

# 2022 Research Grant Program



## Request for Proposals

Center for  
**RURAL**  
Pennsylvania  
A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

## Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors

*Chairman*

Senator Gene Yaw

*Vice Chairman*

Representative Eddie Day Pashinski

*Secretary*

Dr. Nancy Falvo

Clarion University of Pennsylvania

*Treasurer*

Mr. Stephen M. Brame

Governor's Representative

Senator Katie J. Muth

Representative Dan Moul

Dr. Timothy Kelsey

*Pennsylvania State University*

Dr. Catherine Koverola

*University of Pittsburgh*

Ms. Shannon M. Munro

Pennsylvania College of Technology

Dr. Joseph T. Nairn

*Northern Pennsylvania Regional College*

Dr. Charles Patterson

*Mansfield University of Pennsylvania*

Mr. Darrin Youker

*Governor's Representative*

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.

## 2022 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is a bipartisan, bicameral legislative agency that serves as a resource for rural policy 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'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 annual 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
- 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 2022 grant cycle, the Center will grant research awards up to \$50,000.

### ***Targeted Topics***

This year the Board of Directors has approved 15 targeted topics. The list of topics begins on page 6.

### ***Open Topics***

Other topical 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 one Mini Grant targeted topic. The Mini Grant topic is listed on page 14.

### ***Open Topics***

Open topics will also be accepted for Mini Grants.

## **Grant Application Process**

The Center's 2022 Research Grant Program application process is as follows:

1. Request for Proposals is released March 2021
2. Deadline for submission of Letters of Intent **May 17, 2021**
3. Letters of Intent are reviewed and selected applicants are invited to submit a full proposal **late May 2021**
4. Proposal planning discussions are conducted with applicants June - August 2021
5. Deadline for full proposal submissions **August 23, 2021**
6. Center's Board of Directors selects projects for funding November - December 2021
7. Final work plans are negotiated and accepted December 2021
8. Cooperative Agreements are issued, and work begins January 2022

## **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 submission, and 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 15) and is limited to three additional typewritten pages.

The Letter of Intent narrative must include the following:

- project description;
- research scope and methods;
- anticipated policy implications (for full research projects, and for mini-grants when applicable); and
- identification of partners and/or subcontractors.

**Letters of Intent must be received by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania via email by the close of business (4:30pm) on May 17, 2021.**

### **Letter of Intent Submission Guidelines**

Letters of Intent must be emailed to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's Program Manager for Grants Pam Frontino at [pfrontino@rural.palegislature.us](mailto:pfrontino@rural.palegislature.us).

Applicants can also download the cover sheet from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov) and email the completed cover sheet and the narrative of the Letter of Intent.

**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 email [pfrontino@rural.palegislature.us](mailto:pfrontino@rural.palegislature.us) or call (717) 787-9555 to follow up.**

## TARGETED RESEARCH GRANT TOPICS FOR THE 2022 GRANT PROGRAM

### **Broadband Proliferation in Rural Areas**

The importance of affordable and efficient broadband access has become more apparent during the current coronavirus pandemic. A [recent report](#) from Oklahoma State University and Purdue University profiling strategies from throughout the continental U.S. distinguishes why some state broadband policies have been successful and others have failed or have been detrimental, particularly in rural areas. This research will build on that study, using a comparative analysis of policies implemented by various states and looking at unique variables to determine policies that could be replicated to increase broadband availability across Pennsylvania.

#### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Develop short-term strategies to foster greater rural connectivity in Pennsylvania.
- Provide examples of how other communities have leveraged market forces to allow for broader broadband coverage.
- Identify challenges and opportunities to ensure sustainable and affordable connectivity in rural Pennsylvania.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **Cellular Phone Coverage in Pennsylvania**

A 2019 report by the [Federal Communications Commission](#) found that cellular phone carriers overstated mobile data (Internet) coverage by as much as 40 percent. This report raises questions not only about the availability of mobile data services in rural areas, but also the extent of cellular phone service in general. This research will assess mobile data coverage and mobile phone (voice) service in rural areas.

#### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Document mobile data speeds across geographic areas in Pennsylvania, with a particular emphasis on rural areas.
- Produce a map identifying potential gaps and the speed of cellular phone service in rural areas.
- Discuss the implications of the results regarding businesses, education, health care, and emergency services.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Rural Hospital Changes**

Over the past decade, several acute care hospitals in rural and urban Pennsylvania have been purchased by entities outside their region. This research will evaluate the impact of these purchases and compare them to rural hospitals that have not been purchased by outside entities. The research will also examine hospitals in rural areas in other states to assess the impact of hospital purchases.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Identify the number and characteristics of rural hospitals that have been purchased by entities outside their service region over the past 5 years.
- Assess the impact of pre- and post-purchase changes these hospitals have experienced in their finances, staffing, patient care, and any other relevant factors.
- Compare rural hospitals that have been purchased within the past 5 years with rural hospitals that have not been purchased within the past 5 five years.
- Analyze rural hospital purchases in other states and the impact.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Economic Impact of Chronic Wasting Disease**

In 2020, the Pennsylvania Chronic Wasting Disease Task Force released the report, *Combating Chronic Wasting Disease in Pennsylvania*, which details the coordinated efforts to combat Chronic Wasting Disease, or CWD, a contagious, fatal disease that threatens deer and other cervids. The report outlines the status of the disease 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:**

- Analyze of the overall economic impact that CWD may have on cervid hunting and the captive cervid industry in Pennsylvania over the next 5 years.
- Estimate the 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.
- Estimate 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.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Supply and Demand for Non-Emergency Transportation Serving Special Populations**

In rural areas, a lack of transportation services hinders accessibility to basic services, such as non-emergency medical services. This issue is particularly concerning for special populations, like senior citizens and people with disabilities, and puts individuals at risk for social isolation and deprivation of essential needs. This research will assess the supply and demand of rural transportation services, highlighting what is currently available across rural Pennsylvania, and determining how much individuals are willing to pay for services, including alternative transportation options, such as rideshare programs.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Identify the number and types of providers of non-emergency transportation services for special rural populations.
- Assess the demand for non-emergency transportation services for special rural populations.
- Analyze the gaps between the supply and demand for non-emergency transportation services.
- Identify additional deterrents to providing non-emergency transportation services in rural areas.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Programs Addressing Food Insecurity**

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services estimates that 1.7 million Pennsylvanians experience hunger. To combat this, communities across the commonwealth implement various strategies to accommodate residents' diverse needs, such as community food pantries, farmers' markets, mobile food markets, food as medicine initiatives, food recovery efforts, and promotion of government assistance programs like SNAP and TEFAP. This research will use case studies of communities and systems, throughout rural Pennsylvania, that have successfully implemented various initiatives to combat food insecurity and improve community health and wellbeing.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Conduct case studies of rural communities and organizations that have implemented food security and access initiatives to address disparities and improve public health and social factors.
- Identify challenges and opportunities encountered by communities and organizations attempting to implement food security and access initiatives.
- Analyze initiatives that could be replicated throughout Pennsylvania to improve food security and access for rural residents.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.



## **Sustainability of Pennsylvania Conservation and Wildlife Systems**

Current methods to fund wildlife conservation and management in Pennsylvania may not be sustainable. Funds to support wildlife agency budgets are generated through license sales, yet Pennsylvania is experiencing a continuing decline among those who participate in hunting and fishing. Other states have instituted new models for wildlife conservation funding. This research will identify funding mechanisms, and any other strategies other states use to fund wildlife conservation and management.

### **Key Expected Outcome:**

- Identify funding mechanisms, models, and strategies that other states have been using to generate wildlife conservation funding.
- Analyze the feasibility of the identified strategies for implementation in Pennsylvania to support wildlife conservation.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **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:**

- Analyze the effect of Pennsylvania Wilds branding on county, community, and economic conditions in the Pennsylvania Wilds over the past 10 years.
- Conduct a case study analysis of success stories among Pennsylvania Wilds communities to identify the human, natural, and physical resources in place that enable them to capitalize on Pennsylvania Wilds opportunities.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Population Projections for Pennsylvania for the Next 30 Years**

The 2020 Census will likely show dynamic changes in Pennsylvania's population over the past 10 years, and these changes will likely continue for the next 30 years. Projecting Pennsylvania's population over the next 30 years by identifying where any changes will occur, and the rates of change will inform public policy decisions. This research will develop and analyze population projections at 5-year intervals for Pennsylvania's 67 counties for the next 30 years.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Develop Pennsylvania county-level population projections from 2020 to 2050 in 5-year increments, including age and gender cohorts.
- Provide a description of the methods used to develop the projections.

