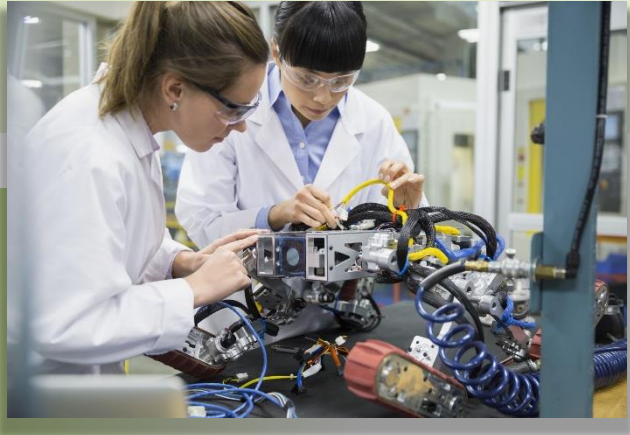


# 2025 Research Grant Program



## 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

## 2025 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 - Full Awards

One-year grants are awarded for applied policy research or to identify local strategies that can result in legislative or program policy considerations or recommendations. For the 2025 grant cycle, the Center will grant research awards up to **\$50,000**.

### Targeted Topics

This year the Board of Directors has approved seven targeted topics. Targeted topics for full award amounts include a list of key outcomes. 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 four special focus areas, but other topics are welcome. Researchers must develop and present their own goals, methods, and key outcomes.

## 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 typically nine months in duration and eligible for a maximum of **\$15,000** in Center support. As with projects that receive full awards, Mini Grant reports must also include policy considerations or recommendations.

### Special Focus Topics

This year the Center has a particular interest in mini grants related to four topics (see page 10).

### Open Topics

Open topic submissions will be accepted for Mini Grants.

## Grant Application Process and Timeline

The Center's 2025 Research Grant Program application process is outlined below:

| <b>2025 Grant Program Timeline</b>  | <b>Date(s) or Deadline</b>         |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Request for Proposals is released  | March 2024                         |
| 2. Deadline for submission of Letters of Intent   | <b>May 24, 2024, 12 PM noon</b>    |
| 3. Letters of Intent reviewed and selected applicants invited to submit a full proposal | Completed by June 28, 2024         |
| 4. Proposal planning discussions conducted with applicants                              | July 2024                          |
| 5. Deadline for full proposal submissions   | <b>August 30, 2024, 12 PM noon</b> |
| 6. Center's Board of Directors selects projects for funding                             | November - December 2024           |
| 7. Final work plans drafted and accepted  | December 2024 - early January 2025 |
| 8. Cooperative Agreements issued, signed, and work begins                               | January - February 2025            |

## 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 (pages 11-12) and a narrative that 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 (an indication that letters of support will be secured from all project partners is strongly encouraged)

## 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. **Letters of Intent must be received by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania via email by 12:00 PM (noon) on Friday, May 24, 2024.**

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 within 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.

## **2025 TARGETED RESEARCH GRANT TOPICS (FULL GRANTS)**

### **1) Outdoor Recreation Industry Survey**

This research will analyze secondary data and conduct an original survey of employers whose businesses are directly related to promoting and supporting outdoor recreation in rural areas of the Commonwealth. There are four primary goals for this project. First, the research will assess the use and suitability of state programs to support the outdoor recreation industry. Second, models implemented in other states to support the outdoor recreation industry will be identified for consideration in Pennsylvania. Third, data collected will be used to estimate the percentage of businesses and employees in Pennsylvania that directly and indirectly contribute to the outdoor recreation industry and their economic impacts. Finally, perspectives from employers will be analyzed to identify challenges and opportunities for the sector.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Clearly conceptualize and operationalize the outdoor recreation industry and provide indicators of its presence throughout the rural areas of the state.
- Inventory and evaluate efforts and resources of state programs and agencies in supporting the outdoor recreation industry.
- Analyze regional, secondary economic and workforce data to measure the impact, direct or indirect, of the outdoor recreation sector on the economy and tax base.
- Assess state-level promotion efforts of outdoor recreation and the associated outcomes in a sample of states in the region, with the goal of comparing the competitiveness of Pennsylvania, and the opportunities available.
- Conduct a survey of employers to identify barriers that prevent the expansion of the outdoor recreation industry.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **2) Automation and Artificial Intelligence Trends in Pennsylvania Manufacturing**

A key factor in maintaining the competitiveness of manufacturing is the ability to invest in, and adapt to, new technologies and efficiencies. This study will analyze the current use of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) in rural Pennsylvania and make projections of its use over the next five years. Additionally, this project will estimate the impact on the rural workforce over the next five years. This project will also examine state economic development and technology programs to determine their ability to assist various sectors and employers in adopting AI technology throughout rural Pennsylvania.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Estimate the number and types of rural businesses likely to adopt AI over the next five years.
- Identification of the opportunities and barriers for AI adoption/usage among rural employers.
- Inventory current state and federal programs available to assist Pennsylvania rural

- employers in the adoption and usage of AI.
- Assessment of programs and policies in other states that are being used to help rural employers adopt and use AI.
- Assessment of the employee training needs associated with the adoption of AI.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **3) The Impact of Volunteerism in Rural Communities**

Volunteerism is essential to local communities. In addition to the direct service impact, it decreases social isolation and increases community engagement. Across rural Pennsylvania, population decline, transportation challenges, and other barriers may have caused volunteer shortages. This study will examine the extent to which rural residents are volunteering, the characteristics of rural volunteers, and the factors that motivate volunteerism. It will also measure the benefits of volunteerism on rural communities and individual well-being.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Estimate and analyze the number of volunteers in rural and urban Pennsylvania.
- Analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of rural and urban volunteers and reasons for volunteering.
- Catalog and analyze the different types of volunteers in rural and urban Pennsylvania.
- Estimate and analyze the demand for volunteers in rural and urban Pennsylvania in future years.
- Identification of public models to encourage volunteerism that might be applicable to rural Pennsylvania.
- Assess the impact of volunteering on communities and individual well-being.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

### **4) Assessing the Benefits and Detriments of Partnerships, Consolidations, or Mergers in Public Services**

Across the United States, local units of government and school districts with small and declining populations are faced with increasingly high per capita expenditures on essential services, such as fire, police, and public education, vis-à-vis the local taxbase. This study will examine available examples of partnerships, shared services, and consolidations/mergers in Pennsylvania and other states to explore how and why they occurred, and whether any of the approaches have been successful and led to more sustainable and positive outcomes.

#### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Assess 5 to 10 recent case studies of rural local units of government or school district consolidations/mergers/partnerships in Pennsylvania and comparable states.
- Within the case studies, inventory and describe the quality of services provided by government units before and after the consolidation/merger/partnership.
- Describe the reasons for the consolidation/merger/partnership within each case study, and the process to complete the consolidation/merger/partnership.
- Assess the financial implications of the consolidation/merger/partnership for each case study.

- Assess the challenges and opportunities resulting from the consolidation/merger/partnership.
- Address the applicability of out-of-state case studies to this Commonwealth.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **5) 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. Building upon the Center's [2022 survey of emergency medical service agencies](#), this study will focus on rural areas and assess the adequacy of the current workforce, 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 of providers and services.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Estimate 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.

## **6) 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:*

- Document and analyze the number, location, and characteristics of mobile homes in rural and urban Pennsylvania, and the number of residents in this type of housing.
- Provide data on the prices of new mobile homes, resale values/depreciation over time (relative to deeded real property), property tax implications, fees or rents, 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.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **7) Building Local Government Capacity in Rural Areas**

Due to limited staff capacity, rural local government officials often face difficulties taking action to address a wide range of issues due to time and resource constraints. A 2023 Center for Rural Pennsylvania [survey](#) of local government officials documented the challenges local government officials face when applying for transportation grants. A [2021 study](#) of chiefs of police noted similar capacity issues in pursuing competitive funding in the context of local law enforcement. This project will analyze methods state agencies use to distribute competitive grants to rural local governments. Research will examine outreach efforts by Pennsylvania state agencies to inform local governments about the availability of the grant and assess the amount and quality of technical assistance state agencies provide to facilitate completion of grant applications. In addition, it will evaluate what factors contribute to the success of local grant recipients and offer insights on how grant processes might be improved or streamlined to increase access, including lessons learned from other states.

### *Key Expected Outcomes:*

- Identify 10 to 15 major state or state-administered grant programs, across a variety of policy areas, for which rural governments in this Commonwealth are eligible. These grant programs must have been active within the last five years.
- Summarize and evaluate descriptive data, including the sources and purposes of funding, for the 10 to 15 major grant programs.
- Select representative samples of both successful and unsuccessful grant applicants, and identify and analyze the factors related to funding outcomes.
- Describe and evaluate the ways in which state agencies or departments provide support for grant applicants, including an assessment of any gaps in resources.
- Provide public policy implications and relevant recommendations.

## **2025 OPEN TOPICS (FULL GRANTS)**

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). Applicants must develop their own key outcomes and goals and provide a convincing rationale for why their research is timely, important, and has implications for policy makers at the state or local level.

For the 2025 grants cycle, the Center is particularly interested in the following *Special Focus Areas* addressed through the Open Topics category:

1. Managing population change in rural communities
2. Strategies for sustaining and growing the rural workforce
3. Rural school district sustainability

4. Research that builds on, updates, or enhances the Center's previously published research

## **2025 MINI GRANT TOPICS**

The Center invites proposals for smaller, nine-month projects, with awards up to \$15,000. The application process is the same as for full awards; applicants must follow the Letter of Intent guidelines.

Letters of Intent on open topics will be accepted for the Mini Grant Program. Proposed Mini Grant projects for this category should focus on basic data collection and analysis, time-sensitive issues, and/or the preparation of reference materials. Mini Grant open topics must show a clear relationship to one or more of the Center's mandated research areas (listed on page 3).

In addition to open topics, for the 2025 grants cycle the Center is particularly interested in awarding Mini Grants related to the following *Special Focus Areas*:

1. Case studies of thriving rural communities or models of local economic development
2. Assessing the impact of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) in rural Pennsylvania
3. Innovative approaches to increasing local government capacity
4. Research that builds on, updates, or enhances the Center's previously published research

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



## 2025 Letter of Intent Cover Sheet

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Project Title:</b>                  |  |
| <b>Project Director Name:</b>          |  |
| <b>Department:</b>                     |  |
| <b>Project Director Email:</b>         |  |
| <b>Host University:</b>                |  |
| <b>Address:</b>                        |  |
| <b>University Grants Officer:</b>      |  |
| <b>Grants Officer Address:</b>         |  |
| <b>Grants Officer phone and Email:</b> |  |

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Choose one of the following application types:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Targeted</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Open</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Open Special Focus Area</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mini Grant</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mini Grant Special Focus Area</p> <p><b>Enter your topic here:</b></p><br><br> |
|--|

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

| <b>2025 Estimated Budget</b>  |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Center for Rural Pennsylvania Funding requested:</b>                       |  |
| <b>Other</b> (include university funding - the Center cannot cover overhead): |  |
| <b>2025 Budget Total:</b>   |  |

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

**Identified project partners, co-authors, or subcontractors:**

**List all previous research projects, papers or publications on the same or related topic(s) by the project director or co-author(s):**

|                                    |              |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Project Director Signature:</b> | <b>Date:</b> |
|------------------------------------|--------------|

Attach a brief narrative, up to two single-spaced typed pages in length, that includes the following elements:

- Project description
- Research scope and methods
- Anticipated policy implications
- Identification of partners, co-authors, and/or subcontractors.
- A statement of acknowledgment that letters of support have been obtained, or are in the process of being secured, from essential project partners (e.g., organizations to be interviewed, sites to be visited)

*Submit the completed Letter of Intent via email to [LDimino@rural.pa.gov](mailto:LDimino@rural.pa.gov) by May 24, 2024 at **noon**.*