IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Iowa Nutrient Research Center
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Request for Proposals (RFP) – 2026 (FY27)

Iowa Nutrient Research Center at Iowa State University is requesting proposals to address nitrogen and phosphorus nutrient losses to Iowa surface waters. The INRC is an Iowa Board of Regents center established in response to the legislation passed by the 2013 Iowa Legislature which states: The purpose of the center shall be to pursue a science-based approach to nutrient management research that may include but is not limited to evaluating the performance of current and emerging nutrient management practices, and using an adaptive management framework for providing recommendations for the implementation of nutrient management practices and the development of new nutrient management practices.

Proposals must address the legislatively defined purpose of the center. For the 2026 RFP cycle, the following topics are identified as priorities based on input from stakeholders representing diverse interests, including academia, industry, farmers and landowners, agencies, and conservation groups.

- Nutrient Management
  - Evaluate the impacts on N&P losses by improved nutrient management from enhanced efficiency fertilizers, manure timing and application, and/or variable rate N&P application.
- Practice Adoption: Barriers, Motivators & Engagement
  - Understand and improve adoption of nutrient reduction practices, especially among middle adopters and large farm operators, including tenant/landowner dynamics.
  - Develop easy-to-use tools for design optimization and ease of implementation of NRS BMPs such as bioreactors.
  - Examine historic trends in conservation practice adoption to inform current practice adoption efforts.
- Quantify and Optimize Nature-Inspired Practices
  - Quantify and optimize the design, placement, and performance of nature-inspired practices including but not limited to pumped wetlands, prairie potholes, stream bank stabilization, drainage/floodplain restoration, and existing landscape features (e.g., road ditches).
  - Explore the use of marginal lands for nutrient reduction and co-benefits.
- Ecosystem Services Valuation & Economic Incentives
  - Quantify and monetize nutrient reduction outcomes including ecosystem services, externalities, cover crop markets, and policy/economic frameworks for operators and landowners.
- Water Quality Predictive Modeling & Watershed-Scale Assessment
  - Consolidate Iowa water quality and weather data to build predictive capabilities for nutrient transport and assess cumulative watershed-scale impacts of nutrient reduction practices.
- Soil Nutrient Testing and In-Field Nutrient Status
  - Advance soil testing strategies to understand in-field nutrient status over time and assess current nutrient (N&P) levels to guide nutrient management decisions.
- New technologies:
  - Develop and assess innovative nutrient reduction technologies such as drainage water recycling, two-stage ditches, saturated grassed waterways, new methods for nutrient removal, and machinery innovations to facilitate implementation.

Important information about the RFP process

Who may submit a proposal?
Investigators representing any *Iowa* nonprofit organization/agency and/or educational institution (such as soil and water conservation districts, schools and colleges, and regional development groups). The Center strongly encourages the involvement and collaboration with faculty or staff at one of the Regent universities.

What to include in your proposal? Please refer to the focus areas to find the appropriate fit for your proposal. Prepare a four-page concept paper with these required elements. References are not counted towards the four-page limit. (Note: Letters of support or commitment are not accepted).

1) Separate **cover page** with project title, complete contact information of the principal investigator including mailing address, phone number and email address; dollar request per year; and the focus area that best fits your proposal. (Note: The cover page is not counted as part of your page total).

2) **Justification** — Why is this specific research needed?

3) **Objectives** — What will be achieved? This must be clearly defined and measurable.

4) **Brief Description of the Methodology** – System setup, experiment design, data collection (frequency), data management, and data analysis.

5) **Anticipated Deliverables and Outcomes** — What will be the outcomes, both end-of-project and long-term, if you achieve your objectives? How will the proposal contribute to improvement of water quality?

6) **Outreach** — How and with whom will you share the project results? You are strongly encouraged to outline plans to work with universities, agencies, non-governmental organizations, etc., to help disseminate information about your work.

7) **Budget** — Itemized listing and brief justifications of project budget. (Note: The budget and budget justification are not counted as part of your page total).

Successful PIs will receive a budget and budget justification template to be used during the contract development stages.

Budgets can be for up to two years, starting August 15, 2026. Note that **INRC does not pay indirect cost**. Investigators whose proposals are selected for funding may be asked for more details.

No Match Required - The INRC has **NO** matching requirement. INRC will not factor matching resources into the review process as an evaluation criterion.

Proposals submitted as MS WORD documents are due close of business May 1, 2026, to malcolmr@iastate.edu**.** An email acknowledgement will be sent upon receipt of your proposal (otherwise, contact Malcolm or Matt to inquire). Investigators funded in 2025 for multiple years do not have to reapply. Investigators requesting funding to continue monitoring on a project funded by INRC earlier should submit a formal proposal. Questions should be directed to Matt Helmers (515.294.6717 or mhelmers@iastate.edu) or Malcolm Robertson (515.294.5692 or malcolmr@iastate.edu). Award decisions will be made in July.