Innovation Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund

SAIF

PROGRAM GUIDE

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Overview

The Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund (SAIF) is a research and development (R&D) funding program designed to accelerate the commercialization of game-changing technological innovations in the province's core economic sectors.

Through SAIF, Innovation Saskatchewan (IS) provides non-repayable grants to projects that address a specific industry challenge. Expressions of Interest (EOI) can be submitted anytime. EOIs will be evaluated during the intake periods outlined below. Only shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Program Objectives

1. Support industry-driven R&D projects that address an industry challenge in the province's core economic sectors.
2. Accelerate the commercialization and adoption of innovative industrial technologies.
3. Drive economic growth in the province through technological innovations.

Eligibility Criteria

All applications must meet the following criteria to be considered for funding:

1. Proposed by a group of active industry partners that represent the project's value chain (e.g., researchers, individuals in the production & supply process and customers & end users).
   - Lead proponent(s) must be a for-profit entity with the intention of commercializing the developed technology.
   - Active partners participate in the project either through cash and/or in-kind contribution and/or letter of intent to purchase.
   - Priority is given to proposals that have an academic partner from a Saskatchewan post-secondary or research institute.
2. Led by a Saskatchewan-based organization*.
   - Preference will be given to lead proponents with headquarter presence in Saskatchewan.
   - The project group can consist of non-Saskatchewan organizations, providing the majority of the group have headquarter presence in Saskatchewan.

* *Projects led by non-Saskatchewan organizations with innovative technologies of significant benefit to Saskatchewan will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. IS reserves full discretion to declare the lead proponent ineligible.*

3. Demonstrates how the technological innovation will solve a specific industry challenge and benefit the sector, not just individual companies.
4. Proves technological solution is novel, innovative and not a minor or derivative improvement on what currently exists in market.
5. Demonstrates a feasible path to commercialization and how the benefits of the technology will be sustained over the long term.
6. Requires that no more than 30 per cent of the project's budget is requested from IS and industry partners provide 50 per cent or more of the project's budget.

Note: R&D activities are expected to be carried out in Saskatchewan using Saskatchewan-based personnel. In limited circumstances, specialized activities that can only be conducted outside of Saskatchewan or expertise that is available only outside of Saskatchewan will be accepted. Any specialized activities or resources required that are outside of the province must be discussed with IS prior to the submission of a full proposal.

Areas of Focus

SAIF accepts applications for R&D projects related to the following areas:

- Mining
- Energy
- Manufacturing & processing
- Health care
- Cleantech

As part of the EOI evaluation process, all proponents will be required to fill out a questionnaire to determine if their project meets the above criteria. Projects that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be invited to submit full proposals.

Funding Structure

Lead proponents can receive a maximum of $450,000 in SAIF grants to support the commercialization of their innovation. Proponents should only request amounts that can be broken down into eligible costs. Unjustified expenditures will negatively affect the success of an application.

In addition to the limit on grants, and as noted in *Eligibility Criteria*, IS will provide no more than 30 per cent of the project's budget and industry partners must provide 50 per cent or more of the project's budget.

The remaining amounts can be secured from other sources like federal funding agencies. In-kind matching contributions cannot exceed 20 per cent of the budget and must be valued at cost.

Once funding has been approved, IS will disburse payments based on the achievement of milestones, the submission of progress reports and the dates specified in the contract. The final payment will be disbursed at the end of the contract after the final report has been received by IS.

Repeat Applicants

Lead proponents can apply for additional funding (over the $450,000) if they are working on a "new project." To qualify, new projects must meet the following criteria:

- Technology or innovation must be separate or substantially different from what was developed in the initial SAIF project (e.g., a new product line or separate service).
- Technology or innovation cannot be an enhancement or extension to the initial SAIF project.

Proposals for "new projects" will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. IS reserves full discretion to declare any project ineligible. Lead proponents cannot receive more than $900,000 in SAIF grants over their lifetime.

Eligible Costs

Funding from SAIF can be used to cover costs deemed essential to the R&D of the technology leading up to commercialization. Eligible costs include but are not limited to the following:

- Consumables
- Capital expenditures within length of project required for R&D (e.g., equipment purchase) valued at depreciation during the length of the project
- Incremental R&D and technical personnel salaries
- Contracted professional technical services or expertise (e.g., third-party software developer)
- Costs related to intellectual property (IP) protection, technology transfer and commercialization
- Travel and accommodation for collaborative purposes

All expenses incurred and reported must have supporting documentation (e.g., invoices, receipts, paystubs) to be made available upon request by IS.

