

HealthTECH Challenge II

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Application Deadline: 5:00 p.m. ET, May 28, 2026

The National Football League (“NFL”) and Football Research, Inc. (“FRI”) have partnered with Duke Biomedical Engineering (“Duke BME”) to create the HealthTECH Challenges, a series of innovation challenges intended to deepen understanding of and advance solutions in the areas of head protection, lower extremity protection, materials science, kinematic measurement, among others (the “Challenges”).

Health TECH Challenge II (“HTC II” or this “Challenge”) is open to helmet innovation with special focus on products designed to improve the impact attenuation characteristics of American football helmets specifically for impacts to the faceguard region. These products may include energy attenuating materials or structures, facemasks, facemask connectors, or products meant for helmet retention (e.g. chin straps). Innovations should take into consideration the requirements from current National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) standards for football helmets and faceguards; players’ field of view and ventilation; and production feasibility. This Challenge, and the Challenges, generally, has been structured to stimulate research and innovation, and to encourage connections with mentors and/or venture capitalists, with a goal of spurring developments in engineering, biomechanics, advanced sensors and material science while providing project management assistance and access to resources/services in a collaborative and service-oriented fashion. The primary goal is to bring these innovations on-field to improve safety. Applications from large existing companies, new ventures, design houses and academia are encouraged. Prospective new products can be designed to be applied to all helmets or designed specifically to enhance an existing product line of one manufacturer.

I. Purpose

This Challenge will provide funding of up to \$100,000, in the aggregate, to one or more winners to *spur advancements to better understand and protect against traumatic brain injury*. The Challenge seeks to provide funding for development of mature research (i.e., research that is currently in or ready for the implementation stage) that, if successful, will lead to a partnership to be formed by the leadership team with diverse team members that may include industry and academia (faculty and/or students). **The goal of this Challenge is to enable and accelerate translation of research** (i.e., new company formation, license, or partnership are all encouraged).

Applicants will work toward major milestones that may enable this translation. Projects selected for funding will be assigned a translational support team to deliver a proposed development path, outsourcing plan, and detailed project. The project teams are encouraged to include the following objectives while furthering their design, development and commercialization strategies:

- Conduct experimental biomechanics evaluations related to the product’s impact performance.
 - This may require the use of experimental methods to observe and record the

mechanical response of helmets. Contracts may need to be set up with facilities to support experimental biomechanics testing.

- Provide or seek technical support for development and evaluation of product design.
 - Teams may need to establish contracts in order to support efforts to develop, refine and federalize new helmet design.
- Perform studies using crash dummies and finite element models and or finite element analysis.
 - Teams may need to establish contracts in order to conduct biomechanical studies using mathematical models to support research efforts. Mathematical models including finite element, can provide an efficient way to investigate testing of their design.
- Conduct analyses of helmet test data.
 - Teams may need to engage a third-party contractor to conduct analyses of crash dummy data to identify trends, causation scenarios and mechanisms.
- Review and analyze data to support development of risk and specifications for use helmet.
 - Teams may need to engage a third-party contractor to conduct analyses of laboratory data and mathematical model output to determine design specifications.

II. Eligibility

This Challenge is open to all individuals over the age of 18 who have not been convicted of a felony or crime of moral turpitude and to all validly formed legal entities that have not declared or been declared in bankruptcy. Employees and contractors of any of the Sponsor Affiliates and/or any of their respective affiliates or subsidiaries are eligible to enter and participate in the Challenge but are not eligible to win any prizes. Multiple Proposals are permitted. Each Proposal will be reviewed independently. Multiple individuals or entities may collaborate to submit a single Proposal, but a single individual must be designated as an official representative for each entry (the “*Primary Contact*”). Participation is subject to all U.S. federal, state and local laws and regulations. Void where prohibited or restricted by law. You are responsible for checking applicable laws and regulations in your jurisdiction before participating in this Challenge to make sure that your participation is legal. If you are entering on behalf of a company or an institution (“*Institution*”), you are responsible for confirming with your company or institution that the Proposal does not violate any policies established by that Institution.

III. Funding Rules

All judging, eligibility and award decisions are at the sole discretion of FRI and are deemed final and not subject to review or explanation. One or more of the Sponsor Affiliates shall announce via the Challenge Series website to whom FRI has made a funding award. Proposals meet the judging criteria for this Challenge, in either FRI’s or the Oversight Committee’s sole discretion. All potential winners will be notified by the e-mail address for the Primary Contact provided in the submission form and will be required to complete further documentation confirming their eligibility. Return of any notification as “undeliverable” will result in disqualification. After execution of such further documentation and verification of eligibility, Awards will be distributed in the form of a check addressed to the Primary Contact. The Primary Contact will have sole responsibility for further distribution of any cash Award among participants in a group Proposal or within a company or institution that has submitted a

Proposal. Each list of Proposals receiving Awards for this Challenge will be made public as described on the Challenge Series website.

At the time that an Award is announced, a funding schedule for the payment of such Award shall also be announced.

All Awards are a one-time offer and there is no offer of licensure, royalty, or other financial compensation implied beyond the initial round of Awards. Each Award winner is responsible for all taxes and reporting related to any Award that such winner receives as part of this Challenge.

This Challenge is a contest of skill. Whether or not your Proposal is determined to be the potential recipient of an Award depends on how your Proposal compares to the other Proposals submitted in the Challenge when evaluated based on the judging criteria for this Challenge.

Awarded amount are direct costs of the proposed project only, with overhead amounts to be capped at 20%.

IV. Proposal Preparation

- Request for guidance (optional) may be sent to) HealthTECH@duke.edu : **By May 21, 2026**
- We will review your guidance request and arrange a consultation meeting with appropriate consultants based on the specific project needs to provide feedback prior to application submission.

V. Selection Process and Review Criteria

1. Application Submission: Duke BME and a panel of expert judges established jointly by Duke BME and FRI ("*Oversight Committee*") shall assess all Proposals using the following assessment criteria, along with any other criteria determined between now and the end of this Challenge, so long as such additional criteria are consistently applied across all Proposal reviews:
 - Proposals must include a scope of work appropriate for Challenge II.
 - The submitting party must demonstrate the technical feasibility of quarterly milestones that will be achieved during the funding period.
 - Proposal must include specific plans or proposals relating to their next phase of the project plan;
 - Proposal must lay out a clear financing, licensing or go-to-market plan;
 - Proposal must include a description of resources of environment to achieve milestones; and
 - Proposal must include the relevant background of the team /organization/lab submitting the response.
2. Feasibility – Project scope of work is appropriate for the timeframe and level of funding.
 - Translation – Translational potential of the opportunity presented by the proposed activity including:
 - The project is sufficiently scientifically interesting to attract potential investors or licensors;
 - The commercial potential, either by virtue of market size or unmet need in a smaller population can command premium pricing;
 - The competitive landscape, including products in development that might impact the potential to partner or translate the innovation.

VI. Key Dates

- Letter of Intent (Optional): **May 21, 2026**
- NFL Webinar: **March 3, 2026**
- Application Submission Deadline: **May 28, 2026**
- Selection of Finalists and Oral Presentations: **July 2026**
- Final Selection: **August 2026**
- Funding Period: **August 2026 – August 2027**