends to address the Task Force Recommendation or emerging question including pertinent methodology, resources, prior demonstrations of related or similar tasks (ex. websites, pictures, publications, apps, etc.)
- List of current personnel available to work on the project and their relevant expertise in the area
- Timeline for plans to complete work

REMINDER: Projects are limited to one (1) year. Project timeline must be between January 20 through December 31.

- Hub priority area that is most relevant to the project. If applicable, a secondary priority area may also be identified. The proposal should include a rationalization for corresponding priority area(s) and how the outcomes of this project will contribute to progress within Wisconsin, relative to the priority area(s).

INSIDE SCOOP! Failure to clearly address and describe specific links to priority area(s) is the most common feedback returned to non-funded proposals.

3. **Previous results and fit to program** (1-page limit per primary PI and co-PI) **MUST** be provided with the following details (if applicable):

- Previous DIH funding received by the primary PI and/or co-PIs. Evidence of prior productivity and results should be noted
- Leverage of a DIH funded capital equipment purchase. Specify the use of referenced equipment within proposed project
- Synergies and novel aspects of this proposal relative to other funding

4. **Budget justification** (with indicated dollar amounts) for the following components:

- Supplies, travel, services, tuition, and/or other budget components
- Research personnel type with approximation of hours (commensurate with planned effort level)
 - If salary is budgeted, fringe expenses must be included. Visit [UW-Madison, F&A and Fringe Benefit Rates](#)

IMPORTANT: Due to 101 funding restrictions, salary dollars cannot cross fiscal years. Any unspent salary dollars will be converted to nonsalary dollars after June 30. Although this award spans only one calendar year,



*it does cross two (2) fiscal years (FY26 & FY27). **For this reason, budgeted salary dollars must be spent out before the end of FY26.** There are no restrictions on personnel type or budget amount during the first six months of the award.*

5. **Outcomes and dissemination** (1-page limit) relative to the current research program and future research goals, please expand on the following:

- Strategies to deliver outcomes to target, external audiences; evidence of the primary PI's ability to generate and disseminate tangible outcomes to stakeholder groups
- Future research goals, other outcomes of the project, and potential for this work to lead to subsequent funding
- Project fit with primary PI, co-PI(s), and other efforts and funding in lieu of current/pending funding
- Unique contribution of *this* project if a similar or complementary proposal has been funded or submitted

D. Proposal review process

Proposals will be reviewed by a group comprised of Hub steering committee members and ad-hoc reviewers. Additionally, DIH advisory council members will review the 250-word summary to provide input on potential research impact in the dairy industry.

Proposals should be written for reviewers with multiple scientific backgrounds (biological and social) to comprehend the science and the project. Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Justification for fit to Dairy Innovation Hub Priority area **(20%)**
2. Short-term: Likelihood of generating tangible outputs to end users **(30%)**
3. High-Impact: Likelihood to have strong impact on Wisconsin dairy community **(30%)**
4. Leverages existing expertise **(10%)**
5. Meets "New Hub PI" criteria **(10%)**

E. Frequently asked questions

Q: What expenses are included in the budget?

A: The annual supply and expense budget may be used for lab/field/farm supplies or consumables, undergraduate hourly expenses, travel to farm or research station, travel to conferences where research will be presented, publication fees, technology, and computing hardware/software needs specific to the project. All expenses should be clearly defined within the budget justification.



Q: How will the funds be dispersed?

A: An account will be created for use by the PI. Projects are limited to a one-year timeline and funds should be used within a year of allocation. Salary dollars will only be available for the first 6-months (Jan. 1 – Jun. 30, 2026). Any unspent salary dollars beyond June 30 (FY26) will rollover for use as Nonsalary (S&E) dollars in FY27. The last day to use Nonsalary dollars will be November 30, 2026; the award will end on December 31, 2026.

Q: Could this STHI project fund a student who is already on a research team?

A: Yes! Given the focus on one-year timelines and outcomes, it is preferred that STHI projects are completed by current students and staff on an existing research team. Key personnel should be identified within the proposal. Strong preference will be given to projects utilizing current staff and/or students who can be partially or fully supported through project grant.

Q: Are there expectations that come with this funding?

A: As with all funding, there are reporting expectations. The Hub reports financial and research outcomes on a fiscal year basis. Researchers will be asked to complete an online submission once per year. Project investigators and collaborators are encouraged to participate in [Dairy Summit](#) and [Dairy Symposium](#) to present research findings. Additionally, Hub funded PIs will be expected to serve as reviewers for proposals submitted to future DIH RFPs.

Still have questions? Contact the Hub directly...

For inquiries concerning the scope of research, acceptability, or appropriateness of a proposed project, please email **faculty director, Matthew Ruark** (mdruark@wisc.edu).

For more information about overall DIH program operations and reporting expectations related to funding, please email **program manager, Maria Woldt** (maria.woldt@wisc.edu).

For further guidance regarding the application, general RFP proposal process, budget, and allowable expenses, please email **administrative specialist, Elisabeth Berndt** (elisabeth.berndt@wisc.edu).

