Rural Renewal Initiative
Oklahoma State University
Request for Seed Grant Proposals

Synopsis: OSU faculty members are invited to apply for a research seed grant through the Rural Renewal Initiative. The proposed research project may include up to $90,000 in total direct costs and should have a duration of 2 years. One-page *pre-proposals* and supporting documents should be sent to ruralrenewal@okstate.edu by 5:00 p.m. CST, ***November 7, 2025***.

Background and purpose: The mission of the Rural Renewal Initiative is to catalyze the renewal of rural communities and places in Oklahoma and beyond through interdisciplinary research, student mobilization, and community engagement. We aim to work with faculty, students, and rural communities to discover effective ways to enhance human, natural, and technological capitals, which reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience. This seed grant program is designed to generate a highly interdisciplinary research portfolio positioned for exponential growth through external funding. A key feature of these efforts will be participatory research, driven by priorities and questions generated jointly by the community and the researchers. This seed grant program aims to catalyze a broad spectrum of research recognizing the complex and "wicked" nature of rural problems that must be organized, interpreted, and communicated using a robust conceptual framework for rural communities as coupled human and natural systems, uniting existing models for vulnerability, community capitals, and resilience building (Figure 1).
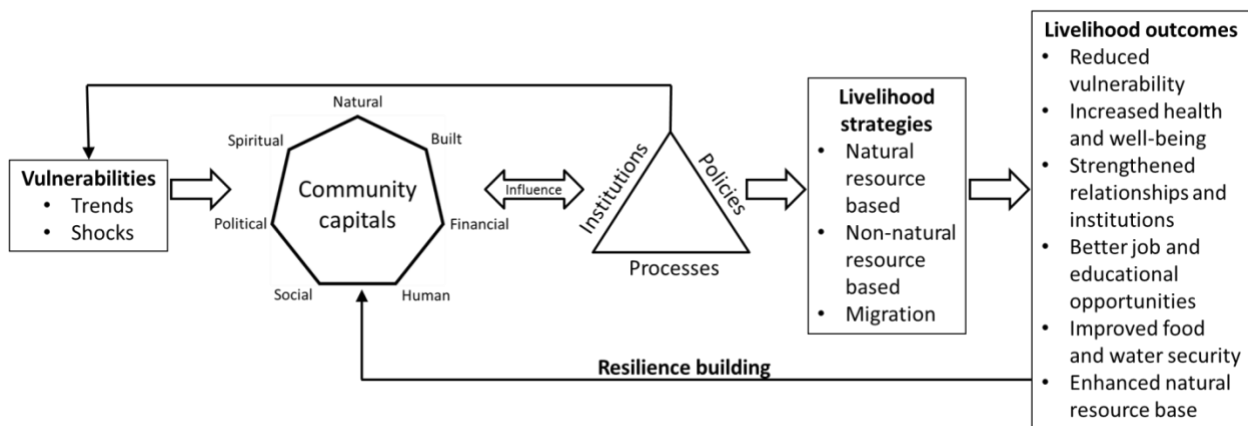

Figure 1. Rural communities experience vulnerabilities from both gradual trends and sudden shocks, the impacts of which are mediated through diverse, interacting forms of community capital. These capitals influence and are influenced by institutions, policies, and processes at local, state, national, and global levels. In this context, rural citizens choose livelihood strategies in hopes of achieving desirable livelihood outcomes, which create the possibility of resilience building through reinvestment in community capitals. Such reinvestment stimulates renewal and spiraling up.

Details: This competitive seed grant program is open to all OSU faculty members and their collaborators. It will provide funds to initiate research in one or more non-metro Oklahoma counties facing stressors including low education, low employment, persistent poverty, housing stress, or population loss as classified by the 2025 USDA Economic Research Service County

Typology Codes ([link](#)) **or** for research in rural communities located in non-metro counties in which the proposing researcher(s) has strong working relationships.
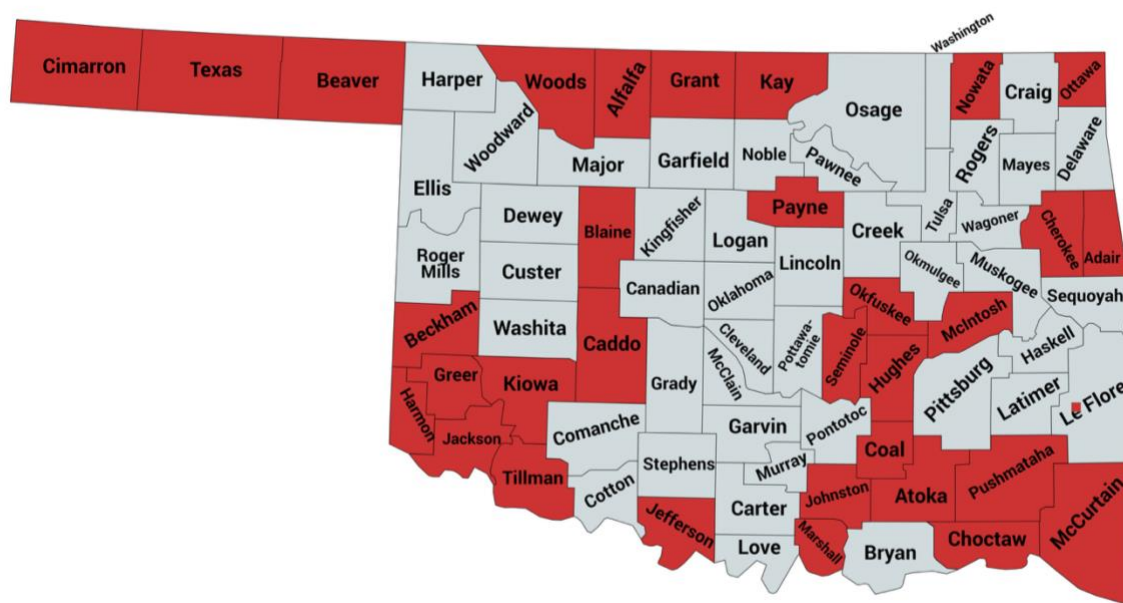