## **Domestic Violence Prevalence and Analysis**

While incidents of domestic violence are often under-reported, it is important to develop estimates of the number of victims to ensure resources are distributed to where they are needed. This project will develop estimates of the number of rural and urban victims of domestic violence and their sociodemographic characteristics. In addition, this project will collect information on domestic violence services and prevention programs in other states and assess their applicability to rural Pennsylvania.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Estimate the number of domestic violence victims in rural and urban Pennsylvania for each of the past 5 years.
- Identify sociodemographic characteristics of domestic violence victims in rural and urban Pennsylvania for each of the past 5 years.
- Evaluate the extent to which other successful domestic violence programs, services, and prevention strategies in other states could be applied to rural Pennsylvania.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Reversing Population Decline in Rural Pennsylvania**

According to a recent [Gallup survey](#), approximately 27 percent of Americans prefer to live in a rural area - the most of any geographic living option presented in this survey. Yet, population in rural Pennsylvania is on the decline and has been for many years. This research will help identify important factors and considerations that increase the likelihood of individuals relocating from urban to rural areas. The research would include specific strategies for attracting new residents to rural Pennsylvania.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Estimate the number of people willing to relocate to rural Pennsylvania, and identify their characteristics.
- Identify barriers preventing willing individuals from moving to rural Pennsylvania.
- Conduct case studies to examine communities and techniques used to attract new residents to rural areas, and how they might be applied to rural Pennsylvania.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Alternative Tuition Strategies for Community Colleges and State-Supported 2-Year Institutions**

The subject of free tuition and alternative tuition strategies in American higher education continues to gain attention across the nation. In Pennsylvania, in 2002, Lehigh Carbon Community College was a leader in providing free tuition to recent graduates of Tamaqua Area High School. Free tuition programs vary by funding sources (public or private), and eligibility (statewide or limited to education for high-demand fields, etc.). This research will examine the economic, educational, and post-graduate outcomes of free and alternative tuition strategies in Pennsylvania and other states.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Estimate the programs that provide free tuition for community college, both in Pennsylvania and in other states, to include: funding sources, geographic limitations, eligibility, post-graduate outcomes, and other relevant factors.
- Conduct an inventory of delayed payment plans in other states, to include: funding sources, eligibility, post-graduate outcomes, and other relevant factors.
- Compare applicable 2-year institutions with and without alternative tuition strategies in terms of enrollment in degree and certificate programs, and graduation rates.
- Analyze the impacts of free community college tuition programs within Pennsylvania over the last 5 years.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Pennsylvania’s Buy Local Agriculture Program**

Particularly during the global pandemic, local agriculture campaigns are in a unique position to attract a diverse customer base seeking to invest in local economies. Examples of “buy local” output include produce, dairy, meat and poultry, and artisan goods. This research would assess “buy local” strategies by analyzing who is buying locally produced goods, why they are interested in this market, an overview of consumer habits, and an assessment of the impact on local economies. The research would include a rural and urban comparison, with the potential to compare cases in Pennsylvania to other states. Additionally, the project would address options for expanding local producer programs within Pennsylvania.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Inventory “buy local” production and marketing campaigns across rural Pennsylvania.
- Conduct a survey identifying demographic characteristics and habits of Pennsylvania consumers who regularly purchase local products.
- Assess the market’s effects on local economies.
- Compare urban and rural “buy local” campaigns.
- Analyze the market outside of Pennsylvania and identify strategies to expand the market.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Pennsylvania’s Workforce and Increased Automation**

