Guidelines for the 2026 Illinois Proof-of-Concept Program (IPOC)
Applications for IPOC 2026 are due by February 27, 2026

1. **Illinois Proof of Concept Program Overview**

   The Illinois Proof-of-Concept program (IPOC) supports the economic development goals of the University by facilitating transformation of University discoveries, technologies, and innovations into products and services that benefit society. IPOC is designed to bridge an existing funding "gap" between the government-supported innovations that result from University research and private sector translation of those innovations into commercial products. "Gap" funding is intended to facilitate the demonstration of an innovation's proof-of-concept, working prototype, or scale-up development to make that innovation more attractive for private sector funding and partnering.

   IPOC grants awards up to $50,000 distributed in tranches as project goals are met.

2. **IPOC Program Outline**

   The Office of Technology Management is seeking proposals that represent the breadth and depth of campus research and that have the potential for positive societal impact across a variety of areas. **Proposals should present a development plan that will move University-owned innovations closer to commercialization, public use and/or licensing. The project should contain defined steps and a tangible set of milestones that would overcome a specific, identifiable hurdle to commercialization.**

   Intellectual property resulting from proof-of-concept funding is wholly owned by the University of Illinois.

   a. **Project Types**

   Projects solicited under this program may include, but are not limited to:
   - Building a prototype
   - Commercial feasibility testing
   - In vivo testing using a relevant disease model
   - Pre-clinical animal testing and medical device testing
   - Creating a mobile application or software to disseminate information or educational materials
   - Demonstrating mitigation of risk for potential licensees
   - Addressing a specific gap identified by industry that impairs the ability to license or attract capital

b. **Scope of Award**

Projects will be awarded in amounts up to $50,000 with funding distributed in tranches. The timing and amount of each tranche will correspond to the budget request submitted as part of the application. IPOC funding is contingent on the availability of funds in the budget.

c. **Eligibility**

The intent of IPOC is to fund translational R&D that takes place within the University (or possibly within a contracted facility such as a testing service). IPOC funds **may not** be used for work within a researcher's startup or work performed at another University. If you are unsure whether your proposed use of funds is within IPOC guidelines, please contact Nicole Nair at nnair@illinois.edu prior to submitting your proposal.

Proposals are encouraged from all fields of research and must meet both the investigator and project eligibility criteria outlined below:

i. **Principle Investigator & Personnel Eligibility**
- The PI must currently be a full-time academic researcher at Illinois, or an emeritus faculty member who maintains an active research group.
- The PI must have an invention report on file with the OTM upon which the proposed project will be based. Applications will not move forward if an invention report is not on file with the OTM. The invention report **can** be made at the time of the application.
- External organizations should be identified within the application and their role within the project should be defined. Use of funds to pay external organizations is subject to limitations.
- Applicants may participate in multiple proposals per funding round (either as a PI or collaborator), however an applicant can only receive one award.
- Applicants can only have 1 active IPOC project at a time; new proposals involving personnel already participating in an active IPOC project will not be considered.

ii. **Project Eligibility**
- Project goals should preferably be achievable within 6-8 months of the start of funding and must be within the requested budget. Proposals that require more than 8 months are still encouraged to apply.
- The applicant must either have a disclosure on file with the Office of Technology Management or file a new disclosure prior to submitting the application.
- The innovation which provides the basis for the proposal must not be encumbered by any other prior obligations that would preclude the University from moving forward with commercialization (i.e. exclusively licensed, or rights already committed under the terms of a sponsored research agreement or an ongoing collaboration with an industrial partner). Please note that technologies that have been optioned or non-exclusively licensed **may be** eligible for the program, depending on the circumstances. Please contact the OTM if you are unsure whether your innovation is eligible.

- The innovation that is the basis for the proposal cannot have been part of a previously awarded IPOC project.
- The intellectual property surrounding the invention must be owned or co-owned by the University of Illinois. If co-owned with another academic institution, the University of Illinois must be the lead institution. Please contact the OTM if you are unsure about the ownership of your invention.
- The project must be focused on advancing the innovation towards licensing and/or use outside of the University. IPOC funding cannot be used for basic exploratory studies or as general funding for the PI's lab or research group.

iii. Limitations and Exclusions
- The following are not eligible for funding under this program:
  - Proposals to fund clinical trials.
  - Proposals to fund basic research or theoretical development.
  - Projects in which the IP rights of the technology or innovation that forms the basis of the project are encumbered. This can be the case with certain types of grants or industry sponsorship. Please contact OTM if you have questions.
- Funds cannot be directly distributed to a start-up company or to another academic institution.
- Funding is intended to only provide support for project related expenses and cannot be used as general support for the investigator's lab. For example, funding cannot be used to purchase laptops or large equipment, for travel (except when it directly supports project completion), for publications, or to cover legal costs or obtain intellectual property protection.
- While funding can be used to provide salary support for U. of I. graduate or undergraduate students involved in the project, funding cannot be used to provide salaries for principal investigators.
- Proposals involving animal use must have their protocols approved by the IACUC. Funding will not be distributed prior to approval of all protocols. Failure to secure IACUC approval will lead to a review of the project's viability by OTM and may result in loss of funding.

