Idaho Water Resources Research Institute

IWRRI Request for Proposals

2026 State Funding Allocation

Total Funding: $500,000
Expected Awards: 6-12
Award Duration: 1-2 year awards
Proposal Due: July 20th, 2026
Restrictions: No equipment over $5,000, F&A costs not allowed
Applicants: Faculty, Research Faculty, Post-doctoral Researchers

Program Objectives

The Idaho Water Resources Research Institute (IWRRI), one of the 54 national water research and technology centers, is charged with conducting applied, impactful and relevant water research across Idaho. IWRRI has received funding from the Idaho Legislature to support actionable water research to address state needs. This funding will be distributed to all Idaho research universities based on research priorities identified by the IWRRI Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and approved by the IWRRI Executive Board. Selected projects will contribute to legislative reporting and are expected to leverage project outcomes to seed extramurally funded research proposals.

The request for proposals serves as a mechanism for IWRRI to identify capacity and interest among Idaho faculty and researchers for conducting applied water research to meet state needs. The current Idaho Water Research Priorities are organized by USGS Water Resources Research Act Priority Research Areas and focus on Water Scarcity, Water Quality and Ecosystems (detailed in Appendix A).

Project types:

Applicants must select one of the two project types. **Research Projects** will generate new applied research results tailored to a specific decision context, whereas the **Drought Working Group** will focus on synthesis, coordination, and statewide drought preparedness products (e.g., white papers, data/knowledge syntheses, and decision-support resources).

Research Projects (Duration: 1-2 years): applied research conducted to meet a specific stakeholder/partner need. These projects require a letter of support from a non-university partner, with a decision-making role in Idaho.

Drought Working Group (Duration: 1 year): Multiple individual awards will be made to support the inaugural year of the Idaho Drought Working Group which will be coordinated by IWRRI. The objective of this group is to synthesize the state of the science and key research gaps in regards to drought preparedness and response as

aligned with the Idaho Water Research Priorities (including connections to growth, monitoring and modeling precipitation, temperature and ET). Each funded investigator is expected to actively participate in group activities and take on a defined leadership role (e.g., leading a subtopic, organizing a convening, or serving as lead author on a synthesis product). Applicants should propose a specific analysis or synthesis approach with clearly defined products (e.g., statewide drought preparedness roadmap, decision-support resource inventory, or agency-ready guidance) that can be used by Idaho agencies and water managers to improve drought planning and response.

At a minimum, the Drought Working Group will produce:

- a statewide synthesis document (white paper or report) on drought response and planning
- postmortem analytics on Water Year 2026 for relevant state needs
- a prioritized research and data needs list co-developed with agencies; and
- at least one public-facing product (e.g., webinar, story map, or visualization) summarizing findings for non-technical audiences.

Funding to participate in this workgroup will be a maximum of $45,000 with budgets including funding for travel within the state for in-person meetings and stakeholder engagement, salary for faculty, student research positions, post-docs, and research faculty.

Award Duration

Research Projects may request 1 or 2 years of support (funded in 1-year increments), whereas Drought Working Group awards are limited to a single 1-year period. For 2-year Research Projects, proposals must identify: (1) specific Year 1 deliverables that enable a clear 'go/no-go' decision for Year 2 funding, and (2) final end-of-project outcomes by the end of Year 2. Proposal budgets submitted should be for the initial year of funding.

Project Expectations and Deliverables

This section describes expectations for all funded projects over the life of the award (what you will do if selected).

- **Actionable Outcomes:** Each project must have at least one primary actionable outcome that addresses a specific need in Idaho (e.g., a decision-support tool, analysis directly informing a management decision, or a guidance document adopted by an agency).
- **Stakeholder Coordination:** PIs are expected to coordinate with relevant stakeholders and partners on projects, at least twice a year. IWRRI can help facilitate as needed.
    - For Drought Working Group awards, PIs should plan for more frequent coordination, including at least two in-person or virtual convenings with agencies and stakeholders during the year.

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- **Required Outputs:**
  - Public-facing reports, story maps, and/or data visualizations developed in coordination with stakeholders
  - At least one presentation at state/regional conferences relevant to project partners/stakeholders
  - All data deposited in HydroShare or other relevant data repository by project end date
- **Technical Support:** For online tools or data visualizations, IWRRI will facilitate development with UI Research Computing leveraging in-house funding.
- **Extramural Proposal Development:** PIs are expected to submit extramurally funded proposals that leverage outcomes from IWRRI funded projects.
- **Reporting:** Progress reports are due March 1, 2027; final reports are due within 30 days of the project end date.

Proposal Submission

This section describes what must be included in your proposal submission (how you will demonstrate your plan to meet the expectations above).

Submit document materials and information via this portal: [Link]
Document naming conventions: [University]-[PI-Lastname]-/CV

Required Proposal Components (3-page maximum):

Project Information:

- PI name, institution
- Project title
- Project Type (select one): Research Project, Drought Working Group
- Geographic focus of study (e.g. statewide, region, or watershed)
- Idaho Research Priority Topic (see Appendix A)

Technical Details:

- **Project description**
  - **Research Projects**: describe the applied research questions and decision context
  - **Drought Working Group**: describe the data analysis, tool or synthesis/coordination contribution and and statewide relevance
  - Description of **Applied Outcomes**:
    - the intended user(s) and decision(s) it will support,
    - when in their decision cycle it will be used, and
    - what level of readiness is expected by the project end date (e.g., prototype, beta tool tested with users, fully deployed product).
- **Methodological approach**
- **Proposed deliverables**: see ‘Project Expectations and Deliverables’ and the project-type specific expectations below)

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- **Timeline**: Multi-year projects should include the deliverables for each year
- **Future development** opportunities, including potential extramurally funded programs to submit proposals to.
- **2-page CVs** for each project personnel

Additional requirements for Research Projects

- At least one letter of support from a non-university Idaho partner with a decision-making role, describing how outcomes will inform decisions or management activities.
- Description of data collection, analysis, and how results will be translated into tools, guidance, or other products for identified users.

Additional requirements for Drought Working Group proposals

- A clear synthesis question or set of questions aligned with the Idaho Water Research Priorities related to drought.
- A defined set of synthesis outputs (e.g., statewide drought preparedness white paper, data/knowledge inventory, decision-support resource catalog, priority research agenda).
- Participation & Leadership Plan
    - Specific products /topics you propose to lead or co-lead
    - Anticipated frequency of participation in regular meetings and work sessions
    - Stakeholders / partners you anticipate being a direct contact for coordination

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Review Criteria

Category	Criteria
1. Relevance to Idaho Water Research Priorities (15%)	Demonstration of how the project directly supports an IWRRI research priority with clear connection to applied needs.
2. Product Deliverables (15%)	Deliverables (collaborative reports, peer reviewed journal articles, etc.) are clearly identified. Refinement of deliverables may occur through the project development process with partners. Clarity on how deliverables will directly support decision-making or management actions in Idaho, and the level of readiness expected at project completion
3. Actionability and user alignment (20%)	The proposal clearly identifies end-users, decision contexts, and how project outputs will be co-developed or tested with those users.
4. Collaborative Research (10%-Research 15% Working Group)	Articulated interest in stakeholder engagement and coordination with IWRRI. Reviewers will consider demonstration of past collaboration or research co-produced with decision-makers. For Drought Working Group proposals, reviewers will also consider the strength of the applicant's participation and leadership plan, including demonstrated experience convening groups, contributing to shared products, and following through on collaborative commitments.
5. Achievability of Scope (10%)	The proposed objectives are achievable in 1 year with clear milestones. Multi-year projects must detail the milestones and final deliverables that would be accomplished with a second year of funding.
6. Budget (5%)	The proposed project budget is aligned with the scope of work and associated deliverables.
7. PI Research Expertise (10%)	Principal Investigator (PI) is qualified to conduct the proposed research.
8. Team Member Expertise (10%)	Team members (post doctoral, graduate) are qualified to carry out the research objectives.
9. Letter of Support (research projects only) (5% Research- 0% Working Group)	At least one letter of support from an Idaho partner is included, with a description of how the project will support decision-making or water management activities.

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Appendix A: 2026 IWRRI Water Research Priorities Summary

Projects were identified by the IWRRI Research Advisory Committee and by IWRRI through partner and stakeholder engagement: [Link to complete list]
Topics identified as high priority for FY 2027 are summarized below.

2026 RAC outcomes

Research Category	Priority Areas	Region	Specific Research Topics
Water Scarcity & Availability	**Impacts of Growth on Water Supply**	Statewide	• Data Centers and Water • Impacts of growth on water use and demand particularly as related to land use change • Domestic, Commercial, Municipal, and Industrial (DCMI) water use- particularly in relation to projected future demand and alignment with administratively available water supply.
	Remote and Rural Watersheds	Statewide	• Tools and resources relevant for watershed management and decision-making in locations with limited monitoring, such as the Raft, Clearwater, and Owyhee basins
	Managed Aquifer Recharge	Statewide	• Methodologies to access responses to MAR
	Regional Water Balance	North	• Regional water balance assessment of the SVRP (Spokane Valley Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer) • Quantify influence of Lake Pend Oreille on SVRP recharge • Integrate climate variability into water availability and timing in the SVRP
		Southeast	• Continued refinement of the ESPA Water budget and mechanisms to quantify reach-gains in the Blackfoot-Minidoka Reach • Tributaries to the ESPA (Upper Snake River Basin above King Hill) ○ Incorporate local studies into regional scale research tools prioritize areas facing groundwater pumping mitigation
Water Quality	**Growth Impacts on Water Quality**	Statewide	• Parcel-scale septic density case studies ○ Partners identified include Kootenai County, Valley County; Bonner County (Sagle), Garden Valley.
		Southwest	• Contaminants of concern and PFAS • Emerging contaminants, septic system saturation, and nitrate contamination. Coordination with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) identified as critical to align monitoring, data sharing, and management strategies.
Technology & Innovation	**Water Monitoring & Data Accessibility**	Statewide	• **Improving Accessibility for Idaho's water data*** ○ Visualizations of groundwater and surface water quality data, integration of multiple streamflow data sources, snowpack and weather data

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			○ Host engagement activities to identify priorities • **Assessing Contemporary Capabilities and Needs in Weather and Climate Monitoring** ○ 1) characterize the extent of Idaho's current weather and climate monitoring network, through the lens of supporting water resource management and research ○ (2) assess the degree to which existing monitoring capabilities meet needs ○ (3) identify gaps and opportunities to expand monitoring coverage throughout the state • **Improve Accessibility for Idaho's Water Data**
Hazards & Climate	**Drought**	Statewide	• Particular emphasis on the 2026 snow drought and statewide drought declaration remain a high priority research area. • Access impacts of drought on: water quantity, water quality and/or ecosystems
Water Policy Planning and Socio - economics	**Economic Value of Water**	statewide	• Interdisciplinary collaboration to assess the multi-faceted economic value and statewide impacts of water supplies and use
Ecosystems	**Integration of ecological impacts assessments**	Statewide/ Southeast	• Ecosystem and water quality considerations were identified as important to local communities, with a need to better integrate these components into water quantity-focused work and expand understanding of ecological responses to water management.
	Impacts of Restoration	North	• Quantify impact of restoration work on ecosystems (water quantity and water quality) - Prichard Creek (Coeur d Alene Basin) identified as a potential case study.
	Thermal Regime Modeling	North	• Evaluate thermal impacts on anadromous and endangered fish species, with expanded thermal regime modeling in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins as priority test cases.