



NEWS RELEASE
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Contact: Mary Breidenbach
mabreide@purdue.edu

2024 Small Grant Awardees Once Again Offer Unique Approaches to Rural Challenges

– Announcing the NCRCRD 2024 Small Grant Recipients –

West Lafayette, Ind. – The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) is pleased to announce the 2024 recipients of our Rural Development Research and/or Extension Projects in the North Central Region Small Grants.

Every year NCRCRD receive proposals that offer unique and creative approaches to addressing rural challenges and 2024 was no different. This year’s selected projects seek to utilize generative AI to enhance rural healthcare; to study and assess the social value and impact of rural business entities on their community’s well-being; to customize a curriculum to support rural gateway communities in developing an outdoor recreation sector; and finally, to evaluate and develop a sustainability plan for a burgeoning food distribution program.

NCRCRD offers small grants to enhance the ability of the North Central Region’s (NCR) 34 land-grant institutions (LGIs) to positively influence the quality of life in the region’s rural areas. This competitive seed grants program seeks to support the preliminary work necessary to develop Extension programs, curricula, or the initial research for a larger project. NCRCRD’s 2024 small grant competition received 14 submissions from LGIs in nine of the region’s twelve states.

“We are encouraged by the diversity in topic and the number of submissions we received this year. The Center strives to inspire and support land-grant institutions to develop rural research and/or Extension programs to benefit the North Central Region,” shared NCRCRD Director, Dr. Maria Marshall.

All submissions are reviewed by the NCRCRD advisory committee and based on their recommendations, the NCRCRD board of directors selects the final recipients. Because NCRCRD receives its core funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA NIFA), the grants are also reviewed and approved by the USDA for consistency with Federal guidelines.

Funds awarded range from \$25,000 - \$40,000 and all projects must relate to the Center’s three priority areas of work — Creating Resilient Communities and Economies, Developing Leadership and Civic Engagement, Promoting Community Health and Wellness. Grantees have one year to complete their work. Upon completion, NCRCRD asks the Principal Investigator of each funded project to share project results or findings with the broader North Central Region and beyond in an NCRCRD-hosted webinar.

Please join the NCRCRD in congratulating the four 2024 Small Grant award recipients:

**Grant Title: Enhancing Rural Healthcare by Incorporating Generative AI and Machine Learning:
Building Stronger Communication Networks**

Principal Investigator: Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Purdue University

Co-Principal Investigator: Thomas Rickert, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

State: Indiana

Organizations: Purdue University & University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension

NCRCRD Priority Area: Promoting Community Health & Wellness

**Grant Title: Partnering to Customize Building an Entrepreneur-Friendly Community Curriculum
for the Outdoor Recreation Sector**

Principal Investigator: Gwynn Stewart, The Ohio State University Extension

Co-Principal Investigators: Myra Moss, The Ohio State University Extension

Nancy Bowen, The Ohio State University Extension

Kyle White, The Ohio State University Extension

Ami Choi, University of Minnesota Tourism Center

State: Ohio

Organization: The Ohio State University

NCRCRD Priority Area: Creating Resilient Communities & Economies

**Grant Title: Assessing Social Value of Nebraska Livestock Sale Barns to Assist with Community
Well-Being and Resiliency**

Principal Investigator: Marilyn Schlake, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Co-Principal Investigators: Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Jean Ann Fischer, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Michelle Krehbiel, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Randy Saner, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

State: Nebraska

Organization: University of Nebraska-Lincoln

NCRCRD Priority Area: Creating Resilient Communities & Economies

Grant Title: Partners in Produce – A Food Distribution Project in East Central Illinois

Principal Investigator: Krystal Hodge, University of Illinois

Collaborators: MaryBeth Massey, University of Illinois

Meredith Probst, University of Illinois

State: Illinois

Organization: University of Illinois

NCRCRD Priority Area: Promoting Community Health & Wellness

Additional information:

- For more information about 2024 Small Grant projects go to:
https://ncrcrd.ag.purdue.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024_GrantsAwarded_Summary.pdf
- List of all grants and fellowships offered by NCRCRD:
<https://ncrcrd.ag.purdue.edu/funding-opportunities/grants-and-fellowships/>
- NCRCRD Webinar series: <https://ncrcrd.ag.purdue.edu/webinars/>
- North Central Region's twelve states and the Land-grant Institutions:
<https://ncrcrd.ag.purdue.edu/who-we-are/land-grant-universities/>

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The North Central Regional Center for Rural (NCRCRD) is one of four Regional Rural Development Centers in the United States. NCRCRD's work links the research and educational outreach capacity of our region's 34 land-grant universities with our region's communities, local decision-makers, entrepreneurs, families, farmers, and ranchers to help address a wide range of development issues unique to our 12-state region. NCRCRD promotes regional collaboration by elevating the research and extension programs in our region; offering grant opportunities to support new and ongoing regional research, extension, and integrated activities; establishing a North Central Region dataset to encourage regional exploration; and creating networking opportunities through webinars, sponsorships, and making introductions between our partners. For more information, please visit <https://ncrcrd.org/>.

NCRCRD receives core funds from the U. S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA NIFA) as well as from the North Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (NCRA), North Central Cooperatives of Extension Association (NCCEA), and Purdue University, College of Agriculture.