



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Mary Breidenbach, NCRCRD  
mabreide@purdue.edu

### **NCRCRD Partners with Two Programs to Provide Technical Assistance**

*West Lafayette, Ind., November 1, 2024* – The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) was awarded two cooperative agreements totaling \$1.1 million. Both grants – the *New Beginnings for Tribal Students* with USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and the *PROPEL Technical Assistance Initiative* with the Delta Regional Authority – draw upon the Center’s regional focus and expertise.

- **New Beginnings for Tribal Students (NBTS), 2024-2029**, awarded by USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA): \$500,000

The USDA-NIFA program, [New Beginnings for Tribal Students](#) (NBTS), makes competitive grants to Land-grant universities to provide identifiable support specifically targeted for Tribal students and their academic success. NBTS aims to help increase the retention and graduation rate of Tribal students attending 1994, 1862, and 1890 Land-grant universities.

Over the next five years, NCRCRD will assist USDA-NIFA in identifying and assessing barriers by compiling and analyzing data that the NBTS project directors collect on the program’s barriers in recruiting and retaining students, and other factors contributing to student success. In addition, NCRCRD will collect programmatic data to ensure Congressional objectives for NBTS are being met as well as provide recommendations to overcome identified barriers.

Zuzana Bednarik, Ph.D., Research and Extension Specialist with NCRCRD, will be the project manager for this grant. Bednarik brings to this position an extensive background in research, survey development, and data analysis.

- **PROPEL Technical Assistance Initiative, 2024-2026**, awarded by the Delta Regional Authority (DRA): \$600,000

The [Delta Regional Authority](#) (DRA), a federal regional commission promoting economic development with an eight-state service region across the lower Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt regions, has partnered with North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD) on the PROPEL Technical Assistance Initiative.

The PROPEL Initiative aims to enhance economic development and community resilience by providing targeted support and resources to economically distressed communities in their service region. NCRCRD will assist five communities in Missouri and Illinois to increase their community capacity and help them alleviate challenges around issues such as public

infrastructure and business development. The Southern Rural Development Center also partnered with the DRA to provide similar support to communities in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Susan Odum, a Community and Economic Development Specialist with University of Illinois Extension, will be NCRCRD's community coordinator for this grant. As an Extension Educator, Odum brings to this position a successful background of empowering residents of small, rural communities. In addition, she is a 2015 graduate of DRA's Delta Leadership Institute Executive Academy and continues to support the region by participating in the Delta Leadership Network.

NCRCRD looks forward to partnering with USDA-NIFA and the Delta Regional Authority on these projects and to contributing to the North Central Region's growth and success.

###

*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.*