

Springboard Challenge 2026
Frequently Asked Questions
March 9, 2026; Revised March 13, 2026

How many pre-proposals will be selected?

The Illinois Soybean Association/Soybean Innovation Center (ISA/SIC) would like to select at least two pre-proposals from each of the five program areas to advance to the proposal stage. However, ISA/SIC reserves the right to make all funding decisions based on the number of proposals received, the quality of those proposals, and available funding.

What are the five challenge areas?

- Bioplastics
- Lubricants
- PFAS Solutions
- Biopolymers
- Products used on the farm

There is a separate notice of funding opportunity that describes each challenge area in detail.

How many Springboard Challenge stages are there?

The challenge occurs in two stages. Stage one involves submitting a pre-proposal. Project teams will be chosen from the pool of ideas and are invited to submit full proposals for Stage Two.

How much funding will be available?

There will be up to \$40,000 for each selected proposal.

How will funds be distributed to awardees?

The project team will identify the lead entity to receive the award. The lead entity will be responsible for separating the funding if multiple entities are involved. Progress-based payments will be made to the lead entities in accordance with the laws and regulations governing Illinois soybean check-off funds.

Can individuals submit pre-proposals?

Individuals, for-profit entities, institutions of higher education, and non-profit organizations are all eligible to submit proposals. ISA/SIC may require additional assurances that the person or entity submitting a pre-proposal has the capacity to perform the tasks and functions described in the pre-proposal.

The Illinois Innovation Network comprises all Illinois public universities and Distillery Labs and is a SpringBoard partner. Will IIN institutions be given preference?

No. ISA/SIC regards the IIN as an essential, non-exclusive partner in developing the R&D and innovation infrastructure in agricultural utilization. ISA/SIC is opening this

initiative to all higher education institutions (including community colleges), private entities, and independent laboratories.

Students may play various roles on higher education teams. All other things being equal between higher education teams, will preference be given to teams where graduate and undergraduate students play a prominent role?

Yes. ISA/SIC values the long-term benefits of this initiative in building Illinois's capacity as a leader in plant product utilization. We regard students as future leaders in agricultural product development.

Can a researcher submit more than one pre-proposal? Yes. There are no limits.

If funded, will ISA/SIC have any ownership rights to the technology?

You keep the intellectual property you already have. We will work with you to create a collaborative agreement that will help improve it. A collaborative agreement will govern any new intellectual property arising from this project based on the Qualified State Soybean Board (QSSB) guidelines. ISA/SIC wants to encourage innovation, research, and development while honoring its fiduciary responsibilities to the farmers whose contributions support this initiative.

Will ISA/SIC, technical reviewers, and all participants sign Confidentiality Disclosure Agreements for applicants?

No. While ISA/SIC will keep all submissions confidential and not share information submitted by participants without their explicit permission, ISA/SIC and its reviewers are not required to sign Confidentiality Disclosure Agreements. Summaries of projects receiving SpringBoard awards will be shared publicly through press releases, the ISA website, and at events. ISA will not disclose any information about projects that do not receive SpringBoard awards.

Is there a limit to the number of project team members?

There is no limit to the number of project team members.

What are the deliverables needed from awardees?

Reports are tied to project milestones, and a final report is due upon the successful completion of the project.

Will written comments from reviewers be available to applicants once a funding determination has been made?

Formal written comments will not be provided. However, staff may provide general notes identifying strengths and weaknesses of the pre-proposals and proposals.

Do you anticipate the Springfield Challenge being held again? If so, can unfunded proposals be resubmitted?

Plans are to hold a similar competition in 2027.

According to the materials, there will be two separate panels of judges. One panel is a national technical advisory committee comprising experts in agricultural product utilization, while the second panel consists of leaders from the Illinois Soybean Association. What about subject matter experts in the field? For instance, in the production of plastic bottles, healthcare PPE supplies, and other petroleum-based plastic products, for the bioplastics challenge? Or textile manufacturers, producers, and end-users regarding the challenges of biopolymers and biofibers?

The technical panel will collectively have expertise across all five product areas. In addition, ISA may go outside of the panel to obtain additional expert assistance. Outside experts will be subject to the same confidentiality expectations as the advisory committee members.

Is the process “one and done”? Will the review teams ask for clarifications during their review processes?

ISA/SIC wants to maximize opportunities for success. The review teams will be permitted to seek clarifications that do not substantially alter the underlying pre-proposal or proposal.

If our team doesn't receive funding, can we resubmit in 2027, assuming there will be another Springboard Challenge?

Yes.

If we don't receive funding, will we receive feedback that enables our team to improve our presentation and proposal for the next time?

Yes.

Must submitters reside in Illinois?

No

What if my idea is not in one of the five identified areas?

You will be required to link your idea to one of the five challenge areas. We will strongly prefer those closely associated with one of the five specific areas. We will consider other projects that are loosely linked. Please remember that our goal is to move the pile. What that means is that we are focused on creating demand and not increasing the supply of soybeans

How long should my projects last?

Project funding is for one year and must result in agreed-upon deliverables. Each project should proceed in several phases with defined milestones. For example, the first phase may last 60 to 90 days, the second phase may last 3 to 6 months, and so on. We recognize that the agreed-upon deliverables may not result in a product or material that can be immediately commercialized. ISA/SIC will work with the project team to secure support for a defined period beyond the first year.

The notice of funding opportunity creates a new category of innovative soy products on the farm. The challenge statement describes this as soy-based products, potentially in combination with other plant-based materials, and as supporting farm operations and production. In addition to functional characteristics, the challenge statement notes that the project must explore ways to engage farmers in developing the product. What does it mean to “engage” farmers? The point of this effort is to develop soy-based solutions with real returns to soybean farmers. Farmers are problem solvers and constitute an important market. They can inspire new ideas and will know the value of the products that emerge. They will be essential members of every team in this challenge area. It is incumbent on the lead institution to integrate farmers into their group.