

# 2024 Research Grant Program



## Request for Proposals



Center for  
**RURAL**  
Pennsylvania

A LEGISLATIVE AGENCY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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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.

## 2024 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.

The Center Board of Directors annually approves topics for research. All projects must show a clear relationship to one or more of the Center's mandated research areas:

- 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 The 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.

### **Penn State Libraries**

In addition to publication on the Center's website, all reports will be included in Penn State Libraries Open Publishing, an open access imprint of The Pennsylvania State University Libraries. For more information, please visit <http://open.psu.edu>.

## 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 2024 grant cycle, the Center will grant research awards up to **\$50,000**.

### Targeted Topics

This year the Board of Directors has approved eight 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. There are three special focus areas, but other topics are welcome.

## 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. Like full grants, Mini Grants must also include policy considerations or recommendations.

### Open Topics

Open topic submissions will be accepted for Mini Grants.

## Grant Application Process and Timeline

The Center's 2024 Research Grant Program application process is outlined below:

2024 Grant Program Timeline	Date(s) or Deadline
1. Request for Proposals is released	March 2023
2. Deadline for submission of Letters of Intent	<b>May 26, 2023</b>
3. Letters of Intent reviewed and selected applicants invited to submit a full proposal	Completed by June 30, 2023
4. Proposal planning discussions conducted with each applicant	June-August 2023
5. Deadline for full proposal submissions	<b>August 28, 2023</b>
6. Center's Board of Directors selects projects for funding	November-December 2023
7. Final work plans are negotiated and accepted	December 2023
8. Cooperative Agreements issued, signed, and work begins	January 2024

## **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 full Research Grant Program and the Mini Grant Program. Those applicants whose Letters of Intent are approved for proposal submission will receive additional information and instructions on proposal preparation, submission, and review procedures.

A Letter of Intent must include the cover sheet (Page 11) and is limited to two additional typewritten pages.

Letter of Intent narratives must include the following:

- Project description
- Research scope and methods
- Anticipated policy implications
- Identification of partners and/or subcontractors (indication that letters of support will be secured from all project partners is strongly encouraged).

**Letters of Intent must be received by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania via email by 12:00PM on May 26, 2023.**

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

Letters of Intent must be emailed to Assistant Director Dr. Laura Dimino at [ldimino@rural.pa.gov](mailto:ldimino@rural.pa.gov) at the Center for Rural Pennsylvania.

Applicants can also download the cover sheet from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania website (under "Research Grants") at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov). Please email the completed cover sheet and the narrative of the Letter of Intent to Dr. Dimino at the email address above.

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 [ldimino@rural.pa.gov](mailto:ldimino@rural.pa.gov) or call (717) 787-9555 to follow up.

## 2024 TARGETED RESEARCH GRANT TOPICS (full grants)

### 1. Assessment of remote rural workers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a larger portion of the workforce worked remotely than was the case in 2019. What remains to be seen is what proportion of the workforce will continue to do so, whether that proportion has stabilized, and what the implications are at the local level for rural areas. This research will provide an assessment of the number of remote workers by industry in rural and urban areas over the last five years and the extent to which there are factors that limit remote work opportunities. The project will explain the expected impacts of trends in remote work and include case studies of three or more rural areas.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Analyze data to identify rural and urban residents whose primary occupations involve remote or telecommuting work. The analysis must include their demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, location, occupation, employer location, industry, and other relevant variables.
- Conduct a representative survey of remote workers in rural and urban areas in Pennsylvania, to determine the extent to which respondents:
  - plan to continue working in a remote manner, are working remoting from a temporary or permanent location,
  - have preferences for remote versus in-person work,
  - report an impact on their career opportunities, and
  - report perceived benefits and drawbacks of engaging in remote work.
- Provide an analysis of any barriers to remote work in Pennsylvania's rural and urban areas.
- Provide three representative case studies in rural areas with a significant number of remote workers. Estimate the economic and non-economic impacts (e.g., demand for local government services, infrastructure, etc.) of remote workers for these case studies.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### 2. Analysis of the current workforce

This research will conduct an original survey of adults in the workforce to provide a comparison between rural and urban areas. It will include an examination of the characteristics and needs of people who live and work in rural areas, their mobility patterns and likelihood of staying, and what attracts and keeps residents and workers in rural areas.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Conduct a survey of adults ensuring a representative sample from rural and urban areas.
- Provide an analysis of the following factors for adults in the active workforce:
  - job satisfaction,
  - community satisfaction,
  - quality of life satisfaction,
  - financial satisfaction,
  - likelihood of relocation over the next five years,
  - likelihood of changing jobs or career over the next five years, and
  - other relevant measures.

