

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

College of Agricultural, Consumer  
and Environmental Sciences  
Office of Research and  
Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station  
228 Mumford Hall, MC-710  
1301 W. Gregory Drive  
Urbana, IL 61801



June 1, 2015

Chris Hamilton  
NCRA Assistant Director and NIMSS System Administrator  
1450 Linden Drive, Room 205e  
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Chris:

I am writing in support of Dr. Ramona Oswald's development committee proposal titled "*Health, well-being, and economic opportunity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons in rural communities.*" Oswald is a nationally recognized researcher specializing in nonmetropolitan LGBT families. Her research is widely cited by other scholars, and has also been used to promote community development. Furthermore, Oswald was a member of NC1171 and chaired that multistate project for two years.

The goal of the development committee is to write a full multistate project proposal that will "improve the economic and social vitality of rural communities by improving the economic opportunities and social climate for LGBT persons living in those communities."

Research has shown that the social inclusion of LGBT people can strengthen communities by increasing economic productivity and innovation, improving health, building social capital, and reducing out-migration. The proposed project is important because it will create a national network of researchers and Extension professionals who will work with stakeholders to assess the needs and opportunities for LGBT people and their families living in rural communities. Although locally defined projects exist, there is currently no national-level understanding of these issues. This project is an opportunity to build the capacity of both universities and rural communities by creating a structure that enables team members to learn from and build upon each other's efforts. If this project is not conducted they will continue to reinvent the wheel in each location. This project is also an opportunity to provide research and outreach training to graduate students in the social sciences. Further, it will improve the knowledge and skills of Extension and other community professionals.

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The development committee will write a full proposal for either a multistate research project or a research coordinating committee. The full proposal then will be used to leverage external funding for research and dissemination.

My office considers this project to be an innovative and promising investment, and we give it our full support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Neal R. Merchen". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Neal R. Merchen

Professor and Associate Dean for Research

Director, Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station