

# 2021 RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Letter of Intent deadline has been extended to May 20, 2020.



# THE CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy research within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. It was created in 1987 under Act 16, the Rural Revitalization Act, to promote and sustain the vitality of Pennsylvania's rural and small communities.

## THE CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA 2021 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy research within the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The Center's mission is to promote and sustain the vitality of the state's rural and small communities by:

- administering grants to conduct research on matters relating to rural conditions;
- maintaining and disseminating a broad base of information on rural trends and conditions;
- publishing research and project results; and
- sponsoring regional and statewide forums on rural issues.

As part of the Center's yearly Research Grant Program, the Board of Directors approves topics for research projects. All projects must show a clear relationship to one or more of the Center's mandated research areas, which are:

- rural people and communities;
- economic development;
- local government finance and administration;
- community services;
- natural resources and the environment;
- rural values and social change;
- educational outreach;
- agriculture; and
- health and welfare concerns.

### **Eligibility**

The Center's enabling legislation allows the Center to award grants to qualified faculty members of Pennsylvania State University, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) universities, and the regional campuses of the University of Pittsburgh. A qualified faculty member must serve as the project director. Partnerships with other academic institutions, community organizations, and public and private agencies are encouraged.

### **Research Grant Program**

One-year grants are awarded to conduct applied policy research or to identify local strategies that can result in legislative or program policy considerations or recommendations. For the 2021 grant cycle, the maximum allowable grant award is \$50,000 per project.

#### ***Targeted Topics***

This year the Board of Directors has approved eight targeted topics, including two under a special focus area. The list of topics begins on Page 6, and the two special focus area topics are on Page 11.

#### ***Open Topics***

Other reasonable and beneficial projects that address one or more of the Center's mandated research areas (see above) will be considered by the Center under the Open Topics category.

## Mini Grant Program

Mini Grants are awarded to projects that focus on basic data collection and analysis, time-sensitive issues, and/or the preparation of reference materials. Projects supported as Mini Grants are a maximum of nine months in duration and are eligible for a maximum of \$15,000 in Center support.

### *Targeted Topics*

This year the Board of Directors has approved seven Mini Grant targeted topics including one under a special focus area. The list of topics begins on Page 8, and the special focus topic is on Page 12.

### *Open Topics*

Open topics will also be accepted for Mini Grants.

## Grant Application Process

The Center's 2021 Research Grant Program application process is as follows:

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. Request for Proposals is released.  | March 2020             |
| 2. Deadline for submission of Letters of Intent.   | <b>May 20, 2020</b>    |
| 3. Letters of Intent are reviewed and selected applicants are invited to submit a full proposal. | June 2020              |
| 4. Proposal planning discussions are conducted with applicants.                                  | July-August 2020       |
| 5. Deadline for full proposal submissions.   | <b>August 24, 2020</b> |
| 6. Center's Board of Directors selects projects for funding.                                     | December 2020          |
| 7. Final work plans are negotiated and accepted.   | December 2020          |
| 8. Cooperative Agreements are issued and work begins.  | January 2021           |

## Letters of Intent

As the first step in the grant application process, researchers must submit a Letter of Intent. No full proposal will be accepted without the submission, and Board approval, of a Letter of Intent. Each letter is reviewed to determine its potential to support the Center's research mandate. Applicants meeting that benchmark will be invited to prepare and submit a full grant proposal. The Letter of Intent process is the same for both the traditional Research Grant Program and the Mini Grant Program. Those applicants whose Letters of Intent are approved for full proposal submission will receive additional information and instructions on full proposal preparation, submission, and review procedures.

A Letter of Intent must include the cover sheet (page 13) and is limited to three additional typewritten pages.

The Letter of Intent narrative must include the following:

- project description;
- scope of work to be undertaken;
- anticipated policy implications (**for full research projects only**); and
- identification of partners and/or subcontractors.

**Letters of Intent must be received in the Center for Rural Pennsylvania office, either in hard copy, by mail, or via email or fax, by the close of business (4:30 p.m.) on Wednesday, May 20, 2020.**

## **Letter of Intent Submission Guidelines**

Letters of Intent may be mailed, emailed or faxed to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

### **1. *Hard Copy***

Submit the original Letter of Intent and **four** copies to:

Mary Kandray Gelenser  
Program Manager for Grants  
The Center for Rural Pennsylvania  
625 Forster St., Room 902  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

### **2. *Email***

Download the cover sheet from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania website at [www.rural.palegislature.us](http://www.rural.palegislature.us) and email the completed cover sheet and the narrative of the Letter of Intent to Mary Kandray Gelenser at [gelensermk@rural.palegislature.us](mailto:gelensermk@rural.palegislature.us).

