

NRC IRAP: Client Guide

What is IRAP?

The National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program, or NRC IRAP, supports Canadian small and medium-sized businesses working on innovative technology projects. In addition to potential project funding, IRAP also provides advisory support through an Industrial Technology Advisor, or ITA.

IRAP is not just about filling out a form. It is a relationship-driven process that helps determine whether your company and project are a fit for support.

Who is the ITA?

Your Industrial Technology Advisor is your main point of contact within IRAP. They help assess your company, understand your project, and guide the discussion around whether funding support may be appropriate.

A strong conversation with your ITA matters. Clear, consistent, and well-prepared information can make the process much smoother.

What IRAP typically funds

At a high level, IRAP typically supports innovation-focused technology projects that help a company build new products, improve core technologies, solve meaningful technical challenges, or move a technology closer to market. It is generally best suited to work that is clearly defined, tied to technical advancement, and important to the company's growth strategy.

In practice, this often includes projects focused on product development, prototype advancement, technical validation, software or platform enhancement, process innovation tied to core technology, and other R & D-style activities where there is a clear development objective and a credible commercial outcome.

IRAP is usually looking for work that has a beginning, middle, and end. The project should have a specific scope, a realistic timeline, named team members, and measurable outcomes. Clients should be able to explain what exists today, what still needs to be developed, and what will be true at the end of the project that is not true now.

IRAP is usually not a fit for routine operations, standard implementation work, general business development, sales activities, ongoing maintenance, or broad company overhead. If the work sounds like normal delivery work or business as usual activity, it is typically harder to position well for IRAP.

How to approach IRAP funding

The best way to approach IRAP is as a strategic conversation, asking for guidance and project support resources, **not** a funding request. Companies should come in prepared to explain the business, the project, the innovation challenge, and the commercial value of the work.

A strong approach usually means:

- starting with a clear and realistic project scope
- showing what is technically new or challenging
- explaining why the work matters commercially
- demonstrating that the company has the team and capacity to execute
- being open, credible, and well prepared in conversations with the ITA

It also helps to frame the project in a way that connects three things clearly: the technical work, the business opportunity, and the reason support matters now. A good IRAP conversation is usually not just about what you want to build. It is also about why the project matters to the company's growth, why the timing is important, and how support could help accelerate or strengthen the outcome.

Clients should also understand that IRAP is often a guided process. The exact questions, level of detail, and application structure can vary depending on the ITA and the project. That means companies should be ready with strong core information, but also flexible enough to tailor the discussion and materials as the process develops.

IRAP support is relationship-based, so preparation and clarity matter. The strongest companies treat the process as part business case, part innovation case, and part execution plan.

What IRAP typically wants to understand

IRAP usually wants a clear picture of:

- your company and what it does
- the innovation or technical challenge you are working to solve

- the project scope, timeline, and team
- the commercial value of the project
- your company's ability to complete and support the work

How to prepare for an IRAP conversation

Before speaking with IRAP, be ready to explain:

- what your company does in simple terms
- what the project is and why it matters now
- what technical work still needs to be completed
- what outcomes you expect by the end of the project
- who is involved in delivering the work
- how the project supports growth, revenue, or market traction

You should also have a basic understanding of your budget, staffing plan, and company financial position.

Clients should approach the conversation with a balance of confidence and realism. The goal is not to sound overly polished or overly technical. The goal is to be clear, credible, and aligned. IRAP wants to understand both the opportunity and the execution plan.

A good conversation usually starts with a simple business overview, then moves into the project itself. It helps to explain the current state, the gap or challenge, the work being proposed, and the expected outcome. From there, the company should be ready to discuss timing, team, budget, and commercial relevance.

It is also important to speak about the project as a defined initiative, not as an open-ended wishlist. Clients should present the work as a focused project with a beginning, a clear set of activities, and an end goal that can be measured.

How to talk about the project

When describing the project, clients should aim to connect the technical work to the business outcome. A strong explanation usually answers four questions clearly:

- what are you building, improving, or validating
- what technical challenge or uncertainty still exists
- what work will be completed during the project
- what commercial or strategic result the project supports

This helps IRAP see that the project is not just interesting technically, but also meaningful to the company's growth.

It is usually best to avoid language that is too vague, such as saying the company wants to keep improving the platform or continue building the product. Instead, clients should describe the specific capability, feature, system improvement, or validation milestone they are trying to achieve.

Clients should also be prepared to explain what has already been done versus what is still ahead. This distinction matters. IRAP is generally interested in supporting defined future work, so it is important to show that the project is forward-looking and not simply a summary of past effort.

Guide for approaching the conversation

A helpful way to approach the conversation is to think of it in three parts.

First, explain the company. Keep this short and practical. What does the company do, who does it serve, and where is it today?

Second, explain the project. What is the goal, what technical work remains, and what will success look like by the end of the project?

Third, explain the business case. Why does this project matter now, and what does it unlock for the company if successful?

Clients do not need to have every answer perfectly scripted, but they should go into the conversation with a shared internal view of the project. The strongest conversations happen when the founder, technical lead, and finance or operations lead are aligned on scope, timing, and cost.

Do's

- Be clear and specific
- Use plain language first
- Show what is innovative about the work
- Be realistic about scope, timing, and budget
- Make sure your technical and business story align
- Be honest about risks and unknowns
- Present the project as a focused initiative with measurable outcomes
- Explain both the technical value and the business relevance

Don'ts

- Do not ask for funding outright
- Do not describe routine work as innovation
- Do not assume IRAP already understands your business, each ITA has a large number of clients.
- Do not frame the project as a broad vision without a defined scope
- Do not rely only on technical language without explaining the commercial context

Final thought

The strongest IRAP applications come from companies that are prepared, focused, and able to clearly explain both the project and the business case behind it. Good preparation helps make ITA conversations more productive and improves the quality of the overall submission.

At a high level, IRAP is most often aligned with innovation work that helps a company build capability, solve technical problems, and bring new products or services closer to market. The best way to approach it is with a clear scope, a strong rationale, and a well-prepared conversation.

For most companies, success starts with being able to answer a few simple questions well: what are you building, why is it innovative, why does it matter commercially, and why is now the right time to pursue support.