The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies @ the SRDC
Advancing Research on Food Assistance and Nutrition Challenges in Rural America

2010 Request for Proposals

Deadline Date: Postmarked by July 15, 2010

Background Information:

The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies @ the SRDC (Southern Rural Development Center) is pleased to announce the launching of its new competitive grants program in partnership with the Economic Research Service, USDA. The RIDGE (Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics) program is designed to invest in timely social science-based research that can advance our understanding of the myriad of food assistance and nutrition challenges impacting rural people and places in rural America.

The 2010 Request for Proposals is designed to outline the information needed to apply for a RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies research grant. If you have questions about any aspect of the application process, please contact Bo Beaulieu, RIDGE Center & SRDC Director, at ljb@srdc.msstate.edu or 662-325-3207.

Maximum Grant Award Amount:

The maximum amount allowed for any proposal is $35,000. Individuals submitting proposals will be allowed to include up to 10 percent indirect cost rate in their budget request. However, the total cost of the project must not exceed the $35,000 level.

Geographic Areas Targeted:

The geographic focus of the 2010 RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies competitive grants program is on the U.S. South. Comparative studies conducted within the region (such as metro vs. nonmetro counties in the South) or between the South and other geographic areas outside the South are both appropriate and encouraged.

Eligible Applicants:

Social scientists located in any U.S. Land-Grant or non Land-Grant University, research center/institute, or other appropriate research setting, are eligible to apply.

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Take Part in One of Our Upcoming RIDGE Webinars

Plan to take part in either one of the upcoming Webinars being conducted to introduce the 2010 RIDGE Center grants program and to respond to questions from potential applicants.

Here are two to the Webinars:

- Friday, June 11th - 12 Noon CDT
- Tuesday, June 15th – 12 Noon CDT

Webinar Link:
http://msues.na4.acrobat.com/srdc/

To take part in the Webinar, just access the link above 15-30 minutes prior to the Webinar to make sure you can connect.
**Project Duration:**

September 2010 through December 2011. However, the research project must be near completion by September/October 2011 in order to ensure that grantees can showcase their research findings at the 2011 ERS National RIDGE Conference slated for early Fall 2011.

**Award Notification:**

All successful grantees will receive an initial award notification by August 3, 2010.

**2010 Priority Research Topics**

The following represent the priority research topics for this year’s RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies grants program.

1. **CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS**
   - Examine challenges associated with the availability and use of child nutrition programs in rural areas. This could include exploration of: (a) factors associated with the utilization of school meal programs by rural school systems in the South; (b) use patterns by schools composed of high proportions of racial and/or ethnically diverse student populations; or (c) links between school budget cuts and the nutritional quality of school meal programs.

2. **FOOD SECURITY**
   - Explore the current and/or changing characteristics of food insecure populations in the region 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) strategies used by rural vs. metro residents whose SNAP benefits run out prior to the end of the month; (c) the degree to which informal food assistance serve as a social safety net for different sub-populations in the South (such as rural/urban residents, racial/ethnic minorities located in different pockets of the South).
   - Examine the influence of culture, tradition, and/or child socialization on food consumption decisions, or strategies for coping with food insecurity.

3. **HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND FOOD ASSISTANCE PARTICIPATION**
   - Assess the impact of community and/or household economic shocks (such as plant closures or job losses; family financial hardships), the housing downturn, and/or health care costs on adult and child food assistance participation rates.

4. **FOOD ADVERTISING/MARKETING ON EATING BEHAVIORS**
   - Examine the role and impact of the food advertising/marketing strategies (within or outside the school setting) on the food preferences, eating decisions and/or nutritional health of children.
   - Assess the impact of school programs and policies enacted to promote healthy food choices on the food consumption decisions of children and/or their families.

5. **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 an impact on food assistance program participation rates.
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.

- Determine if the expansion of local or regional food systems alter the purchasing and consumption of healthier foods by local residents, students enrolled in the local school system, or other relevant groups.

- Explore new approaches and/or methodologies for documenting the presence of “food deserts” in rural/urban areas of the South.

**Important Note on 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 your research investigation. A valuable list of quality secondary data resources available to support food assistance and nutrition-related research studies are described at the following ERS website:

http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/foodnutritionassistance/data/

For applicants who believe that primary data collection will be essential to the conduct of their RIDGE study, we urge that they consider small scale qualitative research studies to ensure that they can be successfully completed within the time period of 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 which of the six major themes/topics listed under the heading “2010 PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPICS” your proposal is most closely aligned with.

- **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 e-mail address of the Principal Investigator(s).

- **Project Summary:** Provide a 250-word 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. 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 in the South.

  2. **Objectives:** Identify the specific research objectives to be pursued in your project.
3. **Research Methods**: Describe the research methodology to be undertaken for each objective. 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 this data source in addressing the subject of your proposal.

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 your research might have in terms of its contribution to the scientific literature and/or its relevance to policy and/or practice (that is, what does it imply with regard to policy or program shifts that may be needed to further strengthen food assistance or nutrition efforts in the South?).

6. **Project Timeline**: Provide a project timeline that specifies specific activities to be completed over the period of the grant.

   **PLEASE NOTE** that grantees will have approximately 15 months (September 2010 – December 2011) to complete their projects. A “no cost” extension beyond the 15-month period **will not be allowed** since all projects MUST BE completed by December 2011.

7. **Proposed Budget**: Specify the anticipated budget expenditures for your project and include a brief justification for these budget expenditures. As noted earlier, only a 10 percent indirect cost is allowed. Moreover, no computer-related equipment is allowed to be purchased with RIDGE grant funds.

   **PLEASE NOTE**: Your budget must include funds for ONE person (typically the project PI) to participate in a 1-2 day research conference being organized by the Economic Research Service. This conference, to be held in Washington, D.C. in early Fall of 2011, will provide a forum for awardees to share the findings of their food assistance and nutrition research projects.

- **Relevant Experiences of Researcher(s) and Curriculum Vita**: Briefly highlight the type of 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. An abbreviated curriculum vita (of approximately 3-4 pages) of the Principal Investigator(s) should be included with the project proposal packet.

**GRANT REVIEW PROCESS**

The RIDGE Center for Targeted Studies @ the SRDC takes seriously the peer review of all proposals received. All reviews and final recommendations for funding will be guided by the RIDGE Center’s National Research Advisory Committee. Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

1. The scientific merit of the proposed research (25 percent).

2. Its relevance to food assistance/nutrition issues, particularly in the South (20 percent).

3. The soundness of the methodology being proposed (20 percent).

4. The potential contribution of the project to the research literature, in informing policy discussions at federal, regional, state and/or local level, and/or in refining program outreach/delivery activities (20 percent).
5. The qualifications of the individual or team who will provide leadership to the research effort (15 percent).

Questions?

Contact Bo Beaulieu (ljb@srdc.msstate.edu) or Vicki Vaughn (vickiv@srdc.msstate.edu) by e-mail or call the SRDC office (662-325-3207).

PROCESS FOR MAILING COMPLETED PROPOSALS

Please send three copies 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

If you will be sending your proposal by overnight 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

No faxed or e-mailed copies of the proposals will be accepted.

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOUR DOCUMENT MUST BE POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN JULY 15, 2010

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/