SAGES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FUND
Funding Proposal

SAGES Research and Development Funds are intended for major strategic initiatives and programs which are important to the Society. They are not to be used for general operations and are different than financial support provided by the *SAGES Education & Research Foundation*. Requests must have a business plan and financial projection. If a product-for-sale is the outcome of the request, the proposal must reasonably forecast excess revenue over expenses and contemplate repayment to the R&D Fund within 5 years.

Authorization for expenditures requires the approval of the Finance and Executive Committees, then a majority vote of the Board of Governors.

SAGES Committee or Task Force: Education Council

Project Lead: Michael Awad (Chair)

Email: awadm@wustl.edu

Phone: 314-750-9916

Executive Summary

- *Brief recap of opportunity, project and funding request*

This request seeks R&D funding for a new Learning Management System (LMS) to replace the society's current platform, Crowd Wisdom, whose contract expires at the end of the year. The Education Council formed a working group of leaders from FLS, FES, FUSE, Continuing Education, and other key areas to identify a suitable replacement. After a thorough process of documenting requirements, interviewing 13 providers, and reviewing demos from four finalists, the working group recommends Absorb LMS as the new provider. The new LMS is a major strategic initiative, crucial for supporting SAGES' core educational programs. This funding will cover the one-time implementation fees and initial operating costs, with the long-term goal of transitioning the expense to the regular operations budget.

Description of the Opportunity

- **What is the problem or need this will solve?** The contract for SAGES' current LMS, Crowd Wisdom, is ending. This necessitates a transition to a new platform to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of our critical educational programs. The selected provider, Absorb LMS, offers a modern, elegant user experience that will better serve our members and learners.
- **What is the growth potential?** A modern LMS provides opportunities to generate revenue and become cost neutral. This can be achieved by charging non-members for premium content, offering subscriptions, selling advertising or sponsorship space on the platform, and cross-selling content by bundling products.
- **Is there any data to support this?** The recommendation for Absorb LMS is the result of a data-driven selection process. A working group documented SAGES' requirements, interviewed 13

different LMS providers, and invited four to provide demonstrations before making a final recommendation.

- **Why is this important to SAGES and its members?** The LMS is the foundational technology for SAGES' most important educational programs, which are a cornerstone of the Society's mission. This includes FLS, FES, FUSE, and all continuing education offerings (e.g. Safe Chole, Fundamentals of Leadership Development, Opivoid CME program). A reliable and user-friendly platform is essential for member engagement and education.

Project Description and Deliverable(s)

The project is the procurement, implementation, and launch of a new society-wide LMS. The primary deliverable is to have the Absorb LMS platform fully operational with all current courses by the end of the year, coinciding with the expiration of the current Crowd Wisdom contract, with little or no disruption to the learners. This includes data migration from the current system and integration with SAGES.org. We are also creating a plan to integrate with the Society's other learning-related systems: My CME (sends credits to ABS) and the exam management system for the Fundamentals exams. The goal is to share data and improve usability.

Marketing/Sales Strategy

- **Who is the target audience/consumer?** The target audience includes all SAGES members, non-members, and learners who engage with our educational programs, specifically FLS, FES, FUSE, and other educational content.
- **How will we reach them with our message?** The LMS will be integrated with the main SAGES.org website. Communications regarding the new platform, its features, and any new content will be distributed through SAGES' standard communication channels.
- **Why will this project outcome be critical to them?** A modern, stable, and intuitive learning platform is critical for our users to access the high-quality educational content and certification pathways they rely on SAGES to provide.
- **Is there any competition or threats to success?** The primary threat is a delayed or failed implementation. This risk is mitigated by choosing a provider (Absorb) with robust technical documentation that simplifies integration, and with whom we had a free trial period before contracting in order to assess them from a technical back-end perspective.
- **What research/needs assessment has been done?** A working group composed of leaders from all major SAGES educational divisions was formed to document and prioritize the society's requirements for a new LMS, ensuring the needs of all stakeholders were considered.

Project Organization

- **Who will lead this project?** Michael Awad, Education Council Chair.
- **How will this project be managed?** Project management and ongoing system administration will be handled by SAGES staff, specifically Vanessa Pryor and an LMS administrator (~0.6-0.7 FTE). The working group will continue to provide oversight during the transition.

- **Who are the other stakeholders and partners?** Key internal stakeholders are the FLS, FES, FUSE, and Continuing Education committees. External partners include the selected LMS vendor, Absorb, and our testing services provider, Kryterion (Webassessor).
- **What is the development timeline?** The timeline is to execute the implementation and go live with the new Absorb LMS by the end of the year.

Project Evaluation

- **What would success look like for this project?** Success is defined as the seamless launch of the new Absorb LMS by the end of the year, with all integrations functioning correctly and positive feedback from users on the new interface and experience.
- **What measurements and monitoring will be in place to gauge success?** Success will be measured through usage analysis, monitoring the quality and integrity of system data, and tracking technical support requests.

Project Financials

- **Multi-year financial projection:** Please see the attached 5-Year Pro Forma Budget. The total projected expense for the first year (FY 2025-26) is $299,462. Through diligent negotiation, this is $79K less than what was anticipated in the FY25-26 Education Council budget approved by the SAGES Board in the summer.
- **R&D Fund repayment plans, if applicable:** As the LMS is a strategic infrastructure initiative and not a direct product-for-sale, a formal repayment plan is not proposed. However, the long-term goal is to make the LMS cost-neutral through revenue-generating ideas like premium content for non-members, subscriptions, and advertising. The funding is intended to be interim, with the goal of transitioning the annual cost to the SAGES operations budget.

Funding Request

- **How much is being requested and over what period of time?** The request is for **$249,462** for the 2025-2026 budget year. This is the first-year expenses already included in the approved SAGES budget minus a $50K grant from the SAGES Foundation.
- **What other support/resources may be necessary?** The project requires SAGES staff resources for project management and system administration, estimated at 0.6–0.7 FTE.