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

2024 Research Grant Report Guidelines

Report Layout and Sections

Report Length and Style

- Overall, the body of the report, not including references and appendices, shall not be longer than 50 pages, unless otherwise approved by Center staff.
- Reports must be written in an accessible style, for a lay audience.

Title Page

- Project title
- Project Investigator(s) (names and degrees/professional designations)
- Title/Position and Department
- Host institution and affiliated institution(s)/organization(s)
- Acknowledgement statement of the Grantor's support for the project:
  - "This project was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly."

Abstract (300 word limit)

Key Words (Provide approximately 5-9 key words or phrases for search purposes)

Executive Summary (1,500 word limit)
The Executive Summary will be detachable from the final report for distribution as a free-standing document. It should **bullet point key findings and policy considerations**, and briefly explain the following:

- Purpose of the study/goals
- Methods and data used
- Key results or findings
- Conclusions

Table of Contents
The Table of Contents should be clickable and linked to the major topic headings and subheadings, and include the following:

- Major topic headings
- Topic subheadings
- Table of tables, Table of figures
- Page numbers

Introduction

- State the problem or the key purpose and outline the need for the research
- Brief review of relevant literature, with a focus on the findings (in an accessible manner for lay readers).
- Outline the project's goals, the questions to which it provides answers, and its contribution to existing research.

Methodology

- In detail, describe the study design, types of analyses, evidence or data collected, level of analysis, operationalization of variables. Be sure to connect the methods discussion directly to the goals of the project.
- Discuss why and how particular case studies or samples were selected
- If an original survey is part of the project, refer to the "Surveys" section of this document

Results and Findings

- In detail, describe the data or information obtained, the quantity collected, any limits on generalizability.
- Provide summaries of data, analyses, empirical patterns. Describe the practical implications of the analyses for the layperson. Highly technical or statistical sections should be placed in an appendix.
- Make note of any changes to the original scope of the project.
- Include deliverables specific to the project, such as tables, figures and maps.
- Organize findings for specific case studies under subheadings.

Discussion and Conclusions

- Conclusions must be derived from the data or empirical evidence collected.
- Include a summary of the report's key empirical takeaways.

Policy Considerations

A primary goal of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's Grant Program is to identify research-based policy considerations for the Pennsylvania General Assembly, executive branch, and county or local government. Therefore, it is imperative that this section of the report be thoughtful. Policy recommendations must be derived clearly from the Results and Findings and Discussion and Conclusions sections, and each consideration should:

- Provide justification and explanation or how it emerges directly from the research observations, data and results.
- Focus on rural Pennsylvania or related issues.
- Outline clear unbiased recommendations for all policymakers.
- Offer specific suggestions about what agency, organization, committee, or stakeholder should address and/or implement the consideration.
- As pertinent, refer to existing state programs, statutes, or regulations that would be affected.
- Explain any specific barriers or opportunities.
- Identify any public funding sources, program guidelines, industry practices, and unique situations in Pennsylvania's rural areas that have a bearing on the consideration.
- Researchers may share comparative policy analyses or examples of how other jurisdictions address a given policy concern (these may be other municipalities, counties, states, or countries).

References

Include a comprehensive list of resources used or cited and provide complete information for the author-date citation given in the text. Authors may use any widely used academic citation format for the References section (e.g., APA). A consistent citation format must be followed throughout the entire references section. For citations within the body of the report or at the end of a quotation, use an author-date citation format (Author last name, year).

Appendices

Include only necessary supporting documentation for the final report, such as methodological details, or supplemental data. Also, place copies of articles generated about the project by media here.

Overall Format and Style Requirements

General Formatting

For ease of editing and transfer to publication software, **please use the Center research report template.**

Details about the specific formatting of the final report are below:

- Use Microsoft Word (please see below for website reader accessibility formatting. Turn on and keep accessibility checker running when writing your report. Please continuously review and correct any accessibility errors).

- Comply with the “Website Reader Accessibility” section requirements (see next section for more information on alternative text and related accessibility matters).
- Font must be Tenorite, size 12 pt.
- For line spacing, do not use double spacing; customize to 1.08 spacing.
- Color charts, graphs, maps, etc., are acceptable – please use easy to view color palettes and be consistent when using color to identify specific variables.
- Left justification only.
- 8 x 11 standard format.
- Begin page numbering after the table of contents (or list of figures); continue consecutively until the end of the last appendix.
- If notes are necessary in the body of the report, use footnotes and not endnotes.
- The report may be written in first person.

All charts, tables and maps in the report must:

- Include a title and chart, table, figure, or map number.
- Include accurate labeling of columns, rows, axes, etc.
- Be referenced in the report text.
- In a caption, identify the source and timeframe of data therein.
- In a caption, identify whether financial figures are adjusted for inflation.
- In a caption, identify whether differences in statistical data are statistically significant (if applicable).
- In a caption, identify the geographic level of the data (state, county, municipality, etc.).
- Be understandable to a lay audience.
- Be consistent in format.
- For secondary data, use the most current data available.
- Indicate the number of respondents (if showing survey results).
- Be created using Microsoft Excel or Word.
- Be sized to at least 300dpi (graphs and images).
- Where possible, maps should include the name of the jurisdiction.

