

Current, a nonprofit water innovation hub and lead organization of the **NSF Great Lakes RENEW Engine**, and the **NSF I-Corps Hub: Great Lakes Region** are partnering together on a water specific cohort for the I-Corps JUMPSTART Program.

Up to ten startups will be selected to participate in this 7-week program to aid their journey in advancing water technology research from the lab to the market.

Applications are due by the end of the day Friday, September 19th, 2025. The cohort will kick off Monday, September 27th, 2025. Classes will be virtual (on Zoom) on 9/27, 10/13, 10/27, 11/10, and 11/17 from 10 AM to 12 PM Central Standard Time.

If you have questions, please contact Current's Chief Commercial Officer Nina Dudnik (ndudnik@currentwater.org) and Commercialization and Partnerships Manager Jonathan Goodell (jgoodell@currentwater.org).

APPLY: <https://forms.gle/xf2rTFEKwqVxCVTAA>

Program Description

The **Great Lakes RENEW NSF I-Corps Water Innovation Program** is designed for innovators interested in translating water-related innovations into commercial solutions. This intensive program provides entrepreneurial training, mentorship, and funding support to help participants assess market potential and validate their technology.

Participants will gain exposure to customer discovery, business model development, and startup ecosystem navigation to accelerate the impact of their water-focused innovations.

Applicants are not required to have more than one person per team. However, we recommend having at least two to share the workload and to provide differing perspectives in customer calls. If possible, we recommend having a team member with technical knowledge of the innovation, and a team member with some familiarity with or interest in business concepts.

Teams are required to attend the majority of the 5 class sessions (~2 hours each), complete homework assignments, and conduct 20-30 customer interviews. Each team should have at least one member in each class session.

Selection Criteria

Applicants will be evaluated based on:

- **Innovation & Research Impact:** Relevance of research to known water sustainability and technology challenges.
- **Market Potential:** Feasibility of translating research into commercial applications.
- **Team Commitment:** Willingness to engage in customer discovery and commercialization pathways and an openness to being coached and potentially having your beliefs and assumptions challenged.

Mandatory Team Commitments

- Complete 20-30 potential customer interviews during the seven-week training program.
- Session Attendance. Attend $\frac{3}{4}$ of all I-Corps sessions including the kick-off and closing meetings, weekly web sessions and office hours.
- Complete $\frac{3}{4}$ of all homework assignments.
- Customer Discovery. Follow the customer discovery process and other guidance given by the instructors.
- Explore Commercialization. Commit to exploring the commercialization potential of your technology.

Teams that complete all five sessions, assignments, and 20 customer interviews, in addition to attending at least one office hours, will receive a \$2,000 stipend.

Expectations from the I-Corps Teams Grant

Successful completion of the Great Lakes RENEW NSF I-Corps Teams Program is expected to contribute to one or more of the following:

- Informed decision about commercial potential of proposed technology
- Formation of a for-profit, start-up business
- Selection of a licensing commercialization strategy
- Submission of a SBIR/STTR proposal
- Development of a business model suitable for review by third-party investors
- Students prepared to be competitive entrepreneurially
- Enhanced entrepreneurial mindset among researchers

The organizers will seek to collect outcomes from the participants along the lines listed above during the post-program period.