



## Springboard Challenge

The Soy Innovation Center (SIC) initiative of the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) aims to increase demand for sustainably produced products across 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 positions itself as an early-stage investor in promising soy-based non-food products and materials. The SpringBoard Challenge encourages innovation at the proof-of-concept stage that could lead to SIC investments and put Illinois on the path of establishing a soy-based innovation ecosystem.

The 2026 SpringBoard Challenge will focus on five areas: Bioplastics, Lubricants, PFAS Substitutes, Biopolymers, and Innovative Soy Products on the Farm. We also welcome ideas for other industrial-scaled, soy-based products.

The Challenge will occur in two stages: Pre-Proposals and Invited Proposals. This announcement pertains to Pre-Proposals.

A Pre-Proposal is required before being invited to submit a full project proposal. Project teams will be selected from the pool of ideas received by ISA. Project proposals that are accepted for funding at the conclusion of the Invited Proposal stage will receive seed support of up to \$40,000.

**Pre-proposal:** The Pre-Proposal is limited to three pages and must have the following elements:

- Project Name
- Project Team [Note: Rules governing the use of ISA funds do not allow for the compensation of 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).
- Project description addressing the following [Note: projects must be completed within 12 months from inception]:
  - The innovation being pursued by the project team and the applied research problems being investigated.

- A brief description of how the applied research problem will be investigated and the kind of research that will be conducted.
- A description of the foreseeable commercial market or application of the proposed applied research and resulting innovation.
- Institutional capacity and partnerships: A description of the partnerships, facilities, and other supportive infrastructure where the project will be executed.

*Pre-Proposal papers must be submitted at [www.ilsoy.org](http://www.ilsoy.org) by 5:00 p.m. CDT on Wednesday, April 1, 2026.*

On April 15, 2026, the ISA technical advisory team will invite groups from each of the five designated areas to submit a full project proposal. The invitation will include feedback and questions that must be addressed in the proposal.

**Invited Full Proposal:** Moving forward, full 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 them. 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:
  - January 2026: Notice of Funding Opportunity
  - March 4-5, 2026: Springboard Challenge Event, ISA Headquarters, Bloomington, Illinois
  - April 1, 2026, 5 p.m. CDT: Pre-Proposal papers are due to ISA
  - April 15, 2026: Invitations to submit full proposals sent to project teams
  - May 22, 2026, 5 p.m. CDT: Full proposals due to ISA
  - July 1, 2026: Public announcement of project winners is made.
- The Illinois Soybean Checkoff program funds this initiative. Federal and state laws and regulations govern all use of checkoff funds. The workshop on March 4-5 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
  - ISB Funding will not pay for equipment
  - While ISB Funding will pay for research salaries, Principal Investigator salaries are excluded from funding
  - Intellectual property that is a result of support from ISA is subject to the federal rules governing the use of Illinois Soybean Checkoff Funds.
- 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.