Website Reader Accessibility:

- Please add your metadata to the Word document.
    - **File: Info: Properties: Advanced Properties:** add the appropriate information - title, tags, add subject, author.

Styles

Use Word's given styles to select Heading 1 (project title only), Heading 2, Heading 3, and so on. Each heading will be a new section of the document and subheadings will follow with Heading 2, 3, etc. **Proper nesting order is important.** Do not use a heading 2 and then a 4, skipping the 3. These allow the user to skip sections using the clicks of a keyboard. Go to **Review: Check Accessibility: Navigation Pane** to do a quick check to make sure the headers are OK.

Alt Text

All figures need descriptive alt text. If an error appears in your accessibility results, click on the drop-down arrow. Add a description of the figure. In some instances, the figure/image may be decorative. In these instances, mark it as decorative.

Link Text

For any web/citation links, be descriptive (For example: Color Contrast Tool) and do not use the words "click here," or type the entire URL. Screen readers do not like spelling out URLs and "here" is not descriptive.

Tables

When creating any tables, **DO NOT** split cells, merge cells, or create nested cells. Each table should have a header row and a reader should be able to tab through the table.

- Right click on the table and go to table properties.
- Here you can add alt text and select header rows. (See Creating accessible tables in Word for more information and Accessible Templates for Office for accessible table templates.) If tables are created in Excel and placed into Word, be sure to reformat in Word by applying Table Styles (go to **DESIGN: Table Design,** and **Table Style Options**: select Header Row and First Column only.)

Charts

It is important that you create your charts in Word or create them in Excel and paste them into Word. Use the chart wizard to build them within the ribbon. Be sure to include color contrast within line styles and use different line styles, such as dotted lines and broken lines. Charts should be readable in black and white. Use the "Chart Design" function in Word for this.

Additional Requirements

Definitions and Language

Rural Definition

- Research funded by the Center will use our definitions of rural available on our website at www.rural.pa.gov; the use of any other definition of rural for the purpose of analyses must be approved by the Center.

Other Definitions

- Other terms in your report must be defined, especially those that are used as criteria for selecting best practices. For instance, if using the word “successful” or “effective,” explain what criteria were used to determine and measure success or effectiveness.
- Define terms when first used in the body of the report. Where there is a multitude of terms specific to a topic, some researchers provide a glossary of terms. While this is not required, it can be very useful and, if provided, should be located in an appendix.

Jargon

- All reports must be free of jargon specific to a field and must initially spell out all acronyms and keep their use to a minimum.
- Discussion of any analytic, scientific, or statistical models must be translated into language understandable by the lay reader. Technical details may be included in the appendix.

Specific Methods

Surveys

For the presentation of survey results conducted as part of the research project, include answers to the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the survey?
- Was the survey done by mail, phone, in-person or online? Why was this method selected as the appropriate approach for collecting data?
- How were survey participants selected? How many were rural?
- How were names, phone numbers, addresses and/or email addresses found?
- How many surveys were attempted? How many were completed? How did this rate compare with what was expected?
- What was the response rate? What methods were used to increase the response rate?
- What were the margins of error/confidence intervals for the survey results?

Provide a copy of the survey questionnaire as an appendix to the report. Also provide the frequency of responses to each question as part of the appendix.

All raw survey data must be submitted to the Center with the final report.

Interviews

For discussions of key informant or other interviews, provide the following information:

- What was the purpose of the interviews?
- Were the interviews done by phone or in-person?
- Who conducted the interviews?
- How were the interview subjects selected?
- How many interviews were attempted? How many were completed?

Provide a copy of the interview protocol as an appendix to the report.

Focus Groups

To describe the focus group sessions, include the following information:

- Where was the focus group discussion held?
- How were participants selected?
- How many focus group participants were anticipated? How many actually participated?
- Who conducted the focus group?
- How were the discussions recorded?

The presentation of focus group results must keep actual quotations from participants to a **minimum**. Additional quotations from the focus group may be included as part of an online appendix.

Data and Technical Information

- When discussing data sources used for the project, provide a discussion of any data limitations. This also holds for discussions of survey or interview results. For surveys with small respondent pools or response rates, discuss the reliability and validity of the survey results.
- Explain any statistical analyses or tests done on data (such as T-tests, Ordinary Least Squares, Anova, etc.) in terms that lay readers can understand. Explain why the tests were selected, what they measure and what they show. Provide the rationale for using selected variables in analyses performed for the project.
- If providing technical details necessary for deeper understanding of data analyses or statistical tests, place the information in an appendix. This will enhance the readability of the body of the report for the lay reader and will

allow readers who are looking for the technical basis of the report to easily find this information.

- When referencing time-based information, like the enactment of a bill or the date of survey collection, use the actual date and not phrases like “last year.”
- Tables and charts must be inserted into the text where they are discussed to enhance readability and simplicity and count toward the page limit. Do not place tables, figures and charts in a separate document.
- In the body of the report, use numerals for all percentages referenced.
- Write out the word “percent” instead of using the symbol. For all numbers referenced in the report, use numerals for number 10 and above. If a number begins a sentence, it must be spelled-out and not presented as a numeral.
- Along with the final report, please submit the data behind all charts, tables, maps, or graphs. These data should be in Excel, SPSS or another approved format. When publishing the findings, we often need to manipulate charts and graphs in our publication software and cannot do so without this information.