



April 16, 2025

Springboard Seed Funding Challenge

The Soy Innovation Center (SIC) initiative of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) aims to increase the demand for sustainably produced products throughout supply chains. This will be achieved by broadening the range of viable, soy-based, renewable alternatives to products that contain petroleum or other substitutable chemical compounds.

SIC primarily positions itself as an early-stage investor in commercially promising soy-based products and materials.* The SpringBoard Challenge serves as a precursor initiative to foster innovation that may lead to SIC investments. A long-term objective of the SpringBoard Challenge is to cultivate and expand a self-sustaining critical mass of higher education institutions, business-led labs, and individual innovators focused on developing high-value, high-volume non-food applications of soy-based resources.

The 2025 SpringBoard Seed Funding Challenge will be limited to five areas: Bioplastics, Lubricants, PFAS Substitutes, Biopolymers, and Biofabrics. The accompanying document, “SpringBoard Challenge Statements – 2025,” provides detailed information on these areas.

The Challenge will occur in two stages. This announcement pertains to Stage One.

Stage One offers a chance to present your project idea. Project teams will be chosen from the pool of ideas and invited to submit full proposals for Stage Two. Each selected team will receive a \$2,000 stipend to assist with the costs of preparing a complete proposal. Project proposals that are accepted for funding at the conclusion of Stage Two will receive seed support of up to \$40,000.

Stage One: A concept paper of no more than three pages with the following elements:

- Project Name
- Project Team [Note: Rules governing the use of ISA funds do not allow for Principal Investigators. Higher education team members should be identified as “faculty researcher” or “student researcher.” Non-higher education team members should be identified as “senior researcher” or “assistant researcher.”]
- Team leader, email, phone, mailing address, and physical address (if different from the mailing address).

* See: <https://soyinnovationcenter.com>

- Project description addressing the following [Note: projects must be completed within 12 months from inception]:
 - The research problem to be investigated.
 - A brief description of how the research problem will be investigated and what kind of research will be conducted.
 - A description of the potential commercial use of the proposed research and resulting innovation.
- Institutional capacity: A description of the facilities and other supportive infrastructure where the project will be executed.

Stage One concept papers must be submitted at www.ilsoy.org by 5:00 p.m. CDT on Friday, May 30, 2025.

On June 13, the ISA technical advisory team will invite groups from each of the five designated areas to submit complete project proposals for Stage Two. The invitation will include feedback and questions that must be addressed in the proposal. Each invited group will receive a stipend of \$2,000 to assist with the time and costs associated with preparing a full project proposal.

Stage Two: Moving forward, invited Stage Two project proposals will require comprehensive descriptions of the scientific, technical, and methodological challenges that will be addressed by the proposed research, along with a summary of how the team plans to tackle these challenges. Proposals must also include details about the necessary materials and equipment, the existing capacity, and the anticipated needs of the project team. Detailed budgets will also be mandatory.

Other Details:

- Challenge Timeline:
 - May 1, 2025, 10 a.m. CDT: Pre-submission virtual workshop. Registration for the workshop is at www.ilsoy.org. The workshop will be recorded and will be available at (ISA YouTube channel)
 - May 30, 2025, 5 p.m. CDT: Stage One concept papers are due to ISA
 - June 13, 2025: Invitations to submit Stage Two proposals sent to project teams
 - August 15, 2025, 5 p.m. CDT: Stage Two proposals due to ISA
 - September 12, 2025, Stage Two project teams receive notice of ISA decision
 - September 25-26, 2025, Public announcement of project winners at IIN Sustaining Illinois Research Conference.
- The Illinois Soybean Checkoff program funds this initiative. All use of checkoff funds is governed by federal and state laws and regulations. The workshop on May 1 will address what is allowable and what is not, and an FAQ will be available on that day.
- Indirect costs are prohibited. Matching is not required.
- Two panels will review submissions received in both stages. One panel is a national technical advisory committee made up of experts in agricultural product utilization, while the second panel consists of leaders from the Illinois Soybean Association.