

RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS FUNDING EXPRESS

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The Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis (CERPA) Receives Rural Center Award

The Rural Center has been involved in research, policy development, infrastructure development and advocacy to improve the quality of life for low to moderate income rural citizens for over 20 years. Recognizing that issues of sexism, persistent poverty, racism and localism hold rural citizens back from accessing economic opportunities, the Rural Center began the Rural Economic Opportunity Initiative in 2005 to identify barriers to economic opportunities for low income families and communities and to frame new approaches for connecting rural residents to asset-building strategies within their communities.



As an initial phase under the Rural Opportunity Initiative, the Rural Center is conducting research to document the persistent barriers to opportunity that low resourced rural residents and communities encounter and the asset building resources that currently exist. The Rural Center has awarded the *Center for Economic Research and Policy Analysis (CERPA)* at Appalachian State University \$90,000 to conduct this research.

Led by Todd Cherry, Professor in the Department of Economics and Director of CERPA, the team also includes the School of Government at UNC Chapel Hill and Debby Warren, consultant. Together, the group will produce balanced and up-to-date “portraits” of North Carolina residents living on the economic margins and will compare rural/urban differences. In addition, they will identify successful strategies and best practices both nationally and within North Carolina that help leaders and small communities decrease poverty rates and uplift economic standards and economic well being. Lastly, they will produce a resource directory of state, federal and local resources on asset building, community wealth creation and poverty reduction where rural leaders can access tools, expertise and agencies that can empower their work with economically distressed residents in their communities.

CERPA is a multidisciplinary unit at Appalachian State University that conducts applied research and analysis that directly supports improved decision- and policy-making. CERPA’s program on economic and community development specifically focuses on providing and disseminating relevant information on social and economic issues at the local, regional and state levels. Given our home region, this entails a particular interest in issues facing the rural areas of the state.

The N.C. Rural Economic Development Center operates a multifaceted program that includes conducting research into rural issues; testing promising rural development strategies; advocating for policy and program innovations; and building the productive capacity of rural leaders, entrepreneurs and community organizations. Visit <http://www.ncruralcenter.org/> for more information.

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UNC System Standardizing Contract and Grant Processes, Principal Investigators Affected



Over the past year, the UNC General Administration and Ernst and Young have assessed areas of financial risk on the UNC campuses and have developed standards for best practices. This initiative, known as FIT (Finance Improvement & Transformation) seeks to strengthen and align UNC people, processes, and technology throughout the University. The current UNC FIT process improvement initiatives are in the areas of Contracts and Grants; Financial Aid; and General Accounting. Effective July 1, 2009, the UNC system is requiring that all campuses be in compliance with UNC FIT.

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at Appalachian State, along with Special Funds Accounting, has been working to meet the standards affecting contract and grant management. The purpose of the Contracts and Grants initiative is to provide guidelines for establishing and maintaining the baseline standards for the post-award process. The focus areas for these improvements are: 1) Account Setup, 2) Time and Effort, 3) Grant Management, 4) Billing and Drawdowns, 5) Reporting, and 6) Grant Closeout. The standards apply to all sponsored projects within the UNC System. Appalachian must submit quarterly reports to GA on its performance in each of these areas.

Included in the process improvements is requiring a "New Award" meeting with the principal investigator (PI) of an award if the award is deemed significant or complex; is from a sponsor outside the normal funding community for the University or discipline; the PI is new to the university, or has not served as a PI before; or if the award has significant cost share. A meeting can also be held if requested by the PI even if it does not fall into one of these categories.

These meetings, conducted by the Office of Sponsored Programs and Special Funds Accounting:

- Identify unique issues to the project, including budget alignment
- Provide an overview of University policies and procedures impacting the project
- Inform the PI and support staff about educational opportunities across the campus specific to managing the project
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the PI
- Identify personnel resources that will be used on the grant.

According to Susan McCracken, Director of Sponsored Programs, UNC FIT and specifically the new award meeting are an opportunity to clarify any questions the PI may have and to build a strong relationship between the PI and the university offices overseeing grants and contracts.

If you have any questions about UNC FIT or the new award meetings, contact Susan McCracken at 262-3066.

News of Note... *From the Grants Resource Center's GrantWeek for June 29, 2009*

NIH to Emphasize Outreach to Emerging Research Institutions through GRC

"If you are thinking of writing an R01 or R15 application, do it now. Funding will never be better!" said Walter Schaffer, senior scientific advisor for extramural research, National Institutes of Health (NIH). Schaeffer made the statement at a June 26 meeting he had with Rich Dunfee and Linda Anthony, GRC, and David Stone, Northern Illinois University. Schaffer was referring to the extraordinary opportunities currently afforded NIH applicants because of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Also at the meeting were Cheryl Kitt, deputy director, NIH's center for scientific review, and Manju Subramanya, communications manager, eRA communications, office of extramural research.