Figure 2: Non-metro Oklahoma counties with at least one stressor identified by the USDA Economic Research Service

We expect to award two seed grants for research projects two years in duration and up to $90,000 total direct costs. Projects should begin August 1, 2026, and end on July 30, 2028. This seed grant program is intended to stimulate community-engaged and place-based research by creating opportunities to engage communities in refining research questions and opportunities to build new community-academic partnerships. These seed grants are also designed to attract new researchers from all career stages into rural renewal research and to provide training opportunities for students and postdocs. Researchers awarded a seed grant are eligible to apply for a subsequent seed grant only if they provide proof of one or more external funding proposals submitted that leveraged the prior seed grant funds.

Research priorities: Research priorities identified through community and stakeholder input and prior related research include, but are not limited to, the following: creating suitable renovation, repurposing, or removal options for dilapidated rural buildings and houses; better understanding the opportunities and obstacles for increasing the quantity and quality of rural housing; developing effective community-led approaches to stimulate and grow small businesses; strengthening rural school systems and educational opportunities; increasing social capital and unity through community institutions and activities; preventing and remediating contaminants (esp. nitrate and bacteria) in drinking water; new approaches for maintaining or recreating rural health care systems; identifying opportunities to increase or conserve water resources; creating effective methods to develop civic pride and leadership; and predicting the impacts of climate change on rural communities. Research that complements or builds on

existing RRI seed grants ([described here](#)), the REEU project ([described here](#)), or the Rural Confluence project ([described here](#)) is encouraged.

Pre-proposal guidelines:

1. The one-page pre-proposal narrative should be ***written for the general public***, not for an academic audience. It must be in 12-pt Times New Roman font with one-inch margins and should include the following:
   a. Project title
   b. List of team members and affiliations
   c. Problem statement, research question(s), objectives, methods, and evidence that this proposed research is needed by your identified rural Oklahoma communities
   d. The pre-proposal must specify and justify the anticipated focus community or communities for the research. *Community here means a particular area or place and all its inhabitants.*
   e. A list of references is not required and not allowed for the pre-proposal.
2. Include a three-page NSF-style biosketch for each team member. The pre-proposal narrative and biosketches should all be compiled into one pdf file.

Pre-proposal review process: Pre-proposals will be reviewed by rural community members and other stakeholders, who will also have the opportunity to provide suggestions to improve the relevance of the research to rural communities and suggestions of potential partners.

Full proposal development process: A subset of the top ranked proposals will be invited to develop full proposals, which will be due ***January 30, 2026***. Before then, the PI(s) for each full proposal must travel to their intended focus communities to meet in person with potential partners and stakeholders, including OSU Extension staff, to receive feedback on their proposal idea. Each proposal team will receive up to $500 in travel funds from RRI to support these meetings.

Full proposal guidelines:

1. Include the project's title and list of team members and their affiliations.
2. Include a one paragraph project summary written for the general public.
3. Include a problem statement, research question(s), objectives, methods, evidence that this proposed research is needed by your identified rural Oklahoma communities, and a description of the role of each team member.
4. Specify and justify the focus (place-based) community or communities for the research.
5. Describe partnerships (or plans for developing such partnerships) with individuals and/or organizations in the communities that will be the focus of the research.
6. Provide a clear plan for communicating the research results to the focus community, with appropriate resources allocated to these efforts.
7. Provide a plan for leveraging the seed grant to pursue external funding.

8. Proposal narrative including items 1-7 above must be six pages or less and written in 12-pt Times New Roman font with one-inch margins. Proposal narrative must be submitted as a Word document. A list of references is required and is not included in the page count.
9. Include a budget spreadsheet based on the standard template for the PI's academic unit. Include a detailed budget justification. Do not include indirect costs.
10. Include a three-page NSF-style biosketch for each team member and relevant letters of commitment from partners in the focus communities. This must include a letter from an OSU Extension staff member who works in the proposed focus community. The budget justification, biosketches, and letters should all be compiled into one pdf file.

Full proposal review process: The Rural Renewal Initiative leadership team will coordinate peer reviews and ratings of the full proposals by external researchers. Projects supported by these seed grants must meaningfully engage rural partners in the design, execution, and communication of the proposed research. Proposals that include training opportunities for graduate students, postdocs, and early career researchers will be prioritized. Proposals that provide a training opportunity for one or more participants in the Rural Scholars program (link) will be prioritized. Members of the leadership team will not contribute to the final proposal rankings and will be eligible to submit proposals or serve as team members on proposals. Questions may be directed to any member of the Rural Renewal Initiative leadership team or submitted to ruralrenewal@okstate.edu. To learn more about the Rural Renewal Initiative visit https://ruralrenewal.okstate.edu/.