Economically, rural Pennsylvania is slipping further behind urban areas. Increased job automation may affect rural employers and employees even more. This research will assess what impact increased automation will have on the rural workforce over the next 10 years. It will also identify examples from other states of what can be done to prepare current and future rural employers and employees for the changing economy.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Measure and analyze the current levels of automation among rural and urban employers and determine, what, if any, gaps exist.
- Assess how automation will affect the rural workforce over the next 10 years, including which jobs and industries are most likely to be disrupted.
- Identify strategies to ensure the long-term vitality of the rural Pennsylvania workforce.
- Examine how Pennsylvania communities could emulate successful strategies from other jurisdictions.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **Media Deserts**

[According to the University of North Carolina](#), from 2004 to 2019, there has been a 29 percent decline in the number of daily and weekly newspapers in Pennsylvania. While newspapers are only one source of information, rural areas are at a disadvantage in accessing online media because of limited broadband access. This research will document and analyze where and how rural Pennsylvanians are accessing information about their local community and identify ways to increase information access.

### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

- Document and categorize the sources rural Pennsylvania residents use to access information about their local communities.
- Analyze rural residents' access to information by their socioeconomic characteristics.
- Identify and analyze any barriers rural residents face in accessing information about their local communities, and opportunities for improved information access.
- Assess the level of civic participation in areas with varying levels of media access.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **OPEN TOPICS FOR THE 2022 RESEARCH GRANT PROGRAM**

In addition to the targeted topics, other topical 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 5. Open Topic projects must define specific key outcomes and specific policy implications that will benefit communities in rural Pennsylvania.

## **TARGETED MINI GRANT TOPIC FOR THE 2022 GRANT PROGRAM**

### **Needs Assessment of Rural Children and Youth Services Programs**

A recent Center for Rural Pennsylvania report highlighted extensive challenges associated with Children and Youth Services (CYS) processes, ranging from communication struggles to overwhelmed staff. Research conducted through a Mini Grant on this topic will present an inventory of provider capacity and availability based on requirements from the Family First Prevention Services Act. The analysis will also include an assessment of statewide funding challenges, as well as internal and external resource capabilities across CYS service domains.

#### **Key Expected Outcomes:**

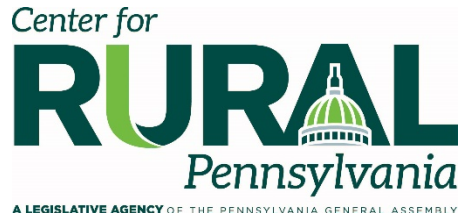
- Analyze Children and Youth Services cases, staffing patterns, and finances and resources over the past 10 years.
- Conduct a rural and urban comparison of Pennsylvania CYS services.
- Based on gathered data, identify gaps in specialized services in rural versus urban areas across Pennsylvania.
- In analyzing data, grade services for alignment with evidence-based or best practices.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **OPEN TOPICS FOR THE 2022 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 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 5.

### **SPECIAL FOCUS AREA: COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON RURAL PENNSYLVANIA**

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Center is sponsoring an open call for research on the impacts of COVID-19 in rural Pennsylvania. While this is an open call for proposals, the Center especially welcomes proposals on topics that address COVID's effects on the economy and education, as well as COVID vaccines, testing, treatment, and prevention, as they relate to rural Pennsylvania. Successful research projects will generate primary data, address current needs relating to one or more of the authorized research areas of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, and recommend short-term and/or long-term policy solutions for consideration by the Pennsylvania General Assembly and/or the executive branch. Policy recommendations must be based on empirical findings generated in the study. Grants of up to \$60,000 will be awarded.



**2022 Letter of Intent Cover Sheet**

Project Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Director Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Host University: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Open Topic—Indicate subject area addressed by selecting one of the areas listed below:

- Rural People and Communities
- Natural Resources and Environment
- Economic Development
- Rural Values and Social Change
- Local Government Finance and Administration
- Educational Outreach
- Community Services
- Agriculture
- Health and Welfare Concerns

2022 Estimated Budget:	_____	Center for Rural Pennsylvania Funding
	_____	Other (Cash/In-kind)
	_____	2022 Budget Total

Project Duration:  Nine months (Mini Grant)  One Year

Identified Partners or Subcontractors: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Director Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Center for Rural Pennsylvania  
625 Forster St. Room 902  
Harrisburg, PA 17120  
(717) 787-9555  
[www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov)