

Agtech Growth Fund (AGF) Program Guidelines

Overview

The *Agtech Growth Fund* (AGF) is a research and development (R&D) funding program designed to accelerate the commercialization of game-changing technological innovations in the province's agricultural sector.

Through AGF, 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 advance innovation in the agtech sector.
2. Accelerate commercialization and adoption of innovative technologies that will benefit the agricultural sector.
3. Address industry challenges and create broad economic benefits through the development of technological innovations.

Eligibility Criteria

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

1. Proposed by a group of active private sector partners that represent the project's value chain (researchers, those involved in the production/supply process, and customer/end users).
 - **Active partner:** participating in the project either through cash and/or in-kind contribution, equity investment, and/or letter of intent to purchase.
 - Majority of the R&D activities must be conducted by Saskatchewan-based partners.
 - Priority is given to proposals that have an academic partner from a Saskatchewan post-secondary or research institute.
2. Demonstrate how the technological innovation will solve a specific industry challenge and benefit the agriculture sector as a whole, not just individual companies.
3. Technological solutions must be novel and innovative.
4. Demonstrate a feasible path to commercialization and how the benefits of the project will be sustained over the long-term.

5. Industry partners must provide 50% or more of the project's budget. The amount requested from IS is no more than 30% of the proposed budget.

Areas of Focus

AGF will accept applications for R&D projects related to the following areas:

- Digital Ag Software/Hardware (e.g., sensors, imagery, precision ag, data stewardship)
- Smart Farm Equipment (e.g., robotics, machinery, automation)
- Food Processing (enabling technologies)
- Indoor Agriculture (enabling technologies)
- Animal Health/Verification Technology
- Supply Chain Technology (e.g., traceability)
- Agricultural Marketplace/Fintech

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 AGF grants over their lifetime. Proponents should only request amounts that can be broken down into justifiable costs. Unjustified expenditures will negatively affect the success of an application. Projects that are shorter than 3 years in duration are subject to lower maximums.

In addition to the limit on grants, IS will provide no more than 30% of the project's budget. Industry partners must provide 50% or more of the budget. The remaining amounts can be secured from other sources (i.e. federal funding agencies). In-kind matching contributions cannot exceed 20% of the budget and must be valued at cost.

Proponents must disclose term sheets if the contribution budget includes equity investments. IS reserves full discretion to declare equity investments ineligible as part of the proponent's contribution.

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.

Stacking Policy

Any contributions provided by an IS-funded institute will be counted towards IS' contribution (i.e. IMII, PTRC, CLS, SHRF, Fedoruk Centre, and VIDO). Funding stacked from other provincial government sources will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Applicants applying to both the AGF and the Saskatchewan Technology Start-up Incentive (STSI) are limited to a lifetime cap of \$450,000 combined between the two programs (ie. AGF \$250,000 + STSI \$200,000). The total amount of stacked funding will be calculated by adding the contribution being requested under the AGF to the total amount of credits being claimed under STSI. It is highly recommended that applicants applying to both the AGF and STSI contact the program manager.

Funds from the AGF and Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund (SAIF) are not stackable. Proponents applying to both programs will be directed to submit their funding request to the program deemed most appropriate for their project.

Eligible Costs

Funding from the AGF 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:

- Capital expenditures within length of project (ie. Equipment purchase)
- Contracted services
- R&D personnel salaries
- Intellectual property protection
- Travel

Ineligible Costs

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

- Capital expenditures beyond length of project
- Land/building purchase
- Marketing
- Non-R&D personnel salaries
- Professional/association membership fees and dues
- Hospitality and entertainment

Application Process

Annual Intakes

Intakes for the AGF are held twice per fiscal 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.

In years where applicants exceed the available funding, 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 will be based on budget availability.

Below are important dates for each intake periods:

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

Please Be Aware:

IS will provide feedback to any applicants that submit a draft of their proposal 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 EOI should be three pages or shorter. Applicants must use the template provided to develop the EOI. EOIs not using the template will not be accepted. Below are the evaluation criteria that must be fully addressed in the EOI by the applicant:

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 agricultural sector.
3. **Innovation:** Demonstrate that the solution being developed is innovative and unique, not a derivative or minor improvement on existing technologies. Outline the risks involved and how they justify government support for the project.
4. **Path to Commercialization:** Outline a feasible path towards commercialization. Provide an overview of the plan to bring the developed technology to market.

The EOI must be submitted with a completed copy of the “Eligibility Questionnaire.”

Application Guidelines

The full application should not exceed 20 pages. Applicants must use the template provided to develop the application. Applications not using the template will not be accepted.

Below are the evaluation criteria that must be fully addressed in the proposal by the applicant:

1. **Executive Summary:** Expand on the overview in the EOI. Provide background, objectives, activities planned, and how the results of the project will be implemented in the long-term to create 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 agricultural sector.
3. **Financial Leverage:** Provide a detailed breakdown of the project’s funding sources:
 - Amount requested from AGF;
 - Amount provided by industry partners;
 - Other sources of funding (i.e. Federal government, universities, research institutes, etc.);
 - Percentage of each source of funding (including AGF); and
 - Completed copy of the “Financial Questionnaire and Information Request Form” in the appendices.
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:
 - Research institutes (i.e. Global Institute for Food Security, Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute etc.);

- Researchers employed at a Saskatchewan research institute, university or polytechnic; and
 - 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 AGF
 - Project timeline; and
 - Further R&D or commercial activities planned after AGF'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 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:** Submit a table outlining direct or indirect competitors in the market. Demonstrate how the technology being developed differs from that of 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. Include a table that identifies the risks, rates their likelihood and severity, and outlines mitigation strategies.
 11. **Economic Impact:** Quantify the economic impact that the project and resulting technology will have on the province. Provide a detailed breakdown of the estimated amounts. This can include but is not limited to:
 - Jobs created;
 - Private investment attracted; and
 - 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 intellectual property (IP) management plan.

Financial Questionnaire and Information Request Form

A Financial Questionnaire Form must be submitted as part of the full proposal. This document and the requested information are 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 significantly strengthen an application.

Evaluation Process

The AGF 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. It will also assess the application's readiness for review by the advisory committee. 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:

- 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; and
- 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.

AGF Advisory Committee Review

After the preliminary reviews and refinements are completed, the proposals will be reviewed by the AGF 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 Board of Directors.

Board of Directors Approval

IS’ Board of Directors is comprised of individuals with business, legal, and/or government backgrounds. Applications recommended to the IS Board of Directors for approval will be evaluated based on their strategic alignment with provincial priorities and IS’ strategic objectives. Approval will also depend on the funding amount requested from the AGF and the level of funding available.

Important Information

Funding Contract Structure

After an application has been approved by IS’ Board of Directors, 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 primary proponent. It is recommended that the primary proponent have contracts or service agreements in place with other members of the industry group.

Intellectual Property

IS will not assume ownership of any product and/or solution that results from funded projects. An IP agreement must be in place between all members of the proponent 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 (refer to “Termination of Contract” below).

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 primary proponent. Funding contract details will remain confidential between IS and the primary 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

From time to time, 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 above under “Confidentiality” without explicit consent from the primary 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; and/or
- Missed milestones and/or progress reports.

IS should be notified of any anticipated delays to allow the AGF lead 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 primary 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 will be expected to participate in a post-project de-brief a year after the project has concluded.