Dunfee, Stone and Anthony traveled to NIH at the invitation of NIH's acting director, Raynard Kington. His goal was to explore ways in which NIH can meet the needs of emerging research institutions. The meeting was the result of the [March 26 letter](#) submitted to Kington by Stone and Dunfee (on behalf of the GRC membership) that raised concerns about changes in the NIH peer review process currently being implemented, and its adverse effect on smaller and emerging research institutions. Kington responded in a [June 17 letter](#) noting that NIH "needs to remain mindful of the needs of emerging research institutions... or the diversity and impact of NIH-supported research will suffer." Kington named Schaffer as the NIH contact with whom Stone and Dunfee were asked to follow up. They will continue their efforts to facilitate NIH's outreach to GRC members by planning WebConferences and face-to-face meetings in the future, and promoting more faculty engagement in the review process.

GRC's August Conference will include a panel discussion on NIH's peer review enhancements, led by Stone and Sally Amero, NIH review policy officer. Amero will provide members with an up-to-date assessment of the progress of implementation of enhanced peer review, including further detail on the next steps in the process. Stone will provide an update on discussions that he and Rich Dunfee are having with NIH. --David Stone, NIU; Linda Anthony

Private Foundation Opportunities Amid Decline in Charitable Giving

Foundation resources are declining, private grantmaking has been reduced, and the trends are likely to continue for at least the next two years. The most recent Giving USA report describes a 5.7 percent decline in total charitable giving in 2008 from 2007 levels. Many foundations have already announced their intent to reduce giving further in 2009 and 2010, and foundations that do not plan to lower giving rates expect to hold total grantmaking to the same dollar amount over the next two years. According to the Foundation Center, only 22 percent of foundations expect to increase their giving in 2009, but only 14 percent expect to do the same in 2010. Despite these gloomy forecasts, there are still opportunities for funding according to speakers at a GRC hosted web conference on June 25.

Steven Lawrence, Senior Director of Research at the Foundation Center, and Lawrence McGill, Vice President for Research at the Foundation Center, shared their perspectives on the state of foundation giving, and expressed their thoughts on the future funding environment colleges and universities can anticipate.

Lawrence began the presentation by saying that, "foundations are digging deep to address the recession and are using endowment funds to continue to support causes important to them." A Commonfund Institute report described in a *Chronicle of Philanthropy* article details the recent decline in foundation assets as well as the increase in the use of such assets in grantmaking activity in 2008. Foundations can be expected to behave conservatively as they manage their limited resources throughout the recession. There will likely be a reluctance to fund new grantees, or projects with which they are unfamiliar, and an unwillingness to make financial promises they cannot fulfill. Much of the focus of foundation giving will be on continuing support for existing commitments. Other aspects of giving will likely remain the same. Project support continues to be the primary focus of funding on campuses, with capital and research support trailing far behind. Institutions already receiving some form of foundation support can also expect the commitments to continue.

It is important to recognize foundations are open to discussing future support of projects despite current grantmaking limitations. Lawrence explains that, "It is a great time to have a frank conversation about where you want to take your institution and how you can work with a given foundation on specific programs you are planning down the line."

Large grants continue to be awarded to institutions, as the Pew Charitable Trusts has shown in their recent giving in the arts, but foundations may find new ways to give these awards to maximize their impact. For example, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation last week gave a total of \$5 million in grants to aid economic and community development in Macon, Georgia according to the *Philanthropy News Digest* (PND). A portion of the grants, \$2 million, goes to Mercer University, which began the recovery project a year ago with a planning grant. The other \$3 million is directed to The Community Foundation of Central Georgia that will work with Mercer to revitalize flagging retail districts, and provide financial incentives for faculty and staff of Mercer to purchase homes in the area.

Partnerships like these between foundations, community groups and institutions of higher education are only likely to increase in number, as organizations look for efficient ways to have an impact on basic community needs says McGill. Colleges and universities and community foundations are unique sources of 'on the ground' knowledge on how to make things work and what has been successful, characteristics that also make these collaborations attractive to federal ARRA efforts.

Lawrence points out that a valuable free resource for keeping up with the latest foundation news is to register with PND and setup custom information alerts. He also encourages sponsored programs offices to frequently visit the Foundation Center's Focus on the Economic Crisis, and recommended Grantmakers for Education's website to stay apprised of what foundations are interested in supporting.

Foundation support for community development, an important giving trend, will be addressed at the GRC August External Funding Conference, 'Thriving on Change'. A program officer from the Greater Washington Workforce Development Collaborative at The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, will speak on how to build a network of partners in order to trigger community change.

GRC members can always contact their program advisor for assistance in obtaining more information about a particular foundation or identify private funders who may be interested in funding your project. –Malcolm Furgol

SBIR/STTR Reauthorization Passes House and Senate Committees

Recently, the House Committee on Science and Technology and the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee approved legislation reauthorizing the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Programs. These programs are the largest source of federal support for technological innovation in the private sector with more than \$3.2 billion spent annually. Throughout the House and Senate there is a shared belief that SBIR and STTR are essential in private sector job creation and in need of additional funding to accomplish its mission. While both chambers passed legislation there are differences with implications for higher education.

The Senate version is titled "SBIR/STTR Reauthorization Act of 2009" (S.1233). Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee Chair Mary Landrieu (D-La) said she believes the SBIR and STTR programs save taxpayers millions of dollars by developing new technologies and creating high skilled, high paying jobs. The Senate bill reauthorizes SBIR and STTR for 14 years. It increases Phase I awards from \$100,000 to \$150,000 and Phase II awards from \$750,000 to \$1 million. Additionally, the Senate addressed outreach to underrepresented areas by extending the Federal and State Technology Partnership program or FAST program (see *GrantWeek*, and the Rural Outreach Program.)

The House version, referred to as the "Enhancing Small Business Research and Innovation Act" (H.R. 2965) reauthorizes the SBIR and STTR programs through 2011. Bill cosponsor and Technology and Innovation Subcommittee Chairman David Wu (D-OR) said, "Given the current economic climate, we need robust SBIR and STTR programs to create the next generation of companies that will provide high-paying jobs and grow our economy."

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Wu's version includes a robust increase of Phase I awards from \$100,000 to \$250,000 and Phase II awards from \$750,000 to \$2 million. To ensure commitment from state governments, the house bill requires applicants submit a written endorsement from their state's governor. Another major difference in the two bills is the House addresses underrepresentation by establishing a "rural preference."

News of Note... *From the Grants Resource Center's GrantWeek for June 22, 2009*

Redesign Offers Cues for Teacher Quality Projects

Just as successful research proposals do, effective education proposals must convey an understanding of the state-of-the-art in the relevant discipline. A redesign announced last month by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) forecasts the tides of teacher training and should be shared with education faculty planning to submit proposals with any relationship to early, elementary, or secondary education in this fiscal year or next.

Opportunity to Coordinate Service Learning

The National Service-Learning Partnership has [released information](#) on this year's National Learn and Serve Challenge, scheduled for October 5 - 11. The goals are to spotlight the value of service-learning to young people, schools, and communities; encourage others to launch service-learning activities; build support for service-learning among decision-makers; and increase recognition of the Corporation for National and Community Service's Learn and Serve America program. Details on previous year's outcomes are available, along with information on the 2010 goal to engage five million college students in service-learning activities.

Other News...

FIPSE Comprehensive Program Cancelled

The Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) has announced there will be no Comprehensive Program competition in FY 09. This news comes after the department indicated, and GRC reported, that the competition would be announced the second week in June with an invitational priority for curriculum development in the humanities. As with the FY 05 cancellation, congressional earmarks and special focus competitions will eat up the FIPSE budget, not leaving enough to support new Comprehensive Program awards. Three FIPSE Special Focus competitions are expected this fiscal year; one, focusing on community colleges, has already been announced.

Those who were preparing to apply under a new Comprehensive Program should contact the Office of Proposal Development for assistance in identifying alternative funding opportunities, and to watch the FIPSE website for updates on the Special Focus competitions.

OMB to ARRA Players: It's Reporting Time

On June 22, 2009, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued government-wide guidance for agencies administering American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding. Agencies already have been providing OMB with weekly reports on their ARRA activities and posting the updates to their websites for public review. At the same time, campuses receiving ARRA grants are gathering the data—on project progress, job creation/retention, and funds expended—required by OMB for quarterly reports. Although the data collection site won't be available for awardees' use in time for the July 10 report, institutions must prepare their reports all the same, and submit a single, cumulative report by October 10. OMB's directive to the agencies is available online. This piece of guidance applies only to grants; additional information on the requirements associated with ARRA contracts is forthcoming.