

# Financing a Simulation Center



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## KEYWORDS

- Surgery • Simulation center • Skills laboratory • Education • Training • Finance
- Costs • Funding

## KEY POINTS

- Many avenues exist to attain funding for establishing surgical skills laboratories, with industry, hospital, and departmental funding being the most common.
- Industry funding or grants can provide substantial initial funding to start the operation; internal support, however, from the surgery department and hospital administration are essential for sustaining the laboratory.
- Collaboration with other medical departments and specialties, such as gynecology, urology, gastroenterology, nursing, and other allied health professions, is key for optimizing the utility of and amount of revenue generated by the laboratory.
- Budgeting factors for financing a laboratory should include both initial and maintenance costs, and acquisition of equipment is generally the most expensive capital investment. Costs for personnel, use of facility or laboratory space, supplies and consumables, and equipment maintenance are ongoing costs for maintaining the laboratory.

## INTRODUCTION

The operating room and the patients' bedside historically have been the foundation for surgical skills training. Although these environments continue to be important, concerns with learning efficiency and patient safety have shifted the training process to include simulation-based training in a structured environment. Teaching residents in a live patient setting increases operative time and costs.<sup>1</sup> As the importance of simulation-based training has been established across various medical and health professional disciplines, skills training laboratories have become a standard in surgery training programs. In 2008, the American College of Surgeons and Association of

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Program Directors in Surgery developed a simulation-based surgical skills curriculum; this curriculum was followed by the Residency Review Committee for Surgery of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education mandating resident access to a skills laboratory.

Although laparoscopic skills training laboratories existed at the time of the reform, institutions without laboratories were forced to modify their program in order to remain compliant. Funding was reported as a major obstacle; establishing a surgical skills laboratory and adapting the training curriculum requires a significant amount of resources, including a physical location, equipment, and manpower.<sup>2,3</sup> A systematic approach, therefore, is necessary to secure the needed funds, optimize, and budget appropriately in order to build a first-rate training facility.

## OBTAINING FUNDING

After establishing a plan for a surgical skills training center, the next step is identifying appropriate funding sources. Finding funding is a critical, yet challenging step in developing a simulation center. Because most laboratories do not initially generate revenue, funding must be acquired from other sources. Numerous avenues for sourcing funds exist, including industry; the surgery department/health sciences center; hospitals; government at the federal, state, or local level; and philanthropic organizations (**Box 1**).

Industry sponsors are one of the most common sources of funding through educational partnerships or grants. According to a survey of training centers, 68% of laboratories have received funding from industry.<sup>2</sup> Funding opportunities are available from various companies, such as medical device, pharmaceutical, and medical education vendors. Successful funding from a granting agency, however, requires the skills laboratory to meet industry objectives. For example, the center may be asked to conduct specific training activities or use recommended equipment. Commitment to industry stipulations may lead to increased activities and may provide continued funding. Most industry funding, however, is provided for start-up or for a limited duration. In addition to cash grants, medical device companies are also able to donate equipment. These donations are valued similarly to cash, which would otherwise be used for equipment purchases. Equipment donations are more readily available and can result in considerable reductions in start-up costs.

### Box 1

#### Funding sources

- Surgery department
- Medicine specialties
- Allied health disciplines
- Hospital
- Industry
- Medical school/health sciences center
- Alumni
- Community fundraising
- Government
- Research grants

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