Application and Review Process

The submission and review of proposals is a two-stage process. The first stage (application submission) is required of all investigators who wish to be considered for the IPOC program. After a review of the applications, finalists will be invited to present to an external review committee.

a. Application
The application consists of a slide deck based on a template. You can download the template [here](). Once completed, your application should be submitted online [here]().

The slide template addresses the following:

- **Project & Technology Description**: Provide a igh-level overview of your innovation and introduce the problem it solves
- **Business Opportunity**: Describe the market your innovation would compete in. Highlight the features of your innovation (such as better/faster/cheaper) that will make your solution competitive in that marketplace.
- **Funding Impact**: Address how achieving your identified project goals will move your innovation towards commercialization.
- **Potential Pitfalls**: Identify potential challenges that could be encountered during the performance of the project and how these could be overcome.
- **Next Steps**: Discuss your future plans if your proof-of-concept is demonstrated.
- **Investigator Profile**: Highlight the Principal Investigator's background and, if applicable, commercialization and entrepreneurial experience and/or interest in starting a company.
- **Project Goals & Budget**: Detail your project goals and how much money & time you will need to reach each one. Funding may be used to provide salary support for U. of I. graduate or undergraduate students involved in the project. In terms of personnel calculations, your budget should include fringe benefits. For tuition waivers, you do not need to budget for tuition reimbursement if: 1) You plan to hire students from their own college, 2) You plan to hire doctoral students, 3) You plan to hire master' students who matriculated at the university prior to Fall 2020

b. **Application Review**
An internal review committee, consisting of representatives from colleges, units, administration and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, will review applications. Applications will be evaluated based on the project's ability to successfully advance the innovation towards commercialization within the scope of the proposed project goals and within the requested budget and timeframe. Please note: reviewers are **not** required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to the review. Protected or proprietary information should not be included, but applications must provide sufficient information for reviewers to make a determination regarding commercialization potential.

c. **Finalist Determination**
After considering the feedback of the internal committee, OTM will select finalists representing the strongest applications among a diverse balance of innovation areas. Finalists will be invited to pitch to an external committee.

d. **Finalist Presentations**
An external committee comprising a multidisciplinary panel of reviewers will evaluate finalist presentations. Committee members are **not** required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to the review. Protected or proprietary information should not be included in the presentation, but applications must provide sufficient information for reviewers to make a determination regarding commercialization potential.

e. **Awardee Determination**
   After considering the feedback of the external committee, OTM will select up to 6 awardees representing the strongest applications among a diverse balance of innovation areas. The following criteria will be considered by both the external committee and OTM:
   - Strength of IP
   - Potential societal benefit
   - Market attractiveness and commercialization strengths
   - IPOC funding as an appropriate enabler of commercialization for the innovation
   - Expertise and commercialization interest by PI and project participants

3. **Award Funding Obligations and Limitations**

   For projects that are funded under this initiative, the initial tranche of funds are expected to be released within four weeks of award announcement, and contingent on completing the required meeting regarding conflict management (see 4a below). However, there is no guarantee funds will be released by this date. As a result, investigators must not spend any funds prior to release into the investigator's account. After the initial distribution, the release of additional funds will be contingent upon successful achievement of the stipulated project goals and deliverables. Failure to complete project goals will result in delay of payment and potential termination of the project.

4. **Post-award Obligations**

   In addition to meeting the project goals and deliverables in the project proposal, awardees will be required to participate in the following activities:
   a. **Post –Award Conflict Management Meeting** -- Awardees will be required to meet with a designated individual within the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation (OVCRI) to discuss conflict management, restrictions on funds, and University obligations. Completion of this meeting is mandatory; funds will not be released until OTM has received confirmation that the meeting occurred.
   b. **Progress Reports & Update Meetings**– As progress goals are completed, a written progress report and update meeting with your technology manager is required to receive your next tranche of funding.
   c. **Final presentation** – Awardee teams may be asked to prepare a brief final presentation at the end of the funding period. This presentation should summarize the outcomes and deliverables of the funding.

5. **Contact**

   Questions can be emailed to: Nicole Nair at nnair@illinois.edu