



# RELIAQUEST

## Innovation Challenge Fund

Request for Proposals

### Summary

RFP Announcement:	May 4, 2026
Proposals Due:	May 22, 2026 by 5pm
Award Notifications:	June 1, 2026
Project Award Period:	June 8, 2026 – October 23, 2026
ReliaQuest Webinar (recommended)	TBD (week of May 11 <sup>th</sup> , will be recorded)
ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge:	October 19, 2026

#### **ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Fund:**

- Award Amount: up to \$30,000
- Number of Projects Funded: up to 6

#### **ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Event:**

- Prize Amounts: Up to \$100,000 in additional funding for one 1<sup>st</sup> place project and up to \$50,000 for two runner-up projects
- Award Period: Additional 1 Year

The ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Fund will award seed funding for up to six projects, up to \$30,000 each, to support the development of innovative proof-of-concept solutions in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity aligned with one of three designated Challenge Areas. Eligible applicants include full-time FSU faculty, staff, and post-doctoral scholars in any discipline, and proposals must present a clear, feasible plan for developing a prototype or solution that can be developed and tested. Awardees will be required to present a 5-7 minute pitch at the ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge during Discovery Days in October 2026, where they will compete for follow-on funding totaling up to \$200,000!

### Program Overview

The ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Fund is designed to accelerate innovative, interdisciplinary research and solution development at Florida State University in artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Through ReliaQuest's philanthropic

investment in FSU, this program will support teams of faculty, staff and/or post-doctoral scholars as they work to find solutions that help address one of three critical challenges identified in corporate security environments:

**1. Challenge One – AI Accuracy Tracking:**

Develop methods to measure and track AI model accuracy, speed, and efficiency degradation over time, especially since corporate environments and data sources evolve. We are looking for tracking optimizations to models, prompts, data sets, or any other components related to output quality, overall performance, and cost optimizations, and ideally, the ability to give recommendations to correct, not just measure and track.

**2. Challenge Two – Data Sensitivity Classification:**

Create tools to classify and tag large groups of files by data sensitivity, supporting security teams in risk assessment and data loss prevention. Data classification remains one of the larger problems for getting good context to enable decisions around cybersecurity, so ideally, looking for ways to search and classify large sets of data into general categories of file contents, as well as sensitivity level for files containing PII or confidential data.

**3. Challenge Three – Knowledge Graph Integration:**

Innovate methods to search, retrieve, and correlate data from disparate knowledge graphs, enhancing the ability to synthesize and act on complex information. As corporate data sources evolve and spread out to multiple data lakes, and especially now, graph databases such as Spanner, Neo4j, or Neptune, the cost and time to centralize this data increases, so ideally, we could find ways to efficiently search these graph databases, transform, and retrieve the relevant information quickly and efficiently.

Research teams will be awarded initial seed funding support of up to \$30,000 per project to develop prototypes or proof-of-concept solutions for one of the three Challenge areas. Up to 6 projects will be awarded.

Awardees will be expected to advance their projects on an accelerated timeline and be prepared to give a 5-7 minute pitch of their project at the ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge during Discovery Days in October, where they will compete for prizes totaling up to \$200,000!

## **Program Kick-Off and Contacts**

The program will kick off with a ReliaQuest webinar the week of May 11th (TBD) to help overview the program goals, industry needs, and overview available resources and contacts. **Participation in the ReliaQuest webinar is highly encouraged.** A recording of the webinar will be available.

Awards will be made the first week of June 2026, and teams are expected to be prepared to pitch their concepts during the ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge event the week of October 19, 2026 (more details below). Throughout the four-month development and ideation period, teams will have access to ReliaQuest mentors, technical resources, and real-world datasets.

## **ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge**

At the program's conclusion, teams will present their solutions at a live challenge event, which will be a keynote event for FSU Discovery Days in October. A judging panel, consisting of members of the ReliaQuest team, will award prizes totaling up to \$200,000 to the most promising and impactful projects to help move the work forward. ReliaQuest will have the opportunity to obtain a license with one or more of the winning teams if they choose to further invest in their solution.

In preparation for this event, awardees will be required to work with staff from the Office of Research in a series of pitch workshops. Staff members will assist with the development and practice of the 5-7 minute high-stakes presentation of the proof of concept resulting from the initial award.

## **Eligibility**

Who is eligible to apply:

- Any full-time FSU faculty, staff or post-doctoral scholars in any discipline.

Other eligibility information:

- A person can only be a PI on one proposal, and must select the best Challenge Area for their research at the time of application.
- A person may be a Co-PI on more than one application.
- Applications from single PIs are acceptable.

## **Application Process**

The PI is responsible for completing the “ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Fund” application located on the [OVPR Internal Funding portal](#). Proposals must be submitted no later than 5pm on May 22, 2026. If you need to make any changes to your application after it has been submitted, contact the Internal Funding Coordinator, Sherry Core: [sbcore@fsu.edu](mailto:sbcore@fsu.edu). Changes cannot be made to an application once the submission deadline has passed.