### **3. *Fax***

A Letter of Intent may also be faxed to Mary Kandray Gelenser at (717) 772-3587. Please follow up fax submissions with a telephone call to confirm that the fax has been received and is readable.

**Receipt of a Letter of Intent will be acknowledged via email. If acknowledgement is not received in three business days from the date of sending, please call (717) 787-9555 to follow up.**

**All Letters of Intent must be received in the office of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania no later than the close of business (4:30 p.m.) on Wednesday, May 20, 2020.**

## TARGETED RESEARCH GRANT TOPICS FOR THE 2021 GRANT PROGRAM

### **Community and Economic Impact of the Pennsylvania Wilds**

Pennsylvania Wilds, encompassing more than 2 million acres of public lands and home to spectacular wild lands, is a premier example of ecotourism. This study will measure the community and economic impact of the Pennsylvania Wilds brand for tourism revenues generated, business start-ups, expansion, retention and attraction of workforce and population, and overall contributions to quality of life in its 13-county area.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of the effect of PA Wilds branding on county, community, and economic conditions in the PA Wilds over the past 10 years.
- Case study analysis of success stories among PA Wilds communities to identify the human, natural, and physical resources in place that enable them to capitalize on PA Wilds opportunities.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Social Isolation in Rural Pennsylvania**

Social isolation can be defined as having little or no contact with other people for extended periods of time. A 2017 study by the AARP Public Policy Institute showed social isolation and its related health implications cost the Medicare program \$6.7 billion annually in additional federal spending. This research will analyze the extent of social isolation in older (age 65+) adults living in rural Pennsylvania, and identify programs and services focused on minimizing social isolation that could be used in rural Pennsylvania communities.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Estimation of the number and demographic characteristics of socially isolated rural seniors in Pennsylvania currently, and in terms of changes over the past 10 years.
- Identification of the factors that contribute to rural social isolation in rural Pennsylvania.
- Identification of programs and services currently in place in Pennsylvania and other states to reduce social isolation and determination of their replicability in rural Pennsylvania.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Analysis of Consumer Debt in Rural and Urban Pennsylvania**

U.S. household debt, including mortgages, credit cards, auto loans, and student loans totaled \$13.9 trillion in 2019, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. This research will analyze data from the Federal Reserve and other sources to determine the levels and types of consumer debt in rural and urban Pennsylvania, and the characteristics of the holders of such debt.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Estimation of the current amount and type of consumer debt carried by rural and urban Pennsylvanians.
- Trend analysis of the amount and type of consumer debt carried by rural and urban Pennsylvanians over the past 10 years.
- Determination of the number of rural and urban Pennsylvanians whose debt-to-income ratios are higher than what is generally acceptable to the finance industry (36%).
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Economic Impact of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in Pennsylvania's Cervid Population**

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), which affects the brain and nervous system of infected deer and elk (cervid) and eventually results in death, was first detected in Pennsylvania in 2012. There is growing concern about the impact of this disease on cervid hunting and farming industries in Pennsylvania. This research will ascertain the economic impact of the current and projected presence of CWD on Pennsylvania's cervid population and the businesses that rely upon it.

#### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of the overall economic impact that CWD may have on cervid hunting in Pennsylvania over the next 5 years.
- Analysis of the overall economic impact that CWD may have on the captive cervid industry in Pennsylvania over the next 5 years.
- Estimation of necessary funding by both state and federal agencies for efforts to prevent, control, and mitigate CWD over the next 5 years, looking separately at wild and captive cervid herds.
- Estimation of the economic impact that potential cervid overpopulation (as a result of declines in hunting) may have on Pennsylvania's overall economy, and within related industries and services (e.g. timber and wood products, tourism, agriculture, food banks, etc.) over the next 5 years.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Case Study of Arts-Based Economic Development in Rural Communities**

Rural communities are looking for ways to attract and retain residents, with some incorporating arts-initiated-development approaches to boost their economy and enhance livability. This research will include case studies of communities in rural Pennsylvania where the arts are an integrated part of a comprehensive plan for community revitalization.

#### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Case studies of rural communities that are successful in leveraging the arts and creative industries to advance economic development in rural Pennsylvania.
- Identification of challenges that rural communities attempting to implement arts-based economic development are encountering.
- Identification of public and private funding sources and community partnerships that can be used to plan, implement, and sustain arts-based economic development.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Assessment of the Quality of Housing Stock in Rural Pennsylvania**

Housing quality refers to the physical condition of a structure as well as the quality of the social and physical environment in which the structure is located. Using measures to assess rural Pennsylvania's housing stock, this research will analyze factors affecting its quality and identify programs to improve the quality of housing stock in rural Pennsylvania.

#### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Development of quantitative measures to assess the quality of housing in rural Pennsylvania.
- Assessment of the quality of housing stock in rural Pennsylvania and identification and analysis of factors that affect its quality.
- Identification of public programs to improve the quality of rural housing stock and assessment of their effectiveness and potential for successful implementation in rural Pennsylvania communities.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **OPEN TOPICS FOR THE 2021 RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM**

In addition to the targeted topics, other reasonable and potentially beneficial projects will be considered by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania under the Open Topics category. Proposed projects for this category must show a clear relationship to one or more of the Center's mandated research areas listed on Page 3. Application procedures for proposed Open Topic projects must follow the Letter of Intent guidelines listed on Page 4. Open Topic projects must define specific key outcomes and specific policy implications that will benefit communities in rural Pennsylvania.

## **TARGETED MINI GRANT TOPICS FOR THE 2021 GRANT PROGRAM**

### **Analysis of Municipal Operating Reserve Funds**

According to the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, municipalities are recommended to maintain an unreserved operating fund balance equivalent to at least 5 percent of their general operating fund. This research will analyze Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development municipal finance data to identify current and prior levels of operating reserves in Pennsylvania municipalities.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Estimation of municipal operating reserves over the past 5 calendar years by municipal type (borough/township) and population, including any enterprises (sewage, water, etc.) owned by the municipality.
- Analysis of change over time of municipal operating reserves for Pennsylvania municipalities.
- Identification of municipalities with low and adequate reserves and description of their demographic, socioeconomic, and municipal finance characteristics.
- Identification of steps that municipalities can take to bolster their operating reserves.

### **Profile of Pennsylvania's Children**

Considerable data are available about Pennsylvania's rural and urban children ages 0-17. This research will include a comprehensive analysis of various data points profiling the status of Pennsylvania's rural and urban children.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Profile of rural and urban children, ages 0-17, to include demographic, economic, health, education, and other relevant indicators.
- Analysis of how the profiles of rural and urban children have changed over the last 10 years.
- Comparison of rural and urban children in Pennsylvania over the past 10 years.

### **Analysis of the Impact of Recreation Grant Programs in Pennsylvania Communities**

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has made substantial investment in local recreational infrastructure in Pennsylvania communities through the Community Conservation Partnerships Program Grants (C2P2). This research will inventory C2P2 grants over the past 10 years and analyze their community and economic impact.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of the number, type, and recipients of DCNR's C2P2 funding over the past 10 years.
- Identification of community and economic impacts in communities that received C2P2 funding (where applicable).
- Determination of additional funds leveraged by C2P2 funded projects.

### **A Potential Model for Rural Development**

The Aspen Institute has been championing Rural Development Hubs, an economic development model that focuses on building inclusive wealth, increased local capacity, and opportunities for better livelihoods, health, and well-being at the local level. A Rural Development Hub requires unique organizational capacity including residents, businesses, local institutions, and other partners. This research will analyze the success of Rural Development Hubs in rural America, and identify how rural Pennsylvania's network of economic development programs and services can use this model to improve rural communities.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of the Rural Development Hub concept, and how and why it is working in areas of rural America similar to rural Pennsylvania.
- Analysis of the existing community and economic development infrastructure in rural Pennsylvania, and how the infrastructure could successfully adopt rural development hub practices.
- Identification of state policies, programs, and agencies that could provide support for the development of rural development hubs in rural Pennsylvania.

### **Assessment of Pennsylvania's Student Assistance Program**

Under Pennsylvania's school code, all school districts are required to provide a Student Assistance Program (SAP). SAPs are designed to assist in identifying issues, including the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and mental health issues, which pose a barrier to a student's success. This research will determine the status of Pennsylvania public schools' implementation of the state Student Assistance Program statutory mandate.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of the implementation of Pennsylvania's Student Assistance Program statutory mandate in Pennsylvania urban and rural public school districts.
- Identification of the challenges and opportunities that school districts face in implementing their Student Assistance Program.
- Identification of resources and partnerships that school districts can use to implement a Student Assistance Program.

### **Analysis of the Supply of and Demand for Housing in Rural Pennsylvania**

According to Census data, from 2010 to 2018, rural Pennsylvania experienced a population decline of more than 77,900 residents; during this same period, there were 36,300 new housing units built. This research will analyze the type and supply, demand for, and affordability of housing in rural Pennsylvania for both renters and homeowners. The research will also identify any rural Pennsylvania areas where there is a housing gap.

Key Expected Outcomes:

- Inventory of the number and type of housing units currently in rural Pennsylvania.
- Assessment of the demand for housing in rural Pennsylvania both currently in the next 10 years.
- Analysis of any gaps between the current supply and demand for housing in rural Pennsylvania including affordability of available housing and projection of any future gaps.

### **OPEN TOPICS FOR THE 2021 MINI GRANT PROGRAM**

Open topics will also be accepted for the Mini Grant Program. Proposed Mini Grant topics for this category should focus on basic data collection and analysis, time-sensitive issues, and/or the preparation of reference materials. Mini Grant projects are to be a maximum of nine months in duration. Proposed Mini Grant projects must show a clear relationship to one or more of the Center's mandated research areas listed on Page 3. Application procedures for proposed open Mini Grant projects must follow the Letter of Intent guidelines listed on Page 4.

## **SPECIAL FOCUS AREA: POPULATION CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON RURAL PENNSYLVANIA**

Population trends of youth outmigration and aging-in-place raise concerns about the viability of rural Pennsylvania from workforce availability to overall community engagement. The following topics will provide current information on the problem as well as identify potential ways to address it. The results from these projects, coupled with the release of 2020 Census data, can serve as the basis for Center for Rural Pennsylvania hearings and additional research about the future of rural Pennsylvania and public policies affecting its viability.

### **Full Grant (1 year; \$50,000)**

#### **Examination of the Impact of Population Change on Workforce Sustainability: What's Working?**

Pennsylvania population projections show that from 2020 to 2040, the number of working age rural residents (20 to 64 years old) will decline 7 percent. This decline may prove to be challenging for businesses in rural areas. This research will examine the effect of population change on workforce availability, identifying those Pennsylvania industries that are facing the most chronic workforce shortages, and identify successful strategies used to sustain a viable rural workforce despite this demographic trend.

##### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Analysis of rural Pennsylvania population trends and their potential impact on future workforce characteristics and participation, and on wages and salaries.
- Identification of industries in rural Pennsylvania that may be most affected by changes in population.
- Case studies of rural industries and/or communities that are successfully addressing labor shortages and evaluation of the replicability of these strategies in rural Pennsylvania.
- Public policy implication and relevant recommendations.

### **Full Grant (1 year; \$50,000)**

#### **Volunteerism in Rural Pennsylvania**

According to the Center's recent attitudinal survey of Pennsylvanians, the percentage of respondents who volunteer either occasionally or often has dropped in both rural and urban Pennsylvania. Other studies confirm this trend. Many community-based organizations depend on volunteers to fulfill their missions and mandates. This research will examine the impact of this decline in volunteers among rural nonprofits in Pennsylvania, and identify ways to increase the numbers of volunteers.

##### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Assessment of the numbers and demographic characteristics of volunteers in rural Pennsylvania, including the type of organizations that they serve.
- Assessment of the annual value of volunteers to nonprofits in rural Pennsylvania.
- Identification of challenges and opportunities for recruitment and retention of volunteers in rural Pennsylvania.
- Identification of models to increase volunteerism in rural communities that would be applicable to rural Pennsylvania.
- Public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Mini Grant (9 months; \$15,000)**

### **Youth Outmigration**

In 2017, rural young adults (ages 18-34) moved out of rural Pennsylvania at a higher level than those moving in, resulting in a net decline of this important demographic. This research will analyze secondary data to develop a profile of those who have moved out of rural Pennsylvania, and those who have moved in, as well as identify the socioeconomic and demographic profiles of rural communities where the numbers of young people have been maintained or increased.

#### Key Expected Outcomes:

- Estimation of the number and characteristics of young adults who moved into rural Pennsylvania who are not enrolled in post-secondary education or living in group quarters annually over the past 10 years.
- Estimation of the number and characteristics of young adults not enrolled in college who have left rural Pennsylvania annually over the past 10 years.
- Analysis of the demographics of communities that gained and lost young adults annually over the past 10 years.
- Trend analysis of the demographics of out-of-state communities that gained former Pennsylvania young adults annually over the past 10 years.

**2021 Letter of Intent Cover Sheet**

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Project Director Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Host University: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Targeted Topic – List RFP Topic Addressed: \_\_\_\_\_

Open Topic – Indicate Subject Area Addressed by Selecting One of the Areas Listed Below:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rural People and Communities      | <input type="checkbox"/> Local Government Finance and Administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resources and Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Outreach                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Development              | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Services                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rural Values and Social Change    | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture                                 |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Welfare Concerns                 |

Synopsis of Project: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (50-word maximum) \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

2021 Estimated Budget:

_____	Center for Rural Pennsylvania Funding
_____	Other (Cash/In-kind)
_____	2021 Budget Total

Project Duration:  Nine Months (Mini Grant)  One Year

Identified Partners or Subcontractors: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Project Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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