



The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development

Call for Research Proposals

Drivers of Rural Innovation and Implications for Community and Regional Economic Development

The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD) is pleased to announce an award program to support data access and research in rural business innovation and economic development. As international competition and knowledge intensity in economic activity have increased, innovation in new products, services, and ways of doing business has emerged as a key driver of productivity and growth. USDA's Rural Establishment Innovation Survey (REIS) provides a new and rich array of data on innovative practices and technologies that will allow researchers to address questions about the ways in which business innovation is happening in rural areas, and its dependence and impact on rural communities and regional economies. For example, are rural firms at the forefront of the clean energy revolution or are urban firms leading the way? Is the availability of workers with 21st century skills or digital infrastructure an impediment to rural competitiveness? Given the increasing importance of knowledge and information, are rural firms able to exploit spatially dispersed networks to mitigate the disadvantages of remoteness? What types of innovation are most closely associated with local and regional economic growth?

The REIS is a new (released in 2015) comprehensive and nationally representative survey on innovative technologies and practices, demand and use of finance, human resource practices, and other relevant establishment data. The survey includes an oversampling of rural establishments necessary to conduct powerful statistical analyses of rural businesses and their comparison to the U.S. economy. USDA seeks to build a community of scholars engaged in high priority research on rural business innovation and regional development through the use of the REIS.

To support that goal, NERCRD is requesting creative research proposals from economists and other social scientists across the country to use the REIS, possibly combined with other currently available data to address pressing issues related to rural innovation and economic development. We expect to fund approximately three of the best proposals, in the amount of up to \$30,000 each, and will also cover the \$5,200 fee for remote data access to REIS through the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) data enclave. Preference will be given to research proposals that actively engage graduate research assistants in the proposed research project.

Time line: Proposals are due by 5pm (EST) of February 25, 2016. Successful applicants will be informed no later than April 15, 2016, and the research should be completed by May 1, 2017. Awardees are expected to present their research at a national workshop and submit a final product or products for review and publication in scholarly journals no later than three months after the workshop. Options for a special issue in a journal specializing in rural or regional issues will also be explored. Awardees should include this travel in their budgets.

HOW TO APPLY

Send an electronic copy of your research proposal by 5pm EST on February 25, 2016 of no more than 2,000 words to Kristen Devlin at krd111@psu.edu with a copy to sgoetz@psu.edu.

We recommend the following format for the proposal, which will be evaluated on how well it addresses each of these:

- Motivation: This section should include a clear statement of intellectual merit of the research and expected significance.
- Relevance: This section should explain how the project will inform issues related to rural competitiveness and rural prosperity.
- Contribution: This section should be clear about the specific contribution to the scholarly literature, what has been already done, what gaps remain, and how the research team's proposed project addresses these gaps.
- Approach: This section should include a brief description of the research design in sufficient detail to allow reviewers to assess the viability of the work. In addition, this section should explicitly state the proposed hypothesis(es) that will be tested and the method(s) used to test the hypotheses.

In addition to the proposal, applicants must provide a *biographical sketch* or *Curriculum Vitae* for the PD/PI including Education and Training, Research and Professional Experience, Collaborators and Affiliations (for conflicts of interest), Publications and Synergistic Activities. The Biographical Sketch should be limited to 2 pages each in length, excluding publications listings. The vitae should include a presentation of academic and research credentials, as applicable (e.g., earned degrees, teaching experience, employment history, professional activities, honors and awards, and grants received). Include a chronological list of all publications in refereed journals during the past 4 years, including those in press. Also, list only those non-refereed technical publications that have relevance to the proposed project. List all authors in the same order as they appear on each paper cited, along with the title and complete reference as these usually appear in journals. This biosketch/CV is not included in the 2,000 word proposal limit.

Awardees are expected to conduct research using REIS data, accessed through NORC, to attend and participate in the workshop, and to provide a draft manuscript 2 weeks prior to the workshop, to be held in the spring or early summer 2017. The REIS data is only available to approved researchers through the NORC data enclave, and all approved researchers will need to complete and pass a data security course administered by the Economic Research Service (ERS). Approved researchers are required by the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act to be sworn in as temporary agents of the Economic Research Service. US citizenship is not required but approved researchers need to affirm they are not acting as a foreign agent.

Selection procedure:

The applications will be reviewed by a panel of experts selected jointly by the NERCRD and ERS, which will make the final selections based on reviewers' recommendations.

Budget:

A summary budget of up to \$30,000 is required detailing requested support for the overall project. Please use the USDA's Research & Related Budget forms available online. Funds may be requested under any of the budget categories listed, provided that the item or service is identified as necessary for successful conduct of the program, allowable under applicable Federal cost principles, and not prohibited under any applicable Federal statute or regulation. Budget items include:

- Personnel
- Fringe benefits
- Travel to the May 2017 conference
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Contractual
- Other direct costs

NB: Under this agreement indirect expenses (F&A) are not permitted. Tuition remission is not permitted for land grant institutions.

Important: Applicants need to contribute \$2,000 in-kind in non-federal matching funds (this could include faculty or scientist time contributed to the effort that is paid from non-federal funds; university indirect costs cannot be used for matching purposes). While further matching is not required, applicants should list any such funds in their proposal, whether they are federal or not.

Funds will be sub-awarded by Penn State University to successful applicants as subcontracts under 7 USC 3318(c) and subject to 2 CFR Part 200 and 2 CFR Part 400.

Supplemental Materials

The OMB Information Collection Request page is in the public record and will provide additional information on the survey. Supporting statements for the OMB Information Collection Request can be found here:

http://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAViewDocument?ref_nbr=201212-0536-001

An earlier NCRCD-sponsored webinar discussing development of the REIS is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9L89e7zNAA> and the ppt is here:

<http://expeng.anr.msu.edu/uploads/files/133/USDAERSRuralEstablishInnovationSvy.pptx>

A data report from Washington State University with crosstabs of all variables and a copy of the questionnaire is available to applicants upon request.