

CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SCIENCE

Research Project Leaders (RPL) – Request for Applications

National Institutes of Health (NIH)/National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) funded Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE)

The **Center for Rural Health Care Delivery Science** is seeking applications for a Research Project Leader. The Center aims to improve understanding of and identify solutions to challenges associated with the provision of health care in rural areas; utilize a community-engaged approach to research; and mentor and support early-career investigators as they transition into independent researchers. The Center is comprised of an Administrative and Mentoring Core, Community Engagement and Outreach (CEO) Core, and Statistics, Informatics, and Qualitative Methods (SIQM) Core.

OPPORTUNITY

A Research Project Leader (RPL) is provided 50% dedicated research effort for up to 3 years, is mentored by two Research Mentors and participates in Center career development activities. An RPL is expected to obtain independent research funding (e.g., NIH R01 grant) within 3 years. There is a limited budget (up to \$25,000/year) for other expenses outside of what is supported by the CEO and SIQM Cores.

To apply, candidates must first submit a Letter of Intent and, if invited, a full research project proposal.

KEY DATES

- Information Session: 10/13/2025
- <https://dhvideo.webex.com/dhvideo/j.php?MTID=m10338d98aa7fe193626ff536efeac872>
- Letter of Intent Due: 10/31/2025
- Full Proposal Due: 1/9/2026

RESEARCH PROJECT SCOPE

Each research project must fit within the rural health care delivery science theme of the Center. Example research areas include, but are not limited to, identification of facilitators and barriers that influence health care in rural communities, investigation into diseases and treatments that differentially impact populations in rural areas, and studies of health behaviors in a rural population. The Center is not seeking local (institutional) quality improvement projects.

Applicants are encouraged to identify two Research Mentors with their application, both of whom would be eligible for modest support from the COBRE award. If Mentors are not identified at the time of the submission, the Center's Administrative Core will assist in identifying Research Mentors for the RPL.

ELIGIBILITY

RPL applicants must have the following:

- A terminal degree (e.g. MD, DO, or PhD)
- Commitment from their Department Chair/Center Director to allow the RPL to dedicate at least 50% time for research effort.
- A research project proposal focused on rural health care delivery

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org

Supported by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number P20GM148278. MPI: Creager

The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

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LETTER OF INTENT INSTRUCTIONS

Interested applicants should submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) to

RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org. The LOI must contain the following:

- Name and contact information of the RPL applicant
- Descriptive title of proposed research
- A brief (2- to 3-page) description of the applicant, proposed project including rationale and specific aims, and potential mentors (if known)

Following review of the LOI, if selected, a full application will be requested.

FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

If invited, full applications must be submitted online at:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/c0b2f6b3d0b54d888560684cf235e791>

The following materials should be combined into a single PDF:

- Letter of Support from Department Chair
- NIH Biosketch
- Other Support page
- Research Mentors' NIH Biosketch (if mentors are identified)
 - Research project proposal - 6 pages maximum, excluding Project Abstract and References (see components for details).

RESEARCH PROPOSAL COMPONENTS

The research project proposal will be comprised of the following:

1. **Project Title**
2. **Project Abstract:** 500 words max

3. **Specific Aims:** Outline the key steps to complete the research project (1 page).
4. **Significance:** Describe the clinical impact of the research project and the gaps in knowledge that it will fill.
5. **Innovation:** Describe the unique and novel nature of the research project as it relates to rural health care delivery.
6. **Approach:** Further detail the Specific Aims and steps that will be taken to accomplish the research project. Describe how the research proposal will utilize services available from the CEO and SIQM Cores, and describe any other resources needed.
7. **Timeline and Milestones:** Provide a table and key milestones over a 3-year period.
8. **References:** List publications cited in the research proposal.

SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

All eligible submissions will be reviewed and scored on the following criteria:

- Qualifications of the candidate
- Impact on rural health care delivery
- Feasibility of achieving independence after 3 years as an RPL

REQUIREMENTS FOR SELECTED RPL

Upon selection, the RPL is required to work with Center Cores and Research Mentors to refine their proposed research plan for submission to an External Advisory Committee and then NIH/NIGMS for final approval. Additional forms for NIGMS submission will be required.

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Frequently Asked Questions

- **What if I may not be ready to obtain independent research funding (e.g., NIH R01 grant) within 3 years?**
 - Smaller Pilot Project grant opportunities are offered by the Center during other funding cycles.
- **Is funding limited to DHMC Faculty?**
 - Yes. Individuals from outside the DH system are not eligible at this time.
- **What if I don't have Research Mentors right now?**
 - The Center Administrative & Mentoring Core can help identify Research Mentors.
- **What is the anticipated start date for funding?**
 - June 2026, though this is dependent on the timeline for NIGMS submission.
- **Will we be scored on our mentorship team, similar to K awards?**
 - No, the internal review is focused on the individual applicant and quality of the science and research project described in application. The review is competitive but the NIH/NIGMS is not running a formal study section for this.
- **Can RPLs be current or previous NIH K award recipients?**
 - Yes, previous and current K awardees in the last 2 years of their award are eligible.
- **What qualifies as a terminal degree?**
 - Per the NIH, “for most Commons account holders, the terminal research degree will be a doctoral degree such as a Ph.D., M.D., or an M.D./Ph.D.” We would consider professional, clinical, and research doctorates to be terminal degrees.
- **What is the scope/definition of rural health care delivery?**
 - The research needs to involve rural communities or populations. Our scope is broad and not specific to any one discipline. Our COBRE award mechanism is required to have a Community and Engagement and Outreach (CEO) Core, so ideal research

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projects would leverage the CEO Core.

- **Do we need to have sites identified that we would be doing research with?**
 - No, if you already have sites identified, that's great. If not, we can leverage our CEO Core (and other resources) to help identify partners.
- **Do the project priorities need to be aligned with the priorities of NIGMS?**
 - NIGMS is the NIH institute that the COBRE P20 grant was funded by. The current topic priorities of NIGMS would not drive what your project is, as long as the project is around rural health care delivery science.
- **Is Community Engagement an essential part of the proposal?**
 - Yes, this is an essential component of the Rural Health COBRE award. Each of the RPL projects will engage in some way with the CEO core as well as our other scientific core.
- **When do you anticipate the COBRE may offer the next RPL cohort?**
 - The COBRE has funding for 4 RPL positions total. It is our intent to have 4 RPLs at any given time. After this call we will not have another position until one of the RPLs completes their 3 year award or obtains independent funding. Note each COBRE award is a 5 year phase, with the possibility of 3 total phases (15 years).