

# Sustainable and Inclusive Rural Economic Development to Enhance Housing, Health, Entrepreneurship, and Equity

## Response to Reviewers

We thank the reviewers for their constructive comments. We bullet our respective responses below each reviewer's comments.

### **Reviewer 1**

The project continues a set of activities that have been underway through multiple 5-year iterations of the project. The topics are worthwhile and the methods appropriate. The text of the proposal has a section is duplicated "related, current and previous work"; this should be removed. The group could possibly pay more attention to governance--the proposed structure is fairly barebones in leadership and then a committee of the whole meeting once per year. More attention to organizing the group for policy impacts would be one potential way to strengthen things. There's mention of several institutions (e.g. RuPRI, RRDCs) but little thought about how the project will interface with these to execute the mechanics of policy influence. Similarly, more thought could go into how to structure the technical committee meetings to assure fruitful (but not too large) collaborations in seeking external funding.

- This reviewer raises some valuable points related to governance and meeting more frequently to ensure fruitful collaborations. While we continue to believe the current structure of the governance committee has a demonstrated track record throughout the many iterations of this project, with higher attendance at in-person meetings than virtual meetings, the COVID-19 pandemic did emphasize the importance of backups to this plan. Thus, we have added an additional note on the potential for virtual meetings.
- The reviewer also notes connections with several regional economic development institutions (RuPRI, RRDCs, etc.). The groups extant connections with these groups are extensive, intertwined, and would be difficult to clearly document. Additionally, the appropriateness of each institution may vary by a particular collaboration, so we note important institutions rather than delineate their connections.
- We also believe we made a mistake in uploading the proposal that led to the duplication of the "related, current and previous work." We have removed this duplication.

## **Reviewer 2**

I strongly recommend continuation of the project. The team of collaborators have strong background in research and outreach and represent a significantly high number of states to make the research relevant at a national scale. There is a great mix of well seasoned and new scholars that are contributing to this project which bodes well for the long-term future of the effort. The proposal is well written and provides updated context as they plan for the major objectives of the study over the next five years. The two main objectives are very relevant in the current context. While housing, health and entrepreneurship continue to be major issues in the rural communities, equity seems to have been lagging behind, driven by significant changes in social attitudes, some historical, and some more recent. The research team is encouraged to address this important issue in ways that captures the hesitancy in many rural areas to welcoming growing diverse population. Also, the research team is encouraged to go beyond the 'growth' mindset to take into account the practical challenges in 'growing' rural regions that are witnessing long-term population decline. Overall, this project has tremendous potential to move the needle as it relates to discussions on the future of rural development across the nation.

- We thank this reviewer for their complementary comments.
- We strongly agree with the reviewer's comments related to the importance of equity and agree that efforts that capture the hesitancy in many rural areas to welcoming growing diverse population.
- We also agree on the importance of not focusing on reversing the issues of population decline. While we argue this issue is worth mentioning and continuing to be researched, we agree that other topics are also important and hence also focus on housing, health, and entrepreneurial issues.

### **Reviewer 3**

There is no doubt in my mind that NE\_TEMP2249: Sustainable and Inclusive Rural Economic Development to Enhance Housing, Health, Entrepreneurship, and Equity should be continued. The proposal includes an excellent team with a strong demonstrated track record. Members are technically proficient, attuned and responsive to emerging trends and needs, and well connected to regional and national partners. Collectively, they represent a range of relevant expertise. The team continues to work in a broad range of topics critical to communities, especially rural communities. This is evidenced in part by five of seven REE plan goals being addressed by the proposal. These are later combined into two clear and complimentary objectives around (1) housing and health and (2) entrepreneurship and equity. While the proposal addresses COVID-19 at some length, and indeed COVID has shed new light on many issues, the issues addressed by this team predate COVID. The pandemic will undoubtedly influence research for years to come, but care should be taken to address emerging contexts of long-standing issues. Regarding outcomes, "increased, better, improved" are often all we can hope for in addressing complex issues. However, when possible, more concrete metrics and successes should be documented. In many cases, it may mean documenting vignettes, such as team members' analysis influencing adoption of a program, or noting instances when team members testified before a public deliberative body and recording the outcome of the vote. Finally, while the current team members are grade A, I'd encourage them to expand their ranks to include additional researchers from additional states. The current team members are recognized as experts and strong mentors and would be well-suited to encourage junior faculty within the team.

- We agree on the importance of not “over-focusing” on the COVID-19 pandemic and essentiality of continue to improve and measure progress on long-standing rural issues. We argue that issues like rural diversity and equity have been long-standing, but not given the attention that they deserve in rural areas.
- Additionally, we agree on the importance of recruitment for our group and are actively recruiting from new states. This was actually brought up at our last technical committee meeting. We also note the somewhat contradictory comment from reviewer 2: “There is a great mix of well seasoned and new scholars that are contributing to this project which bodes well for the long-term future of the effort.”

#### **Reviewer 4**

While the proposal would benefit from some refining in a few areas, I think the project has identified key rural issues and linked them with national priorities. It is broad, but so are the challenges facing rural America and I think Health, Housing, Equity and Entrepreneurship are all timely and important focal topics. In the future, I think the proposal could identify specific coordination strategies across investigators, but the track record of the group is assuring. The longstanding success of the team bodes well for future success. They bring together a range of skills, perspectives on rural, and diversity of economic circumstances in a way that strengthens the work. They have clearly been productive, conducted impactful research, and collaborate well together.

- The reviewer's comments on committee governance relates to the comments from reviewer 1, so we again note that we have added some backup plans for meeting to the proposal. We also agree that the track record of the group is impressive and we aim to continue this trend of collaborative efforts.

#### **Reviewer 5**

The narrative had some redundancies as a large section appeared in two different areas of the proposal. Overall the project has an ambitious scope of work, yet the work is critical to informing rural policies. The project has a diverse range of stakeholders and will ensure that previous collaborations are supported and continue.

- We believe that the “redundancy as a large section appeared in two different areas” refers to the “Related, Current and Previous Work” which mistakenly was uploaded twice. As we noted for reviewer 1, we have removed this duplication.