

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

# Explorer Challenge - 2.0

## Overview

For the past ten years, the Explorer Challenge, originally known as the Strategic Innovation Fund, has supported collaborative and innovative ideas brought forward by the entire Marquette campus: staff, students and faculty. The unique nature of this competition was recognized by the University Economic Development Association with its Award of Excellence in Innovation in 2018. Information about past awards can be found [here](#). Updated information on this year's competition will be posted [here](#).

The University Innovation Council, a cross-campus group of staff, students and faculty, has developed an updated version of the Explorer Challenge that is being launched this semester. Explorer Challenge 2.0 builds upon the legacy of collaborative innovation of the prior competitions and focuses on two thematic areas linked to Marquette's new strategic plan. In addition to the designated focus areas, this year's competition will also feature a simple one-page proposal summary supplemented by a short pitch presentation that the Innovation Council will use to determine award recommendations. Funded projects will be able to begin in July 2025 or Fall 2025. Details on the application process and support that is available to our campus innovation community to help develop Explorer Challenge 2.0 ideas can be found in the timeline section below.

We will start by offering an open campus "innovation sandpit" event where preliminary ideas can be discussed and where the Innovation Council and other members of the campus community will offer assistance in developing these ideas and building teams. If you are interested in submitting a project idea description for discussion at the sandpit, please [complete this submission form](#) by Thursday, February 20, 2025. We encourage anyone who may be interested in applying to this year's competition to submit the very brief (1-3 sentence) description and participate in the sandpit. Additional workshops and office hours will be held to assist with project development.

In addition to changes in the application format, we will be offering two different levels of funding as noted below. This will accommodate teams who have ideas that are ready for larger scale funding (up to \$25,000 for a 2-3 year project) as well as those with earlier-stage ideas that would benefit from a planning or pilot year (up to \$5,000).

Funded projects will begin in July or Fall 2025.

**THEMES, FUNDING & TIMELINE CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**



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## Project Themes

For the 2024-25 competition, applicants can submit projects that broadly fall under two themes:

1. The creation of innovative new cross-disciplinary collaborations (including building new research teams). Note that research proposals should involve creation of new scholarly endeavors that involve development of new cross-disciplinary teams and not be simple extensions of current research programs.
2. The promotion of community, well-being, and belonging across the Marquette campus community.

## Funding

Two levels of funding are available. Applicants will request the funding level best suited to their project. Final budgets are negotiated with the Office of Research and Innovation once awardees are determined and must follow university guidelines for expenditures. Student-led projects will require a faculty or staff team member who will provide budget oversight.

- Projects that are ready to be implemented fully can be funded for up to **\$25,000**, which is expected to be spent over a 2–3-year period. As in the past, a sustainability plan will be needed for projects that plan to extend beyond the initial funding. **One or two awards** are anticipated at this level.
- For projects that need more planning or are early-stage pilot activities the upper limit is **\$5,000**. Recipients of these one-year awards will be expected to meet with Innovation Council members during their award period for feedback and advice and will be eligible to apply for a larger award in subsequent years. **Up to five smaller awards** are anticipated.

## Timeline

**Explorer Challenge 2.0 Project portal open to campus** – submit your preliminary ideas [here](#).

**Thursday, February 20, 2025, 11:59 PM**

- **Project ideas due, submission online portal closes**

**Friday, February 21, 2025, Afternoon**

- Portal ideas made available to campus
- Office hours announced for Innovation Council to assist with project development

**Tuesday, February 25, 2025, 1-4 PM**

***(estimated timeframe, will be finalized once ideas from portal are submitted)***

- **Explorer Challenge 2.0 Innovation Sandpit Event at 707 HUB**
  - Opportunity for members of the campus community to share ideas, develop projects, and build teams.
  - The event will be facilitated by the University Innovation Council.

**Friday, February 28, 2025**

- Templates for one-page summary and pitch deck made available

**Tuesday, March 18, 2025 (location TBD)**

- **Explorer Challenge 2.0 Proposal Workshops to prepare for:**
  - (a) pitch and accompanying one-page summary; and
  - (b) budget development

**Thursday, March 27, 2025, 11:59 PM**

- Final proposal one-pager, budget template, and pitch slide-decks (1-2 slides) due.

**First week of April 2025 (date/time TBD depending on applicant availability)**

- **Explorer Challenge 2.0 pitches heard**

