MEDTECH INNOVATOR

2027 Applicant Info Session: Applying Early and Often

Thursday, November 19, 2026 - 9 - 10:30 AM PT // 12 - 1:30 PM ET

📹 Recording
💻 Presentation
📝 Application Link

Speakers

- **Nicole Black** | Program Director at MedTech Innovator | Email |LinkedIn
- **Georgia Fleet**| Co-Founder & CEO at Zonova | LinkedIn
- **Eddie McDaid** | Co-Founder & CEO at Galenband |LinkedIn
- **Tushar Sharma** | Founder & CEO at Vivifi Medical |LinkedIn
- **Don Schwall** | Chief Commercial Officer at VIS, Inc. | LinkedIn

Overview

This applicant info session focused on one of the questions MTI hears most: "We applied before and didn't get in. Should we bother reapplying?" Program Director Nicole Black was joined by four alumni from the 2026 cohort. Three had applied between three and six times before getting in, and the fourth (Don Schwall, VIS) was a mid-stage reapplicant. They shared how their companies evolved, how they used feedback, and what they got out of the program.

Key Takeaways

- **It's never too early to apply.** Successful companies are usually at least at the prototype stage, but every applicant gets free written feedback from 4–8 expert reviewers, and getting it before decisions like a design freeze can save costly mistakes.
- **Persistence pays off.** 63% of the 2026 cohort applied in at least one prior year, 13 companies applied in at least two prior years, 8 applied in three or more, and about a third had pitched in a prior year. First-time applicants still get in: 24 of the 65 companies (37%) were applying for the first time.
- **Reapplying is easy.** A new feature auto-populates last year's answers, so returning applicants only need to update what's changed. Simply resubmitting the exact same application will likely produce the same outcome, so MTI recommends incorporating feedback and company updates into your next application.
- **Show progress and coachability.** Being coachable is one of the main judging criteria. Showing how you addressed last year's feedback is a strong positive signal.

- **Relationships compound over time.** Alumni found advisors, board members and investors among the judges they met while applying, even in years they weren't accepted.
- **Applications are due December 1, 2026.** Start one now to preview the questions and stay on MTI's radar; Nicole will personally email anyone with an unsubmitted application around November 30. Start your application here.

Meet the Alumni

Georgia Fleet, Zonova (early stage)

London-based Zonova develops an antimicrobial additive embedded in polymer manufacturing, so medical devices such as IV catheters kill bacteria on contact. Zonova applied in 2024 and 2025 without being invited to pitch, then pitched at Radar Forum and was accepted on its third attempt. Georgia nearly didn't apply again until Nicole encouraged her. Zonova won the MTI Vision Award, voted on by peers at kickoff, and gave a final pitch at the Wilson Sonsini conference.

Eddie McDaid, Galenband (early stage)

Galenband is developing a heart rhythm monitoring platform for diagnosing intermittent arrhythmias through longer-term monitoring than chest patches allow. Galenband applied six times; for the first three or four years it was still a university project that hadn't spun out. The year before it was accepted, it placed second by one vote in a pitch competition at MedTech Strategist in Dublin, where first place won automatic admission. Galenband was a Vision Award finalist and a Grand Prize finalist. Three of the six members of its advisory board are judges met during its application attempts.

Tushar Sharma, Vivifi Medical (early stage)

Vivifi Medical is developing an in-office treatment for benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) that addresses the condition at its source, using needle punctures under local anesthesia with no incisions or implants, and plans to expand to prostate cancer. Vivifi applied four times before being accepted and was a Grand Prize finalist. Through those attempts it built relationships with judges, raised funding from investors it met at pitch events, and added one of them as a board observer.

Don Schwall, VIS (mid stage)

VIS (Vision in Seconds) is a commercial-stage company with a non-invasive laser vision correction device, already gaining traction in Canada. Don applied twice. The first time, he learned that pitching to MTI's strategics requires a different approach than pitching to investors; the second time, he better understood how the program was structured. VIS was a mid-stage finalist and received a $25K award at MedTech Strategist.

Program Overview

MTI is the world's largest and most impactful accelerator for medical technology. Its scope covers medical devices (implantables, wearables, surgical tools), digital health (including hospital workflow optimization) and diagnostics that touch the patient. A good rule of thumb: the customer is ultimately a patient or a hospital. Lab-based diagnostics sold to CLIA or hospital labs generally fit better in BioTools Innovator, though many companies apply to both. Platform technologies that address several clinical problems are eligible; Zonova is one example.

Track Record

- More than 900 alumni companies with the 2026 cohort.
- More than 60 acquisitions, 600 products on the market and $12 billion in follow-on funding.
- 90% of MTI companies are still in business or have been acquired.
- The 2026 cohort represented 18 countries.

Interest Areas

Examples include new device designs, surgical tools, implantables, safety mechanisms for existing devices, tissue grafts and biomaterials (a common interest of the ASPS track), interventional tools, consumer-facing wellness products (often commercial companies in the mid-stage cohort), clinician workflow optimization, patient monitoring, imaging, measurement systems and patient-facing diagnostics. New partners can open up new areas each year: Solventum is expected to bring in dental technologies, and BD is adding business units with broader interests.

Selection Process & Timeline

- **December 1, 2026:** application deadline.
- **Review:** more than 600 reviewers in MTI's ecosystem, with 4–8 real people reviewing each application. MTI does not use AI to review applications. Reviewers include strategic partners (e.g., J&J, Zimmer Biomet, Edwards, BD), service provider experts, investors, clinicians and key opinion leaders, mixed to give diverse perspectives and matched to your clinical area.
- **February–March 2027:** roughly the top 10% of applicants are invited to pitch.
- **April 6–8, 2027:** Radar Forum in Washington, DC.
- **May 2027:** about the top third of pitching companies (65 of roughly 200) are selected for the cohort. Summarized written feedback goes to every applicant around May or June.
- **June 15–17, 2027:** Innovator Summit in Los Angeles, the cohort's in-person kickoff, with alumni-led discussions (about 40–50 alumni attended last year) and partner-led dinners.
- **June–October 2027:** the accelerator runs fully virtually, so companies can be based anywhere.
- **October 4–6, 2027:** finals and showcase at The MedTech Conference in San Francisco, hosted by AdvaMed.

Mentor Matching

MTI meets companies where they are. After goals calls at the start of the program, early-stage companies (about two-thirds of the cohort) are matched with one or more strategic partners from the founding, platinum or specialty track tiers, plus service provider mentors. Mid-stage companies (generally commercial or in later-stage clinical trials, typically with $15M+ in equity raised) are matched mainly with service providers based on their needs. Most companies now receive two value coaches.

What the Alumni Got Out of the Program

Mentorship & Value Coaching

- **Georgia (Zonova):** Pre-revenue, having closed its seed round in May. Its strategic mentors were BD and Zimmer Biomet, a perfect fit for a B2B licensing business that wanted to test its story on future partners. Service provider mentors Proxima (regulatory) and Syensqo (polymer expertise) helped refine the regulatory plan and introduced compounders and sterilization services the company now uses. Value coaches, including one from BD's HEOR group, pushed the team on health economics, pricing and the evidence hospital value analysis committees need.
- **Eddie (Galenband):** Dexcom, its strategic mentor, focused on fundraising strategy, aligning milestones with the company's narrative, and how valuation would develop over time. Galenband also worked with NAMSA, Infera, QuickVault, Prolucid, PRIA (reimbursement and regulatory) and individual experts he called "unsung heroes." His advice: "listen to everybody, believe nobody, and form your own opinion."
- **Tushar (Vivifi Medical):** BD gave Vivifi access to its business development, HEMA and sales teams, meeting at least twice a month, to understand how a strategic views the space for acquisition and commercialization. FORJ Medical supported its electrosurgical generator strategy, and RQM+ runs its clinical studies. He called value coaching one of the biggest benefits of the program, and noted that many partners offer cohort companies discounts.
- **Don (VIS):** Met J&J leadership in person, gained introductions through Samsung and Olympus, and worked with Prolucid (software) and FORJ Medical (design, engineering and contract manufacturing). Feedback from his value coaches led him to change his business model in Canada. His mentor, NAMSA, came at the right time as VIS was changing CROs.

Radar Forum

Radar Forum is now a three-day, all-in-one pitch event and conference for about 150 companies, replacing smaller roadshow events of 30–50 companies. The 2026 event had 200 judges and experts from strategics, the AMA, CMS and FDA's TAP program, a keynote from FDA CDRH Director Michelle Tarver, and about 15 health systems in the judging pool, including roughly six people from Mayo Clinic. Pitching companies spend about three hours at round tables, pitching for about 20 minutes to

groups of around 10 judges at a time. They then receive a "spider diagram" scoring them on dimensions such as product, team, value drivers and fundability against the average applicant, along with each judge's individual comments. Companies that don't make the cohort still benefit: one recently posted that it met its first investor at Radar Forum.

- **Georgia:** One judge joined Zonova's advisory board and introduced another advisor. Her tip: do the beach walk (likely a monument walk in DC), which got Zonova two extra hours with a BD judge.
- **Eddie:** Called Radar Forum about 25% of the value of the whole accelerator, thanks to direct access to senior FDA and CMS leaders, including those running the TAP and Breakthrough programs.
- **Tushar:** Scheduled meetings with FDA leaders, including Michelle Tarver and former CDRH Director Jeff Shuren, for feedback on Vivifi's regulatory strategy.
- **Don:** By Radar Forum, companies have been vetted, so sponsors and judges open up more. It was the first event where he really pursued the people he wanted to meet.

Other Highlights

- **Leadership pods:** groups of about 5–7 CEOs, matched after Innovator Summit and meeting every two weeks as "peer therapy." Georgia and Tushar, who shared a pod, called it one of the most valuable parts of the program.
- **Credibility and investor readiness:** Tushar said that after being screened by so many reviewers, strategics and vendors, companies leave the program investment-ready.
- **Vetted partners:** Don valued access to pre-vetted design, engineering, software, cybersecurity, manufacturing and regulatory firms he wouldn't have found otherwise.
- **Visibility:** PR opportunities throughout the program, including the Nasdaq Tower, plus warm introductions. Don noted that being vetted by 250–300 judges makes large companies more willing to open their networks.
- **Health system connections:** MTI collaborates with Mayo Clinic and Kaiser Permanente, whose representatives have taken part in Radar Forum panels, the Value Program and mock value analysis workshops, and as value coaches.

Why Apply Early

- **The application itself is useful.** Questions about customers, value proposition and funding can change how you think about your company.
- **Free expert feedback.** Every applicant receives summarized feedback from 4–8 expert reviewers, around May or June.
- **Feedback before it's too late.** It's better to hear that a product needs a feature before a design freeze than after.
- **Relationships take time.** Meeting partners early pays off; returning applicants are already known when they pitch again.

- **Pre-prototype?** Eddie's advice: if you don't have a product yet, your deck and how you present it is your product, so get as much feedback on it as you can.

Why Apply Often

- **Selection depends on partner interests,** which change every year as new partners join and existing ones expand. You never know when your year will be.
- **MTI improves every year.** Radar Forum, the Nasdaq Tower graduation and a larger pool of value coaches are all recent additions.
- **Progress is visible.** Reviewers can compare against last year's application and see whether you addressed the feedback, which is a big win.
- **The odds favor persistence.** 63% of the 2026 cohort were reapplicants, and about a third had pitched in a prior year.

Tips for Applying & Reapplying

- **Don't just copy last year's answers.** Show what's changed: new milestones, how you addressed feedback, and specific goals.
- **Add a "what we changed" slide or paragraph,** pairing last year's feedback with what you did about it.
- **Use the attachments section** for letters of support, for example from a judge or ecosystem member who has seen your progress.
- **Track who gave you feedback** (Tushar). Reconnect after Radar Forum, show them how you addressed the gap, and ask for their view. They may judge you again, and if they see you acted on their advice, they're far more likely to recommend you.
- **Listen to the feedback on your business model** (Georgia). Zonova's technology stayed the same, but reviewers found its model confusing; switching to B2B licensing was what changed the outcome.
- **Keep pitch decks lean** (Don). In a 20-minute slot, pitch for 4–5 minutes and leave the rest for questions. Live decks need much less text than emailed ones.
- **Use video.** The application has a field for a video link, and reviewers like watching them. Animations showing the problem or how the product works are helpful (Don used a CAD animation of his procedure). Voiceover is fine for videos you share, but when pitching live, speak the content yourself.
- **The hardest part varies by company.** For Vivifi it was the reimbursement pathway; Tushar learned at an early pitch event, from PRIA, that Vivifi would need its own reimbursement code.

Q&A Highlights

Eligibility & Fit

- **Do pre-revenue companies have a real chance?** Yes. About two-thirds of cohort companies are pre-revenue. Vivifi doesn't expect revenue until 2029–2030 and hadn't filed its PCT application when it applied.
- **Are digital health, healthcare IT and SaMD companies eligible?** Yes. Digital health and healthcare IT companies have gone through the program, and about 25% of cohort companies are SaMD.
- **Is MTI looking for AI-native or software companies?** Both are eligible, including AI-assisted medical applications.
- **Can companies with products already on the market elsewhere apply?** Yes.
- **Is a therapeutic biologics company a fit?** If your customers are pharma companies, BioTools Innovator is likely a better fit. See here for a summary of our Joint MTI & BTI Info Session.
- **How do I know if my company is eligible?** Search MTI's alumni portfolio on the website for companies in your clinical or digital category.
- **Are non-US companies eligible?** Yes. Startups can be based anywhere, including the UK and Africa; the 2026 cohort represented 18 countries. Beyond targeting the US market, there are no extra requirements. Most webinars run 12–1 PM ET, and MTI hopes to offer more APAC-friendly times next year.
- **Do non-US founders need a visa?** No. The program is virtual and MTI does not employ participants. MTI writes letters of support for anyone who needs a travel visa to attend Radar Forum.
- **Can we apply before incorporating?** Yes, but you must be incorporated by the program start (May 2027).

Selection Odds & Feedback

- **How many first-time applicants get in?** 24 of the 65 companies in the 2026 cohort (37%) were first-time applicants.
- **What was different in the year you got in?** Georgia: the technology was the same, but Zonova acted on feedback that its business model was confusing and refocused on B2B licensing. Tushar: each round surfaced shortcomings to address before the next, and the program itself grew and improved over time.
- **Do declined applicants get feedback?** Yes. All applicants receive feedback from expert reviewers.

Team & Time Commitment

- **How many team members are required?** You can participate solo, though Tushar recommends having at least two team members involved.

- **What is the time commitment, and must every team member attend?** About 10 hours a week across the team. Teams can divide sessions based on relevance, and MTI recommends which team members to invite to each session. Some companies have the CEO or founder attend everything.
- **Are there rules on part-time teams or founders with other jobs?** No, as long as the team can dedicate about 10 hours a week in total.
- **Can students be on the team?** Yes. One 2026 cohort company was led by a current undergraduate.
- **Will the program help build out a team?** You may not find future team members in the program, but you can find consultants to fill gaps and recruiters to help you grow the team.
- **Can one person apply with two different companies?** Yes, using a different email address for each application.

Application Content & Confidentiality

- **What was the toughest part of the application?** It varies by company. For Vivifi, it was the reimbursement pathway. Don said the pitch mattered most in the end, and recommended keeping decks lean.
- **Are applications confidential, and who sees them?** Applications must be non-confidential. 4–8 reviewers are assigned from a pool of about 600, many of them MTI partners, chosen for a mix of backgrounds and familiarity with your space. You should be comfortable discussing your technology openly, including in the room if invited to pitch.
- **Are short videos in a pitch a good idea?** Yes, especially animations that show the product working or the problem it solves, and the application has a field for a video link. Cohort companies also produce a 60-second video during the program. In a live pitch, judges want to hear from you, not just watch a video.

Program Fee & Specialty Tracks

- **How does the program fee work?** The fee is $15,000 for accepted companies, and scholarships often cover a significant portion; every 2026 cohort company received at least $7,500. The fee can be paid in cash, upfront or in two equal installments, or through a $50K SAFE note, with terms executed before acceptance. Deferral may be available case by case. The fee includes the five-month curriculum, mentor matching, registration and presentations at The MedTech Conference and Innovator Summit, Open Rounds, the Innovator Portal, and eligibility for $700,000+ in prize competitions.
- **What do the specialty tracks cost?** The AHA and ASPS tracks require a $50,000 SAFE. The Vantage program fee is covered by a 100% scholarship from BARDA. General cohort companies can choose between the $15K fee and the $50K SAFE.
- **If a specialty track doesn't select us, are we still considered for the main cohort?** Yes, with the $15K program fee option available.

Mentorship & Resources

- **How would a SaMD startup with AI integration benefit?** Mentors are matched by stage; Prolucid and Velentium commonly mentor software companies.
- **Which eQMS platform do you recommend?** It depends on your stage. QMS providers take part in Radar Forum and the program and can help you decide.
- **How can MTI help a commercial-stage company with visibility among health systems?** Don found introductions much easier through MTI because companies have been vetted by hundreds of judges. MTI also works closely with health systems and IDNs such as Mayo Clinic and Kaiser Permanente.

Key Dates

- **November 24, 2026** — APAC info session with alumni from Japan and South Korea
- **December 1, 2026** — Application deadline
- **February–March 2027** — Invitations to pitch
- **April 6–8, 2027** — Radar Forum, Washington, DC
- **May 2027** — Cohort announced; applicant feedback sent around May–June
- **June 15–17, 2027** — Innovator Summit, Los Angeles
- **June–October 2027** — Virtual accelerator program
- **October 4–6, 2027** — Finals and showcase at The MedTech Conference, San Francisco