You will receive an immediate email notification stating that you have successfully submitted your application. You will receive an additional notification when the technical review is complete.

The proposal must be written in clear, concise language so that reviewers from any discipline will be able to understand. Field-specific jargon and acronyms are discouraged unless plainly defined within the proposal text. The components of the application are:

**Text entry fields:**

- Basic information about the PI and Co-PI(s): name, employee ID, ORCID, email address, amount requested, proposal title, primary department.
- Non-faculty support (undergrad, grad, and post-doctoral associates supported)
- Credit distribution by PI and department
- Keywords (list at least one describing the proposed research)
- Department project team
- Abstract (250 words maximum)

**Title Page:** (1-page)

- Should include the proposal title, the name of the PI and Co-PI(s), in PDF format.

**Proposed Research:** (2-page maximum)

- The proposal text cannot exceed 2 pages in length (not including references). Appendices not allowed. Pages must be formatted with 1” margins, utilizing 11pt Times New Roman or Arial font. A PDF version of your proposal must be uploaded to the portal. Proposal should include:

1. Relevance, Innovation, and Impact:

- Clearly identify the Challenge Area, and how your project will solve the challenge in a well-defined, deployable solution suitable for a business environment.
- What potential does this project have to produce meaningful impact in AI, cybersecurity, and/or business environments?
- 2. Feasibility and Technical Merit:
  - Explain the development plan resulting in a proof of concept or prototype. Explain how it can be achieved during the accelerated award timeline.
  - Include a description of the data you will use to create and evaluate your solution and how you will access or generate that data.
- 3. Team and Resource Readiness:
  - Provide details about the qualifications of your project team in relation to the work proposed. Include any resources, personnel, and infrastructure needed.
- 4. Future Development Potential:
  - Explain how this project can be further developed beyond the initial seed funding period. If selected for ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge follow-on funding, explain how this funding will advance the potential of this solution.

**Curriculum Vitae:** (2-page maximum each)

- Please include the CV for the PI, and any Co-PI(s) on the project.
- You can use the CV template for the [Council on Research & Creativity \(CRC\)](#), or any format of your choice as long as it includes:
  - Education from baccalaureate-level forward, including Institution, Degree, Field of Study, and Completion Date
  - Previous positions related to the proposal
  - Research Support, including completed and ongoing grants
  - Any other data pertinent to the research or activity proposed
  - Regardless of form choice, the CV must be no longer than 2 pages and no less than 11-point (Arial or Times New Roman) font, with 1" margins.

**Budget:** (1-page maximum)

- Budget must include direct costs up to \$30,000. Costs can be listed in table format, with a justification below, attached as a PDF.
- Allowable costs:
  - Key & Other Personnel Salary

- Excluding academic year salary for E&G funded positions
  - Supplies, equipment, computer services and contractual services
  - Equipment should be a minor component of the award budget
- Unallowable costs:
  - Student tuition
  - Travel costs
  - Food, meals, drinks, per diem

## **Review Criteria**

Below are the criteria each member of the ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge Fund Review Committee will use to assist them in (a) critiquing a proposal, (b) providing useful feedback to the PI, and (c) determining an overall score for the proposal.

### **1. Relevance, Innovation, and Impact:**

- Does the proposal clearly address one of the three Challenge Areas?
- Is the proposed solution innovative and well-defined?
- Does the project have strong potential to produce meaningful impact in AI, cybersecurity, and/or business environments?

### **2. Feasibility and Technical Merit:**

- Are the technical approach and development plan clear, sound, and achievable, producing a proof of concept or prototype?
- Does the proposal describe an appropriate data source and evaluation strategy?

### **3. Team and Resource Readiness:**

- Does the project team have the qualifications needed to complete the work?
- Are the necessary resources, personnel, and infrastructure in place to support success?

### **4. Future Development Potential:**

- Is there strong potential for the project to advance beyond the initial seed funding period?
- If selected for ReliaQuest Innovation Challenge follow-on funding, is there a clear plan for next-stage development?

### **5. Budget Justification:**

- Is the requested budget reasonable, appropriate, clearly tied to the proposed work, and demonstrate a need beyond current resources?

**Scoring Scale:**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Additional Guidance or Strengths/Weaknesses</b>
1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2	Very Good	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	Good	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
4	Satisfactory	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
5	Average	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
6	Fair	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
7	Marginal	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
8	Poor	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
9	Unacceptable	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

- Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact
- Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact
- Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact

## **Reporting Requirements**

Check-ins during the award period:

- Initial check-in:
  - Ensure a smooth allocation of needed resources from ITS: June 11, 2026
- Midpoint review:
  - Presentation of progress to ensure the timeline is on track for the October pitch competition, and identify any barriers to progress: August 6, 2026
- Pitch preparation:
  - Initial pitch in preparation workshop for the Challenge event: September 14-18, 2026
  - Personalized coaching with Office of Research, ITS, University Communications, and University Marketing staff
  - Dress rehearsal: October 12-16, 2026