- Provide an analysis of the following factors for inactive (not employed) adults:
  - reason(s) for being out of the workforce,
  - length of time in an inactive status,
  - quality of life satisfaction,
  - financial satisfaction, and
  - likelihood of entering active workforce over the next five years.
- Identify the key factors that influence decisions to:
  - remain in current position and employment status or seek a change,
  - remain working or inactive in current location or area, and
  - retain residence in current community.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **3. Analysis of the workforce supply of and demand for Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs)**

A key service in local communities is the availability of emergency medical treatment, including ambulances, emergency responders, and EMTs. This study will assess the adequacy of the current workforce, with a focus on rural areas, provide a projection of how many more EMTs will be needed over time, and examine the training and resources available to ensure an adequate pipeline.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Analysis of the current and future supply of and demand for EMTs, paramedics, and similar medical professionals. Assess the adequacy of the current and future supply of these medical professionals.
- Identify three or more rural case studies to assess recruitment and retention practices of these medical professionals, and the sustainability of these practices.
- Analyze the following regarding EMTs, paramedics, and similar professionals, across rural and urban Pennsylvania:
  - the costs of training,
  - assessment of who currently pays for that training,
  - the availability of professionals (trainers) to provide training, and
  - the sources of funding to employ trainers.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **4. Rural hospital sustainability**

This research will evaluate what factors contribute to making a rural hospital sustainable. The study will examine the impact of recent hospital mergers/consolidations or restructuring on hospital sustainability and compare them to rural hospitals that have not been consolidated or restructured. The goals are to evaluate the impact of these two kinds of changes on access to needed health care, and to provide guidance on what options are best pursued for the 18 rural Pennsylvania hospitals now at financial risk. The research will also include a literature review and review examples from other states to provide guidance and best practices for sustaining access to health care in rural areas.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Identify the number and characteristics of rural hospitals that have merged/consolidated or

restructured over the past seven years.

- Assess the impact of mergers/consolidations and restructuring on rural hospitals (relative to those hospitals that did not change), including but not limited to:
  - financial position/solvency,
  - employee recruitment/retention,
  - staffing levels,
  - patient access to healthcare, and
  - patient health outcomes.
- Analyze rural hospital purchases and consolidations in other states and the impact with the goal of identifying best practices and recommendations for Pennsylvania.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **5. Economic and transportation impact of warehousing on rural Pennsylvania communities**

A recent surge in warehouse construction in Pennsylvania has yielded interest in the short- and long-term effects of this growth on rural regions of Pennsylvania. The growing presence of warehouses also generates questions about local capacity to manage traffic and workforce issues. This study will update and expand findings from a 2008 Center for Rural Pennsylvania report that created a geographic and economic assessment of the warehousing industry in rural Pennsylvania.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Assessment of the economic, transportation, and community impacts of warehousing on rural Pennsylvania.
- Analysis of employment needs and supply within the industry.
- Identify changes to the warehousing industry in Pennsylvania over the past 10 years, and the potential outlook for the next 10 years.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **6. Analysis of the supply of and demand for 55+ housing in rural Pennsylvania**

This research will analyze data to determine rural housing availability and affordability for residents aged 55 and older. The study will also survey state residents with the goal of understanding the needs, preferences, and decisions of this age group about where to live and retire.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Analyze data on the age of the Commonwealth's population in rural and urban areas and the availability of housing in rural areas.
- Survey rural residents aged 55 and older to determine:
  - their housing needs and preferences,
  - intentions and likelihood of retirement relocation, and
  - short- and long-term demand for 55+ housing in rural areas.
- Provide a profile of what factors influence decisions to remain in rural Pennsylvania throughout retirement, including the demand for affordable or low-income housing.
- Analyze the extent to which the rural housing supply - current and projected - is designed to facilitate "aging in place."



