MINNESOTA AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES RESEARCH CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Request for Applications:

MAISRC Externship Program for AIS Professionals

Purpose

The MAISRC Externship Program engages AIS professionals in solutions-oriented research to develop research-based solutions that can reduce the impacts of aquatic invasive species in Minnesota by preventing spread, controlling populations, and managing ecosystems; and to advance knowledge to inspire action by others.

As a part of the Externship Program, participants will partner with MAISRC-affiliated researchers to conduct research that is locally relevant to their organizations and has the potential for statewide benefits. The goal of the externship program is to increase capacity for AIS management in Minnesota by addressing high-priority research questions and supporting the professional development of resource managers and decision-makers. As a part of this application process, we invite prospective externs to propose new research projects that will addresses these aims.

Structure

The MAISRC Externship Program will launch for the first time as a pilot program in 2026. Externships are expected to be up to one year in duration with a maximum budget of $30,000. During the externship, MAISRC will fund a portion of the extern's salary (and associated fringe benefits) to enable them to dedicate time to applied AIS research while continuing to fulfill their ongoing organizational responsibilities. For example, an applicant could propose to allocate 10% of their time to MAISRC-associated research over a one-year period. In addition to funding participants' allocated effort, MAISRC will also cover direct costs associated with the project (e.g., supplies, laboratory services, research travel, etc.). MAISRC will also cover time spent on the project by MAISRC-affiliated researchers (faculty and staff) who will partner with externs; these costs will be addressed internally and should not be included in applicants' proposed budgets. Note that this program is not intended to provide supplemental funding for ongoing organizational activities. The goal is to enable new research that would not otherwise be performed.

Externs and MAISRC-affiliated researchers will collaboratively implement the research to ensure scientific rigor and relevance to on-the-ground management. Applicants may already know of MAISRC affiliates with whom they wish to collaborate or, if not, can describe the research mentoring/support that their project requires as part of their application, in which case MAISRC will try to identify a suitable match.

Continuation of externships beyond the one-year timeframe may be possible, based on performance and the goals of the extension.

Timeline

Applications due	February 6, 2026
Invitations for proposals sent	February 20, 2026
Proposals due	March 6, 2026
Final selection and announcement of awards	March 13, 2026
Externships begin	May 1, 2026
Externships end	April 30, 2027

Eligibility and Themes

Professionals from across sectors, including state, tribal, non-profit, private-sector, and local governmental units that are conducting AIS-related work in Minnesota, are eligible to apply. The Externship Program is intended for early- to mid-career professionals – not students, interns, seasonal staff, or other temporary employees. Externships must focus on one or more MAISRC priority species and should address early detection and preventing the establishment of priority species, creating and improving options for control of priority species, and/or understanding impacts to prioritize management actions.

Potential externship focus areas include the following. These are intended as illustrative examples and other proposed activities will be considered.

- Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, describe the impacts of the AIS Prevention Aid program and the potential consequences of reduced funding.
- Develop a rapid response framework (e.g., communication plan, lake wide search protocols, outreach materials, management recommendations, etc.) for new starry stonewort infestations.
- Develop recommendations for verification and response when AIS presence is suspected based on eDNA.
- Develop and pilot a community-based control project for mystery snails or rusty crayfish, building on past and ongoing MAISRC research.

Applicants may address one of the focus areas listed above or develop their own project on a topic of interest and relevance to their local jurisdictions.

Application Instructions

The deadline for pre-proposals is February 6, 2026 at 11:59 PM. All applications should be submitted to maisrc@umn.edu and must include the following documents:

Application Components:

1. Externship Application – *submit in one PDF; download outline*
2. Project Budget – *submit in MS Excel; download template*
3. Optional Attachments – *letters of support, etc.*

For questions about the Externship program or to discuss research ideas, contact MAISRC staff at maisrc@umn.edu.