



The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies

Advancing Social Sciences-Based Research on
Food Assistance and Nutrition Challenges in Rural America

2013 Request for Proposals

DEADLINE DATE: MUST BE POSTMARKED BY APRIL 15, 2013

Background Information:

The purpose of the RIDGE (Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics) Center for Targeted Studies is to invest in innovative social sciences-based research that explores the food and nutrition assistance challenges of **rural people and places**. The program is especially interested in proposals that focus on Native Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and other racial/ethnic populations, as well as children and low-wealth individuals/ households. This document outlines the key information for applicants planning to submit grant proposals.

Maximum Grant Award Amount:

The maximum amount allowed for a RIDGE grant proposal is \$35,000. Applicants will be allowed to include a 10 percent indirect cost rate in their budget request. However, the total amount of the budget cannot exceed the \$35,000 level.

Geographic Areas Targeted:

RIDGE grant applicants are required to focus their research on people, organizations, institutions, or communities/counties located in nonmetro counties or rural places of the United States. Applicants are free to propose:

- Case studies
- Cross-sectional or longitudinal studies of select people and/or counties/communities
- Comparative studies within a given region (such as exploring differences across metro and nonmetro areas of the South) or across U.S. regions (i.e., differences across the South, North Central, Northeast and/or Western regions)

Take part in the upcoming RIDGE webinar:

We encourage you to participate in the upcoming webinar hosted by the RIDGE Center in February. The webinar will showcase this year's competitive grant program and answer questions that potential applicants might have about the RIDGE program.

The live webinar is scheduled for:

Wednesday, February 13

12 p.m. Eastern;

11 a.m. Central;

10 a.m. Mountain;

9 a.m. Pacific

Webinar participants are encouraged to access the following website approximately 20-30 minutes prior to the start of the webinar to ensure a successful connection to the Adobe Connect webinar site. In addition, participants are asked to call the following toll free number just prior to the start of the webinar to hear the audio portion of the RIDGE Center presentation.

<http://msues.na4.acrobat.com/srdc/>

Please enter as Guest

Toll Free Number for Audio Portion: 1-800-244-2500

Participant Code: 548982#

Eligible Applicants:

Social scientists employed by U.S. land-grant or non-land-grant universities, colleges, research centers/institutes, or other appropriate research settings, are eligible to apply.

Project Duration:

Grantees will have 18 months (July 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2014) to complete their research projects. However, projects should be close to completion by September 2014 to allow the Principal Investigators to present their findings at the 2014 ERS National RIDGE Conference planned for early fall 2014 in Washington, D.C. Participation in the conference is required for the P.I. of each RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies funded grant.

Award Notification:

All successful grantees will receive preliminary notification of the award by May 15, 2013.

2013 PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPICS

The RIDGE Center is interested in basic, applied, policy, and evaluation-related research proposals that align with one or more of the following priority themes (NOTE: Possible topics relevant to each priority theme are offered for your consideration).

1. CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

- Examine challenges associated with the availability and use of child nutrition programs or the advancement of child nutrition in rural areas. This could include exploration of: (a) factors associated with the utilization of school meal programs by rural school systems; (b) use patterns by schools composed of a high proportion of racial and/or ethnically diverse student population; (c) links between school budget cuts and the nutritional quality of school meal programs; or (d) impacts of school policies and programs that promote healthy food choices on the food consumption decisions of children and/or their families.

2. FOOD SECURITY

- Explore the current and/or changing characteristics of food insecure populations in rural areas and the strategies used to cope with food insecurity. Such studies could investigate: (a) the coping mechanisms employed by food insecure households that meet (or fail to meet) the SNAP eligibility requirements; (b) differential food insecurity experiences of individuals within households; (c) strategies used by nonmetro vs. metro residents whose SNAP benefits run out prior to the end of the month; or (d) the degree to which informal food assistance serves as a social safety net for different sub-populations in rural areas (such as rural/urban residents or racial/ethnic minorities located in different pockets of the rural South, North Central, Northeast and/or Western regions).

3. HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC/MENTAL/PHYSICAL INSTABILITY & FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPATION

- Assess the impact of health care costs on adult and child food assistance participation rates. Examine the degree to which food assistance programs serve as an economic safety net for low-income families/households, protecting them from hardships resulting from income losses and major unexpected expenses. Or, explore the nature of the relationship (if any) between the mental/physical health of individuals/families and participation in food assistance programs.

4. FOOD CHOICES: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS AND CONSEQUENCES

- Explore: (a) the economic determinants and consequences of food choices, including the influence of such factors as market forces and time use on program participation and weight status; (b) the role and impact of the food advertising/marketing strategies on food preferences, eating decisions, and/or nutritional health of adults or children; (c) the away-from-home food consumption patterns of adults and/or children and the consequences on their nutrition and health status; or (d) the role of behavioral economics and incentives in helping adults or children make better health/nutrition-related choices.

5. BUILT ENVIRONMENT & FOOD/NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM USE

- Examine whether key features of the “built environment” (i.e., availability of local offices, access to transportation services, web-based or face-to-face enrollment process) have effects on food assistance program participation rates. Determine whether federal or state policy decisions regarding the “built environment” have positive or negative impacts on food assistance program participation.

6. PLACE-BASED FACTORS AFFECTING FOOD ACCESS OR CHOICES

- Explore place-based factors that may affect the nutritional health of local residents such as the availability of a variety of healthy food products by type of stores, the cost of healthy diets, diet quality, and access to healthy foods. Assess the impacts of community-led efforts to promote weight reduction on the health status of local residents. Determine whether the expansion of local or regional food systems alters the food assistance and nutritional status of local residents, in general, or key sub-populations, in particular.

7. OTHER RELEVANT TOPICS

- Other important topics (not covered above) that the applicant would like to submit for the RIDGE Center’s consideration are welcomed. The key is to ensure that the research explores the social sciences-based aspects of your food assistance and/or nutrition-related topic.

Topics Not Likely to be Funded:

The following proposal topics are less likely to secure funding:

- Research on community gardens/community-supported agriculture
- Role of farmers’ markets in providing fresh products to local residents
- Case studies that focus on urban communities/neighborhoods without the inclusion of a comparative study of rural localities (see definitions of nonmetro and rural at the following ERS website: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications.aspx>).

Important Note Regarding the Grantee’s Research Methodology:

In light of the modest level of grant funding available, coupled with the short time period available to complete the research, grant applicants are strongly encouraged to tap existing secondary data resources to pursue their research investigations. A list of quality data resources available to support food assistance and nutrition-related research studies are listed on the following ERS sites:

- <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-security-in-the-united-states.aspx>
- <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance.aspx>

For an applicant who believes that primary data collection is essential to conduct his/her RIDGE study, we urge that a smaller scale qualitative research study be launched in order to ensure that it can be completed within the time period allowed for the grant.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

All proposals must be organized in the following manner.

- **Title of the proposal**
- **The specific research topic(s) being addressed:** Indicate with which of the seven broad themes/topics listed under the heading “2013 PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPICS” your proposal most closely aligns.
- **Principal Investigator(s) and Collaborators:** List the name and institutional affiliation of each research team member. Provide the telephone number, fax number, mailing address and email address of the Principal Investigator(s).
- **Project Summary:** Provide a 250-words summary of your proposal.
- **Project Description:** This represents the most critical part of your proposal. This portion of your application cannot exceed 10 pages in length and should be single-spaced (double-spaced between paragraphs). Please use a 12-point font to ensure easy readability. The Project Description should include the following:
 1. *Introduction and Problem Statement:* Provide an overview of the current state of knowledge regarding the research problem of interest in your study. In addition, specify what your research proposal will do to further advance our understanding of this specific food assistance or nutrition related issue being addressed.
 2. *Research Objectives/Questions:* Specify the research objectives or research questions on which you plan to focus.
 3. *Research Methods:* Describe the research methodology to be undertaken for each objective or research question. If sampling is being proposed, provide a strong rationale as to the relevance of the site(s) selected for your research investigation. If an existing data set is being utilized, discuss the quality and relevance of the data in terms of being able to address your research objectives or research questions.
 4. *Data Analysis:* Indicate the statistical procedures that you anticipate using for your data analysis.
 5. *Application of the Research Results:* Provide an assessment of the relevance of your research in terms of its contribution to the scientific literature, policy, and/or practice.
 6. *Project Timeline:* Provide a project timeline that specifies the activities to be completed over the period of the grant.

NOTE: Grantees will have approximately 18 months (July 1, 2013 to Dec. 31, 2014) to complete their projects. A “no cost” extension beyond the 18-month period will not be allowed since all projects MUST BE completed by December 2014.
 7. *Proposed Budget:* Specify the anticipated budget expenditures for your project and include a brief justification for these budget expenditures. As noted earlier, the indirect cost rate is limited to 10 percent. Moreover, no computer-related equipment can be purchased with RIDGE grant funds.

NOTE: The budget must include funds for ONE person (typically the project P.I.) to participate in a 1-2 day research conference organized by the Economic Research Service. Held in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2014, this conference will provide a forum for awardees to share the findings of their food assistance and nutrition research projects.

8. *References:* Complete citation of articles referenced in your project description.

- **Relevant Experiences of Researcher(s) and Curriculum Vita:** Briefly highlight the past activities that the applicant(s) has been engaged in that are relevant to the proposed research project. This could include a listing of relevant publications, reports and contributed papers. The Principal Investigator(s) abbreviated curriculum vita of approximately 3-5 pages must be included with the grant proposal packet.

GRANT REVIEW PROCESS

The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies takes seriously the need for a sound and unbiased peer review process of all research proposals that it receives. As such, all reviews and decisions regarding projects to be funded will be made by the members of the RIDGE Center's National Research Advisory Committee. Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. The scientific merit of the research being proposed (20 percent)
2. The relevance of the proposed research in terms of addressing one or more of the food assistance/ nutrition priorities of the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies, including a focus on key populations and/ or places in rural America (20 percent)
3. The soundness of the methodology being proposed (20 percent)
4. The project's potential contribution to the research literature; to informing policy discussions at federal, regional, state, and/or local levels; and/or to improving food assistance/nutrition-related program outreach/delivery activities (25 percent)
5. The qualifications of the individual or team that will provide leadership to the research effort (15 percent)

Questions?

If you have questions about any aspect of the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies grant program, please email Dr. Bo Beaulieu, RIDGE Center director, at jib@srcd.msstate.edu or Vicki Vaughn, Program Manager, at vickiv@srcd.msstate.edu or call 662-325-3207.

PROCESS FOR MAILING COMPLETED PROPOSALS

Please send ONE copy of your proposal to the SRDC. If you plan to mail your proposal by regular mail, please use the following address:

Southern Rural Development Center
Box 9656
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762-9656
ATTN: RIDGE Grant Program

If you intend to send your proposal by overnight or two-day delivery, please use the following address:

Southern Rural Development Center
190 Bost North, Room 410
Mississippi State University
Mississippi State, MS 39762
Telephone: 662-325-3207
ATTN: RIDGE Grant Program

No faxed or emailed copies of the proposals will be accepted.

PLEASE NOTE:

Your completed application must be postmarked no later than April 15, 2013



About the Southern Rural Development Center

The Southern Rural Development Center seeks to strengthen the capacity of the region's 29 land-grant institutions to address critical contemporary rural development issues impacting the well-being of people and communities in the rural South. Visit us online at <http://srdc.msstate.edu/>



About the Economic Research Service (ERS)

ERS is a primary source of economic information and research in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Its research is designed to inform public and private decision-making on a variety of economic and policy issues involving food, farming, natural resources, and rural development. ERS serves as the key leader of the Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP) and is the major sponsor of the RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies.