Tendon Health

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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I. Background and Overview

Achilles and patellar tendon injuries are among the most prevalent and serious injuries that impact NBA players.[1] The National Basketball Association ("NBA") and the National Basketball Players Association ("NBPA") seek to advance strategies that promote tendon health and ultimately reduce the prevalence and/or burden of these injuries.

To support this objective, the NBA and NBPA Tendon Health Working Group (the "Tendon Health Working Group") is issuing this Call for Proposals ("CFP") to engage leading clinicians, researchers, and sports scientists with expertise in orthopedics, sports medicine, biomechanics, imaging, and related disciplines to advance understanding of tendon health and improve outcomes in professional basketball. The Tendon Health Working Group will appoint a peer review panel of multidisciplinary experts (including NBA team health clinicians, performance specialists, sports scientists, and other advisors with expertise in tendon health) to evaluate proposals for scientific merit.

This CFP will support innovative research addressing critical clinical and scientific questions related to the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Achilles and patellar tendon injuries, including acute tendon ruptures. Priority will be given to research that can translate findings to benefit elite basketball players.

II. Tendon Health Call for Proposals

A. Overview

Achilles tendon rupture and Achilles and patellar tendinopathies represent significant burdens in elite basketball. Certain injuries, such as Achilles tendon rupture, result in prolonged absence from play. This CFP seeks to fund research that advances understanding of tendon injury mechanisms and improves strategies for prevention, treatment, and clinical management.

Please note that although key questions and areas of research interest are outlined below, proposals that demonstrate a pathway to translate findings into meaningful improvements in NBA player clinical care, performance, and injury-reduction strategies will receive priority.

B. Specific Areas of Research Interest

- Tendon Injury Risks and Capacity
    - Risk factors for and mechanisms of acute tendon ruptures.
    - Biomechanical, structural, biological, genetic, epigenetic, and training-related factors that contribute to Achilles and patellar tendon injuries in elite basketball players.
    - Tendon morphology, size, vascularity, and structural characteristics associated with injury risk, adaptation, or recovery.
    - Biomarkers that may modify tendon structure, adaptation, injury susceptibility, or healing, particularly as they interact with mechanical loading, training exposure, aging, or prior injury.
    - Prevention programs tailored to basketball-specific demands.

[1] Mack CD, Herzog MM, Maak TG, et al. Epidemiology of Injuries Among National Basketball Association Players: 2013-2014 Through 2018-2019. *Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. 2024;17(3):585-593. doi:10.1177/19417381241258482.

- Load Management and Longitudinal Monitoring
    - Biomechanical analyses of tendon loading, movement patterns, and injury mechanisms.
    - Longitudinal studies of tendon health, adaptation, and injury progression in professional and high-level non-professional basketball players, including evaluation of tendon morphology, raining adaptations, and their clinical relevance using serial imaging (e.g., MRI, diagnostic ultrasound), including:
        - Changes in tendon morphology, vascularity, and mechanical properties with volume of work across seasons and career.
        - How tendon vascularity changes with time (across a season or rehabilitation period), aging, and cumulative workload (e.g., measured via ultrasound vascularity).
        - How biomechanics of the gastroc-soleus complex change over time or with changes in adjacent joints (e.g., ankle ROM, hip ROM).
    - Integration of wearable technology, load monitoring, and real-time data capture to assess tendon health and injury risk.
- Assessment and Return to Play
    - Recommendations and best practices for in-season, off-season, and game-day loading for injury prevention, including non-imaging assessments of tendon health status and game-readiness (e.g., a series of tests that can be administered efficiently to evaluate injury risk and readiness to play, such as strength measures, functional assessments, and wearable-based metrics).
    - Timing of prevention and intervention strategies as they relate to training and competition schedule.
    - Integration of imaging modalities for tendon health monitoring and assessment of tendon status for game and training readiness, including quantitative imaging techniques and/or other novel imaging techniques.
    - Clinical trials evaluating emerging therapies, rehabilitation strategies, and return-to-play protocols.
    - Psychosocial, performance-related, and quality-of-life outcomes related to tendon injuries and recovery.

C. Key Questions for Proposed Research

- What are the biomechanical, structural, biological, and training-related risk factors that contribute to Achilles and patellar tendon injuries in elite basketball players?
- How can longitudinal monitoring approaches, including imaging, biomechanics, wearable technology, and biomarkers, be explored to improve understanding of tendon adaptation, injury risk, and prognosis?
- How can musculoskeletal imaging and related datasets, including the application of AI and machine learning to such data, help identify risk factors before an injury occurs?
- Which prevention and intervention strategies (including strength and conditioning and related training methods, neuromuscular training, and novel biologic or regenerative therapies) are most effective in reducing the incidence, severity, and recurrence of Achilles and/or patellar tendon injuries?
- What are the optimal injury prevention and intervention strategies for in-season and off-season Achilles and

patellar tendon loading, as well as game-day tendon readiness?

- How can advanced imaging, functional assessment, and performance-based tools be used to improve early diagnosis, monitor recovery, and optimize return-to-play decisions for tendon injuries?
- How do tendon injuries impact player performance, psychosocial well-being, and quality of life in elite basketball players, and how can these findings be incorporated into performance and return to play strategies?

Please note that while basic science and mechanistic studies can be proposed, studies will be specifically judged on the merits of meaningful and actionable conclusions that can be translated to improve player health and performance.

III. Award Mechanism and Amounts

A. Funding Overview

This CFP will award up to a maximum of $250,000 per year. This funding could support one or multiple proposals based on Tendon Health Working Group review and meritorious submissions. Multi-year projects will be considered for a maximum duration of four years, with total funding not to exceed $750,000. All requested amounts should represent total project costs, inclusive of direct and indirect expenses, for the full duration of the proposed research.

This CFP will consider indirect expenses up to 20% of total project costs. Proposals exceeding that percentage of indirect expenses will not be considered. Proposals that include clearly defined deliverables within the first year will be given priority consideration, and funding under this CFP may serve as seed funding to enable investigators to generate preliminary data and pursue larger external funding opportunities. Successfully funded proposals will be required to provide the Tendon Health Working Group with quarterly updates on study progress, use of funds, and accomplished milestones. A failure to provide mandatory quarterly updates or achieve milestones, study enrollments, publishable manuscript, or other deliverables may result in the return of awarded funds.

B. Acceptable Use and Limitations of the Awarded Support

Awarded funds may be used to support costs directly related to the proposed research, including:

- Salary support of investigators and research personnel.
- Costs of medical procedures required to achieve research endpoints that are not part of standard of care.
- Research-related subject costs, including clinical supplies and subject recruitment.
- Consumables and other study-specific materials.
- Necessary consortium or subcontract expenses, including travel and communication between collaborating sites.

Certain expenses may not be included in the budget. Unallowable costs include, but are not limited to:

- Travel to conferences or educational meetings.
- Capital equipment purchases; equipment required for execution of the proposed research may be supported, but capital equipment that could be used beyond the scope of the proposed research cannot be supported by this CFP.

The total projected costs, including all direct and indirect costs associated with any subcontractor or consortium partners, must be included in the overall budget request to be considered. Proposals also must include a comprehensive, year-by-year (if applicable) budget detailing all direct and indirect expenses and the total funding required for the full duration of the project to be considered. This CFP will honor indirect expenses up to 20% of total projects costs. Proposals exceeding that amount will not be considered.

IV. Submission Instructions

A. Schedule of Events

Event	Date
Release of CFP	05/13/2026
Letter of Intent Due (5:00 p.m. EST)	05/26/2026
Invitation to Submit Final Proposal	06/12/2026
Final Proposal Submission Deadline (5:00 p.m. EST)	07/10/2026
Successful Applicants Notified	07/31/2026

Applicants will submit all materials through ProposalCentral (link here).

Applicants will be notified by email regarding invitations to submit final proposals and final award decisions. Questions regarding the CFP or submission requirements may be directed to Pete Meisel at pmeisel@nba.com and Dan O'Brien at dan.obrien@nbpa.com.

B. Qualification Criteria

To be eligible for consideration under this CFP, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- The proposal must be complete and include all required components set forth in Section IV.E.
- The proposed research project must be complete within four (4) years.
- Applicants must have the institutional capacity, resources, and expertise to conduct the proposed research, including compliance with all relevant regulatory and ethical requirements, as well as the terms and conditions set forth in Section V of this CFP.
- Collaborative or multi-institutional proposals are permitted, provided that a single Principal Investigator and lead institution are clearly identified.

This CFP does not restrict eligibility by institution type; proposals may be submitted by academic institutions, medical centers, research organizations, or other qualified entities.

C. Letter of Intent

Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent ("LOI") through ProposalCentral no later than 5 PM ET on May 26, 2026.

The LOI must contain the following details:

- Project title.
- Principal Investigator and institutional affiliation(s).
- Names of key contributors.
- A short project summary (~150 – 300 words) describing research objectives, proposed methods, anticipated timelines and deliverables, and relevance to tendon health.
- Any anticipated data, access, or logistical requirements.

Budget details will be requested from applicants invited to submit a full proposal. Incomplete LOIs will not be considered.

D. Invitation to Final Proposal Submission

Final proposal submission will be by invitation only. Applicants invited to submit a final proposal will be notified by June 12, 2026. Submitted LOIs will be reviewed by the Tendon Health Working Group and evaluated based on relevance, impact, innovation, and feasibility of the research plan.

E. Final Proposal Requirements

Applicants invited to submit a final proposal must do so through ProposalCentral no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on July 10, 2026.

The proposal must provide a proposed research plan based on sound scientific rationale and grounded in methods and concepts derived from a critical review of the peer-reviewed literature. Preliminary data relevant to the proposed research is not required, but, if available, should be referenced and submitted as appropriate.

A complete final proposal must include all of the following components:

1. **Cover Letter**
   Cover letters should describe alignment of the proposed research with the Tendon Health Working Group's goals and mission and relevance to this CFP.

2. **Abstract (500 words)**
   Applicants should describe the objectives of the proposed research using language and terminology that will be understandable by lay readers including those without a background in science or medicine. Do not duplicate the technical abstract. Any proprietary and confidential information should not be included. Include a description of the applicability of the proposed research to elite basketball players including the projected timeline for the benefits to be achieved in this population.

3. **Statement of Relevance to Elite Basketball Athletes (250 words)**
   Applicants should clearly articulate how the proposed research aims and methods are relevant to elite basketball players. Collaboration with NBA teams, team physicians, and players is encouraged where appropriate but is not necessary.

4. **Research Plan (max 5 pages)**
   The research plan should clearly state the primary and any secondary aims of the research project; describe

the population under study; and define a statistical plan to rigorously examine the stated aims. Applicants should identify any innovative treatments, methods, or analytical techniques. The research plan should include a well-defined statistical plan supporting all primary and secondary aims, including a power analysis with sample size estimates sufficient to meet the study objectives.

For research plans that involve a clinical trial component, proposals must document the availability of and access to study participants that will support the stated primary and secondary aims.

Investigators should describe goals for successful accrual of qualified study participants and if standards of care or other factors, such as basketball season schedules, will impact accrual or execution of the research plan. Where relevant, alternative approaches to support successful accrual should be described. In addition, clinical trials must adhere to Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines for all aspects of the proposed research plans. Investigators should provide the local Institutional Review Board (IRB) of record for the trial and any other required regulatory approval processes. Investigators must commit to register the study in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) clinical trials registry (www.clinicaltrials.gov).

If the research plan involves investigational drugs, compounds, or devices, investigators must document availability of and access to such products and confirm that they meet FDA quality standards (i.e., Quality System Regulation, Good Manufacturing Practices). The proposal must also include a well-defined safety management plan, including procedures for monitoring and reporting adverse events.

5. **Timeline of Research Milestones and Deliverables (1 page)**
   Applicants should provide a timeline of key research milestones and deliverables, including anticipated abstracts, publications, and presentation plans. Investigators are strongly encouraged to identify meaningful and clearly defined milestones and deliverables, including those expected within the first year. Deliverables may also include interim analyses, insights, or reports that could be shared internally with NBA team health and performance staff, team physicians, players, and agents, as appropriate.

6. **Personnel Effort and Budget with Justification (Attachment A)**

7. **Relevant Bibliography**

8. **Investigator Biosketches (Attachment B, max 4 pages)**
   Biosketches should include current and recent appointments, publications, and qualifications that are most relevant to the proposed research. Each Biosketch should also include a personal statement describing the investigator's expertise and how that expertise relates to tendon health and the proposed research project.

9. **Documentation of Institutional Support and Conflict of Interest Disclosures**

Applicants must submit the following documentation:

- Conflict of Interest Disclosures: Each key person or investigator receiving funding from the proposed research must provide a signed and dated statement disclosing any actual or potential conflicts of interest, or a signed and dated statement affirming that no such conflicts exist. Potential conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to, financial support of an investigator's work by a commercial entity, whether direct or indirect (e.g., through the investigator's institution); financial activities unrelated to the submitted work; or any other relationships that may have influenced or may be construed as influencing the submitted work.
- Institutional Support: Letter(s) of support from the sponsoring institution(s) confirming availability of

laboratory space, equipment, and other required resources necessary to conduct the proposed research.

- Collaborator Support: Letter(s) of support from all co-investigators and collaborators.
- Industry or Third-Party Support: Demonstration of support from any companies or individuals providing support in the form of pre-market devices, drugs, or other resources.
- Access to Study Populations: Demonstration of support from any entities providing access to study populations (for example: clinics, teams, leagues).

Note: Incomplete proposals will not be considered.

F. Number of Submissions

There is no limitation on the number of submissions that a given investigator or institution can submit. Investigators are encouraged to submit proposals for all research projects that align with the goals of this CFP.

G. Proposal Review Process and Selection Criteria

All qualifying full proposals will undergo a two-stage review process. As noted previously, studies that focus on translating findings into meaningful improvements in NBA player clinical care, performance, and injury-reduction strategies will receive priority.

The first stage will consist of a confidential, blinded, scientific peer review. All members of the peer review panel will sign a nondisclosure statement obligating them to maintain the confidentiality of all proposal materials and evaluation discussions. Stage 1 will focus exclusively on scientific merit. Proposals will be scored on the following criteria, each weighted equally:

- **Relevance and Impact**: Do the goals and aims of the proposed research address issues of relevance to future, current, or former NBA players? Does the proposed research plan address challenges related to translating findings to impact and benefit elite basketball players? Does the proposed subject population adequately match the population of interest? Does the proposed study seek to critically expand existing research (for example, by incorporating an elite basketball cohort), or position the project to support continued investigation and pursuit of larger external funding beyond the NBA/NBPA award?
- **Innovation**: Does the research propose a novel approach to the topic, the use of unique methods, or the novel application of existing methods, treatments, or technology?
- **Research Strategy and Scientific Methods**: Is the research plan well designed, and are the proposed methods and statistical plan scientifically rigorous to yield findings that advance scientific or clinical knowledge and have a high likelihood of resulting in peer-reviewed publications? Is the scientific rationale supported by preliminary data or published research? Are appropriate control populations identified? Are the inclusion and exclusion criteria sufficiently defined and justified? Do the investigators acknowledge possible areas of difficulty in methodology or recruitment and are alternative strategies proposed? Does the research proposal demonstrate thoughtful integration of multiple data sources (e.g., imaging, biomechanics, wearable data, optical tracking, biomarkers, etc.)?
- **Personnel and Environment**: Is the research team (investigators, clinician staff, statisticians, etc.) appropriate to accomplish the proposed research? Does the research team have the skills, experience, and resources (including access to the required subject populations) to successfully conduct the proposed research within the projected timeframe? Are the levels of effort of the team members appropriate? Proposals that are multi-institutional or involve collaborating research groups are encouraged.

In addition, the budget will be evaluated to ensure it complies with the requirements and limitations of this CFP and is appropriate for the proposed research plan. Unlike the above categories, the budget will not be scored.

Following the scientific peer review process, scored proposals will advance to the second stage of the review process. Stage 2 will include a programmatic review conducted by representatives of the Tendon Health Working Group, who will evaluate alignment with overall goals and mission:

- Consistency and applicability of the proposed research goals to address high-priority clinical questions regarding the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of tendon-related injuries among NBA athletes, and to apply such findings to basketball and the general population.
- Assessment of the probability of successful completion of the research.
- Overall composition of the research portfolio, with the goal of developing a balanced portfolio of research for this CFP.

Programmatic review incorporates portfolio-wide considerations; therefore, a high scientific score in Stage 1 does not guarantee a funding recommendation. Final selection and funding recommendations will consider both stages of review: the scientific evaluation from Stage 1 and the programmatic alignment assessment conducted in Stage 2.

H. Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

Pre-existing intellectual property conceived or developed solely by an awardee and its personnel will continue to be owned by the awardee. In accordance with Section V.E. below, intellectual property conceived or developed in the course of the research will be owned by the NBA and NBPA. Publications and public presentations arising from the research will be subject to coordination with and prior approval by the NBA and NBPA, and to the NBA and NBPA's right to review and comment on proposed manuscripts and abstracts prior to submission.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, no research findings, data, datasets, publications, or other materials arising from the funded research may be disseminated, published, or otherwise disclosed by any party without the prior written consent of the NBA and NBPA.

The foregoing ownership framework will be reflected in the definitive agreements entered into with successful applicants. Complete intellectual property terms, including rights relating to use, licensing, commercialization, and publication, will be set forth in those agreements.

Submitted proposals will be confidential; however, descriptions of funded proposals may be released to the public. Unfunded proposals will remain confidential.

I. Compliance

The applicant is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the research are conducted in accordance with Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines, when applicable, and in compliance with all local and federal regulations including HIPAA.

Local IRB or IACUC approval at the time of submission is not required.

J. Notification

Successful applicants will be notified by July 31, 2026.

V. Terms and Conditions for Responding to this CFP

A. General

The NBA and NBPA reserve the right, in their sole discretion, to:

(i) award a contract for any, all or none of the services for which you submit your proposal;

(ii) award one, more than one, or no contract pursuant to this CFP;

(iii) negotiate with parties other than those submitting proposals regarding some or all of the services;

(iv) request additional information from any applicant submitting a proposal;

(v) withdraw the CFP or base the selection of the applicant(s) to provide services on additional or different terms and/or requirements other than the ones specified in this CFP without incurring any obligations or liabilities with respect to any applicant;

(vi) make all decisions regarding each proposal, including, without limitation, whether (a) any proposal does or does not comply with the requirements of the CFP, (b) to accept, reject, or negotiate modifications to any terms of any proposal received and (c) to reject any and all proposals received; and

(vii) communicate with applicant(s), individually or collectively, formally or informally.

The NBA and NBPA expressly disclaim any representations or warranties with respect to any projected or actual revenue and/or any volume or percentage of services.

B. Contract Requirement

This CFP shall not be deemed to be an offer to enter into a contract and acceptance of a proposal shall not (i) be deemed to commit the NBA or NBPA to award a contract to any applicant, even if all requirements stated in this CFP have been met or (ii) limit the NBA and NBPA's right to negotiate in any manner they see fit.

At the conclusion of the CFP process, and following any selection of the party/ies to provide services (each such selected party, a "Supplier"), the terms of each accepted proposal shall be set forth in a written contract to be executed by each such Supplier and the NBA and NBPA (each such contract, a "Contract"), except in such instances as otherwise determined by the NBA and NBPA. The NBA and NBPA's acceptance of a proposal shall not be deemed a Contract, and the NBA and NBPA reserve the right to withdraw that acceptance at any time prior to the NBA and NBPA's execution of a Contract with such Supplier. The term of any Contract shall be as mutually agreed.

C. Payment Terms

Payment terms are net 45 days upon receipt of invoice and full and final delivery of all contracted goods and/or services.

D. Contract Terms

The NBA and NBPA will determine the contract length upon reviewing your CFP proposal. The agreement will commence on a mutually agreed date.

E. Ownership

Applicants acknowledge that, if selected, all work product, intellectual property rights, research outputs, data, analyses, reports, and other materials developed pursuant to the project (collectively, the "Project Materials") will be owned by the NBA and NBPA. Complete ownership, license, publication, and use terms will be set forth in agreements negotiated with successful applicants. Such terms are expected to include a license permitting the awardee institution to use the Project Materials for the institution's internal research, academic, and educational purposes but not commercial use, external distribution, or sublicensing, except as expressly approved by the NBA and NBPA.

F. Information Disclosure

You acknowledge and agree that it is entirely up to you as what information and other material you provide to the NBA and NBPA as part of your proposal and agree that the NBA and NBPA shall have the right to assume that any information and other material that you include in connection with your proposal (whether or not in writing) is not subject to any confidentiality requirements or obligations. You further acknowledge and agree that any information and other material that you disclose or present to the NBA and NBPA may be the same or similar to concepts the NBA and NBPA have previously developed on their own, that have been pitched to them by third parties, or that the NBA and NBPA have otherwise independently considered. As such, you hereby agree that you (on behalf of yourself and any person, company or other entity that you may represent or be involved with) will not pursue any claim or take any action of any kind against the NBA and NBPA or any of their affiliates, officers, directors, employees, members, agents and licensees in connection with any actions that any of them may take at any time with respect to your proposal or any other idea relating thereto.

G. Confidential Information

The information contained in this CFP and your proposal, as well as information provided or exchanged through other verbal or written communication between you and us concerning this CFP ("Confidential Information"), is confidential and proprietary to us, regardless of any statement contained in or accompanying your proposal or response. If you are not willing to maintain the confidentiality of such information, you are required to notify us immediately and promptly return all copies of this CFP to NBA and NBPA. You may use the information contained herein only for purposes of responding to the CFP and such information may be disclosed by you only to your employees and agents who have a need to know such information to enable you to respond to this CFP. You shall not divulge, disseminate or publicize and shall not permit your employees or agents to divulge, disseminate or publicize any Confidential Information to any third party, except as may be required by court order. You agree to return or destroy all copies of this CFP (both hard copies and electronic copies) upon the earlier of our request or the final award of a Contract to a Supplier other than you. The NBA and NBPA will not execute any non-disclosure agreement that purports to restrict the NBA or NBPA's ability to disclose any information regarding any proposal.

H. Proposal Expenses

Expenses incurred by prospective or actual applicants in the preparation of proposals in response to this CFP are the sole responsibility of the applicable applicant.

I. Prices That Are a Part of Your Proposal

By submitting a proposal in response to this CFP, you agree that prices quoted in your proposal, as well as all other terms of your proposal, shall not be changed unless otherwise agreed to by you and the NBA and NBPA in writing.

J. Acceptance of Terms and Conditions

By accepting this CFP and beginning to prepare relevant matters in connection with your proposal, it is deemed that you have fully understood and accepted all the terms and conditions contained herein.