- Evaluate key factors, such as:
  - licensing processes for rural assisted living homes, personal care homes, etc.), and
  - zoning, laws or ordinances, etc., that hinder or facilitate various types of rural 55+ housing (e.g., developments, senior apartments, etc.).
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **7. Impact of short-term rentals in Pennsylvania**

There are increasing opportunities for short-term rentals, as entities such as Airbnb and Vrbo have emerged. This study will estimate the number of such rentals in rural and urban areas. It will evaluate the pros and cons of such rentals on municipalities, including factors such as property values, taxes, tourism, availability of long-term rentals for residents/local workforce, and economic impact overall. In addition, it will describe the extent to which there are local ordinances that regulate short-term rentals and their impact.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Analyze existing data on the prevalence of short-term rentals in rural and urban areas.
- Identify and review the extent to which there are local ordinances related to short-term rentals, along with their content and impact. Discuss to what extent and how short-term rentals are regulated.
- Provide an analysis of the pros and cons of short-term rentals based upon current conditions in rural Pennsylvania.
- Estimate the economic benefits or costs to various stakeholders, including:
  - the possible impact on the residential rental market,
  - local and state tax revenue,
  - local infrastructure, and
  - other relevant considerations
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **8. Mobile homes in Pennsylvania**

Mobile homes may be classified as one affordable housing option. However, mobile homes and some manufactured homes, are not classified in the same way as deeded residential properties and residents are subject to additional expenses. This research will outline the impact of this differential treatment on the valuation of homes, the impact of property tax issues and fees on the affordability of this type of housing, and the extent to which people who reside in them are at risk for displacement.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Analyze the number, location, and characteristics of mobile homes in rural and urban Pennsylvania, as well as the number of residents in this type of housing.
- Provide data on the prices of new mobile homes, resale values/depreciation over time, property tax implications, and the financial implications for mobile homeowners who do not own the land on which their homes are located.
- Describe and analyze the extent to which there is government involvement in zoning, taxation, and consumer protection with regard to living in a mobile home.
- Outline the policy areas for which there are implications and provide relevant public policy recommendations.

## **2024 OPEN TOPICS (FULL GRANTS)**

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

For the 2024 grants cycle, the Center is particularly interested in the following *Special Focus Areas* addressed through the Open Topics category:

1. Identifying relevant models for combating substance abuse, in particular problems stemming from opioids, fentanyl, and illegal drugs in rural Pennsylvania. Potential interest in barriers to treatment, harm prevention.
2. Sustaining the rural workforce over the next 10 years, with potential areas of focus on:
  - a. Trends and rates of automation by industry, and related implications of automation, or
  - b. Attracting new workers to rural areas.
3. Lessons learned from rural hospital closures in Pennsylvania and other states, including the impact on residents, health outcomes, and access to health care.
4. Research that builds on, updates, or enhances the Center's previously published research.

## **2024 MINI GRANT OPEN TOPICS**

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 Topic Mini Grant projects must follow the Letter of Intent guidelines.



## 2024 Letter of Intent Cover Sheet

<b>Project Title:</b>	
<b>Project Director Name:</b>	
<b>Project Director Email:</b>	
<b>Host University:</b>	
<b>University Grants Officer:</b>	
<b>Grants Office Address:</b>	
<b>Grants Office Phone:</b>	
<b>Grants Officer Email:</b>	

<b>Is your project addressing a Targeted Topic? If yes, please indicate the topic here:</b>
<b>Is your project an Open Topic submission? If yes, please indicate the topic here:</b>

<b>If this is an Open Topic submission, please indicate subject area addressed by selecting one of the areas listed below:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Rural People and Communities</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Natural Resources and Environment</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Economic Development</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Rural Values and Social Change</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Local Government Finance and Administration</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Educational Outreach</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Community Services</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Agriculture</b></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Health and Welfare Concerns</b></li> </ul>

<b>2024 Estimated Budget</b>	
<b>Center for Rural Pennsylvania Funding:</b>	
<b>Other (cash/in-kind):</b>	
<b>2024 Budget Total:</b>	

<b>Project Duration (select one)</b>	
<b>Nine months (Mini Grant):</b>	
<b>One year (Full Grant):</b>	

**Identified project partners or subcontractors:**

<b>Project Director Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
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Center for Rural Pennsylvania  
625 Forster St. Room 902  
Harrisburg, PA 17120  
(717) 787-9555 | [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov)