

## Call for Research Project Leader Applications

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 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 to support this mission.

### **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. The total available budget for the RPL is approximately \$250,000/year for direct project costs, including salary support. Mentorship and Core consultation expenses are supported by the overall Center, and are in addition to the RPL project budget.

To apply, candidates must submit a full research project proposal by the application deadline. Applicants are encouraged to meet with faculty from the Center's two Scientific Cores and Administrative and Mentoring Core to discuss their application and ensure alignment with the Center's goals prior to the submission. Email [RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org](mailto:RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org) to request a consultation.

If accepted, applicants must obtain IRB approval and complete the NIGMS submission package,

including PHS Human Subjects and Clinical Trials Information forms, within 10 weeks.

### **KEY DATES**

- Application Deadline: August 10, 2026
- Notification of Acceptance: September 21, 2026
- Target NIGMS Submission: December 1, 2026
- Start date contingent on NIGMS approval (anticipated March – June 2027)

### **RESEARCH PROJECT SCOPE**

Each research project must fit within the rural health care delivery science theme of the Center and utilize the Center's Scientific Cores in the design and conduct of the project. See FAQs for more information on working with the Scientific Cores.

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 must identify two Research Mentors with their application, both of whom would be eligible for modest support from the COBRE award. If needed, the Center's Administrative & Mentoring Core can assist applicants in identifying Research Mentors.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

Faculty investigators of all ranks are eligible, but [Early Stage and New Investigators](#) will be given priority. RPL applicants must meet the following criteria in order to be eligible:

- 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.

## **FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS**

The Application must be [submitted online](#).

The following materials should be combined into a single PDF:

- Letter of Support from Department Chair
- [Biosketch Common Form](#) and [NIH Supplement](#) (must be completed in [SciENcv](#))
- Current and Pending Other Support page ([Common Form](#))
- Research Mentors' [Biosketch Common Form](#) and [NIH Supplement](#) (must be completed in [SciENcv](#))
- Research project proposal - 6 pages maximum, excluding Project Abstract, Specific Aims, 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.
9. **Draft budget and justification:** detail how the project will use the proposed funding during the

36-month project period. If your project is selected to go forward to NIGMS for approval, we will request a final budget. Expenses may include:

- Research personnel
- Supplies
- Participant costs
- Travel to one scientific meeting per year
- Publication costs (APC not allowed)
- Other justifiable direct research costs

## **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. IRB approval and additional forms for the NIGMS submission will be required.

RPLs will be expected to participate in the Center's monthly Research-in-Progress meetings, monthly Rural Health Improvement Seminar (RISE) series, and engage regularly with each Core.

## **CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS**

[RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org](mailto:RuralHealthCOBRE@hitchcock.org)

Supported by NIH/NIGMS Award Number P20GM148278.

MPI: Creager

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## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Is funding limited to DHMC Faculty?**

- Yes. Individuals from outside the DH system are not eligible at this time.

### **What is the scope/definition of rural health care delivery?**

- The research needs to involve rural communities or populations, and address a gap in knowledge related to rural health care delivery. Our scope is broad and not specific to any one discipline.

### **Do we need to have sites identified that we would be doing research with?**

- 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 does not drive what your project is, as long as the project is around rural health care delivery science.

### **How will the Scientific Cores support Project Leaders?**

- Project Leaders are expected to engage with the Cores throughout the design and execution of their project. Core experts may advise investigators on project design, analytic plans, recruitment materials, data collection tools, community engagement approaches and more to ensure projects are scientifically rigorous and well suited to advance rural health care delivery science.

### **Is working with the Community Engagement and Outreach Core essential?**

Yes. As a Rural Health COBRE, we are required to have a CEO Core. Research

projects should utilize community engaged scholarship principles, although community engaged research methodology is not a specific requirement. Applicants are encouraged to consult with the CEO prior to finalizing their application and should describe how they will leverage the CEO Core in their project.

### **Is working with the Statistics, Informatics and Qualitative Methods Core essential?**

- Yes. Each investigator will engage in some way with the SIQM Core. Examples of SIQM Core utilization may include but are not limited to: partnering with them to apply innovative statistical methods, utilizing novel data sources, piloting new data in the rural health data warehouse, or contributing to the rural health data warehouse. Applicants are encouraged to consult with the SIQM Core prior to finalizing their application and describe how they will leverage the SIQM Core in their application.

### **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 as well.

### **How many Research and Pilot Project Leader slots are available?**

- The Center has funding for 4 Research Project Leader positions (3 years each) and 2 Pilot Project Leader positions per year. Thus, there can be 4 RPLs and 2 PPLs at any given time. Each COBRE award is a 5-year phase, with the possibility of 3 total phases (15 years). The current Phase 1 Award goes through January 2028. If an RPL project timeline extends beyond the end date of the overall award, the remainder of their project will be included in Center's application for the subsequent Phase.