Ineligible Costs

IS reserves full discretion to declare expenditures ineligible. Ineligible costs include but are not limited to the following:

- Capital expenditures beyond length of project and/or not related to R&D activities
- Land and/or building purchases
- Non-R&D and/or technical personnel salaries
- Professional/association membership fees and dues
- Marketing and business development
- Overhead
- Contingency
- Hospitality and entertainment
- Technical and/or economic feasibility studies*

* *While IS will consider funding feasibility studies as a component of a larger project, studies cannot be the sole focus of the project.*

Application Process

Annual Intakes

Intakes for SAIF are held twice per year. To be considered for funding, prospective applicants must submit an EOI and complete the *Eligibility Questionnaire* before the intake deadline. Only selected applicants will be invited to submit full proposals. Shortlist decisions made by IS' internal selection committee are final.

Only proposals determined to be most strategically aligned with the province's R&D priorities will be invited to submit full proposals. The number of grants approved per year is based on budget availability and the evaluation process.

Intake Period 1

April 30	Deadline for EOIs
May 31	All invites for full proposals sent
July 31	Deadline for full proposals
September 30	Funding decisions made

Intake Period 2

September 30	Deadline for EOIs
October 31	All invites for full proposals sent
December 31	Deadline for full proposals
February 28	Funding decisions made

IS will provide feedback to any applicants that submit a draft of their proposal or EOI before the submission deadline. All applicants submitting a full proposal are *strongly* advised to take advantage of this opportunity.

Expression of Interest

EOIs are evaluated based on their alignment with the eligibility criteria and IS' strategic priorities. Only shortlisted proponents will be invited to submit a full proposal. The evaluation criteria that must be fully addressed in the EOI by the applicant are as follows:

1. **Project Overview:** Provide an overview of the proposed project and the technology being developed. Include the project's objectives, major activities planned, partners and timeline.
2. **Benefits to Sector:** Demonstrate that the technology being developed is driven by industry demand. Highlight the specific industry challenge being addressed by the proposed technology. Explain how the technology will provide broad and tangible benefits to the related sector(s).
3. **Innovation:** Demonstrate that the solution being developed is novel and innovative. Describe how the technology will offer a significant competitive advantage over existing solutions in the market. Outline the risks involved and how they justify government support for the project.
4. **Path to Commercialization:** Provide an overview of the plan to bring the developed technology to market. Identify development and commercialization milestones and deliverables.

Application Guidelines

The evaluation criteria that must be fully addressed in the proposal by the applicant are as follows:

1. **Executive Summary:** Expand on the overview in the EOI. Provide background, objectives, activities planned, and how the results of the project will create long-term positive impacts in the province.
2. **Alignment with Industry Needs:** Demonstrate industry demand for the technology being developed. Explain how the proposed technological innovation will solve a specific industry challenge and benefit stakeholders in the sector.
3. **Financial Leverage:** Provide a detailed breakdown of the project's funding sources:
   - Amount requested from SAIF
   - Amount provided by industry partners
   - Other sources of funding (e.g., federal government, post-secondary institutions, research institutes)
   - Percentage of each source of funding (including SAIF)
4. **Academic Research Asset Leverage:** Identify the Saskatchewan-based research infrastructure and personnel that will be utilized in the project, if any. Explain how the project will leverage these assets to assist with developing the technology. Academic research assets include, but are not limited to the following:
   - Research institutes (e.g., Canadian Light Source, Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization)
   - Researchers employed at a Saskatchewan research institute or post-secondary institution
   - University-owned research infrastructure
5. **Project Design:** Describe in detail how the project will be carried out to reach its objectives. Include the following:
   - Detailed description of work required and deliverables
   - Cost breakdown and justification for the amount requested from SAIF
   - Project timeline
   - Further R&D or commercial activities planned after SAIF's investment period
6. **Proponent Capacity:** Demonstrate the applicants' capacity to carry out the project from start to finish. Identify the expertise and capabilities that each partner brings to the consortium. Provide a list of key personnel that will be involved in the project and brief biographies.
7. **End User Impact/Adoption:** Identify the group(s) who will benefit from the results of the project and their readiness to adopt the technological innovation. Include at least two letters of intent in the appendices from committed customers.
8. **Challenges to Technology Adoption:** Identify any challenges in the market's ability to adopt the technology. Describe efforts made or to be taken to address these challenges.
9. **Competitive Analysis:** Identify direct or indirect competitors in the market. Demonstrate how the technology being developed differs from competitors. Discuss what advantages or disadvantages the technology has over existing products/services.

10. **Risks:** Identify and discuss potential risks in developing and implementing the proposed technology. Specify if there are any regulatory risks or hurdles associated with the technology.
11. **Economic Impact:** Quantify the economic impact that the project and resulting technology will have. Provide a detailed breakdown of the estimated amounts. This can include but is not limited to the following:
    - Jobs created
    - Private investment attracted
    - Increased productivity
12. **Environmental Impact:** Describe potential positive and/or negative impacts to the environment associated with the project.
13. **Long-term Impact:** Discuss the long-term impact of the technology being developed. Outline the applicant's plan to bring the technology to additional markets. Include an IP management plan.

Financial Information

Financial information must be submitted as part of the full proposal. The requested information is used to determine the primary proponent's financial capacity to carry out the project from start to finish. An external independent consultant will review the materials and provide an assessment of the proponent's financial health.

Letters of Intent from Customers

All applications must include at least two letters of intent from prospective and/or committed customers of the technology being developed. These letters ensure the proponent has completed market validation and that there is demand for the technology being developed. Having more than two letters of intent from committed buyers will strengthen an application.

Evaluation Process

The SAIF evaluation process is rigorous and multi-staged to ensure public funds are being invested in strategically aligned projects with the highest potential return on investment. It will take approximately two months from the submission deadline before funding decisions are made. This process is outlined below.

Preliminary Review and Proposal Refinement

Once the project proposal is received by IS, a preliminary evaluation will be conducted internally. This process will determine whether the application has adequately addressed all the evaluation criteria. If gaps are identified, IS will work with the proponent to revise the application.

Technical and Financial Review

To determine a proposal's technical merit and financial feasibility, IS contracts independent external subject matter experts to provide recommendations. These external reviewers will evaluate the following:

- Technical claims
- Accuracy of cost projections
- Feasibility of anticipated results
- Proponents' technical capacity to carry out the project
- Primary proponent's financial health
- Primary proponent's financial capacity to carry out the project
- Business case/feasibility

The technical and financial reviews occur at the same time as the preliminary review. This allows IS to provide prompt feedback to the proponent should any technical and/or financial gaps be identified.

SAIF Advisory Committee Review

After the preliminary reviews and refinements are completed, the proposals will be reviewed by the SAIF Advisory Committee. This committee consists of external experts in industry, academia and/or policy. Evaluations are conducted based on the program criteria as outlined in the Application Guidelines section.

Proposals are first reviewed individually by each of the committee members. The committee will then meet and use the scores aggregated from individual reviews to decide which projects to recommend to the Minister Responsible for Innovation Saskatchewan for final funding approval.

Important Information

Funding Contract Structure

After an application has been approved, the proponent group has 30 days to sign a funding agreement. Failure to sign the agreement within the allotted time will result in a rescindment of the approval.

The funding contract will be made between IS and the project's lead proponent. It is recommended that the lead proponent have contracts or service agreements in place with other members of the industry group.

Intellectual Property

IS will not assume ownership of any IP that results from funded projects. An IP agreement must be in place between all active partners of the project group prior to funding being approved. IP disputes between members of the proponent group resulting in extended delays and/or deviations from the original project objectives could result in discontinuation of funding (see *Termination of Contract*).

The proponent group is responsible for ensuring it has the freedom to operate. IS will not assume any costs or damages related to potential IP disputes with a third party. IS retains the right to terminate funding if a project becomes stalled due to IP issues.

Confidentiality

IS will not release personal, technical and/or financial details of a project to any party without explicit consent from the lead proponent. Funding contract details will remain confidential between IS and the lead proponent. Consultants contracted by IS to evaluate proposals are bound by non-disclosure agreements. IS may coordinate with other provincial and/or federal funding bodies contributing to the project. Information may be shared between these funding parties.

Media Releases

Following the completion of each intake, IS will make public media releases on funding decisions and projects. Proponents will be notified and consulted with prior to any releases being made. IS will not disseminate any personal or commercially sensitive information referenced in *Confidentiality* without explicit consent from the lead proponent.

Termination of Contract

IS retains full discretion to terminate contracts and discontinue funding for reasons including, but not limited to the following:

- Change in project objectives
- IP disputes between proponent group members that result in extended delays or deviations from the original project objectives
- Disbandment of the proponent group
- Missed milestones and/or progress reports

IS should be notified of any anticipated delays to allow the program manager to work with the proponent in developing a feasible action plan and/or amend the funding contract to reflect revised deadlines. If the proponent fails to produce a satisfactory action plan to address extended delays in meeting milestones and/or submitting progress reports, a 60-day notice will be given before funding for the project is terminated.

Reporting Requirements

The lead proponent will be required to submit periodic progress reports throughout the duration of the project. Funding payments are tied to submission of progress reports. The final payment is tied to the submission of the final report. A progress report template will be provided to the proponent, which clarifies information expected to be included in the reports.

Proponents are obligated under the funding contract to provide a post-project report once per year for up to five years after the funding period has expired. The program manager will reach out to the lead proponent for these reports on an annual basis. Failure to submit post-project reports may affect any future funding applications.


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