

## CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS

### ***Building a Better Understanding of the Challenges and Opportunities Facing Rural Economic Development***

***Economic Development Quarterly* and  
the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research**

**In partnership with  
The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago and The Citizens Research Council of Michigan**

*Economic Development Quarterly (EDQ)* is seeking research manuscript proposals that will contribute to our understanding of the economic challenges and opportunities facing rural areas. Authors of the selected proposals will be invited to share their complete research findings at a two-day conference hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, and Citizens Research Council of Michigan in spring 2020 in Grand Rapids, MI. In addition, the presented manuscripts will be eligible for consideration for publication in an EDQ special issue on rural economic development planned for August 2021.

EDQ is the premiere applied academic journal publishing research on domestic U.S. economic and workforce development issues. Its mission is to promote research supporting the formulation of evidence-based economic development and workforce development policy, programs, and practice in the United States.

In addition to providing an opportunity for invited researchers to share their findings, the two-day conference will provide a forum for national, state, and local policy experts, civic leaders, economic development practitioners, and policy makers to share best practices and ongoing policy initiatives.

#### **PURPOSE AND PROCESS**

The call for paper proposals is the first step in the process for compiling high-quality research for the conference presentations and the EDQ special issue. Authors of selected proposals will also be invited to attend a pre-conference workshop at the Upjohn Institute in Kalamazoo, MI, October 29-30, 2019 to present and discuss their research ideas on this topic. Researchers from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, and the Upjohn Institute, as well as invited experts, will be on hand to provide input and feedback to help guide authors in preparing their final research for the spring 2020 conference. Following the conference, authors will be given time to finalize and submit their research to EDQ's peer-review process for inclusion in the special issue.

#### **RESEARCH TOPICS**

EDQ is seeking research manuscript proposals that will probe the fundamental questions of rural economic development from within **each** of the following four research areas below. Of course, other topics related to each of the four research areas may also be offered.

##### **1. What is rural?**

Increasingly, economic development practitioners are focusing on place-based responses to improve opportunities for rural communities. To investigate the opportunities for place-based growth, it is necessary to develop a typology for evaluating the attributes of rural places. Rural America is not a homogeneous place and identifying the specific characteristics of rural communities can help guide what type of policy intervention may be most appropriate for each situation. For example, in “Strategies for Left-Behind Places” Hendrickson, Muro, and Galston (2018) ([https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018.11\\_Report\\_Counteracting-geography-of-discontent\\_Hendrickson-Muro-Galston.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018.11_Report_Counteracting-geography-of-discontent_Hendrickson-Muro-Galston.pdf)) argue that strategies connecting opportunities to workers are necessary to improve outcomes of left-behind places. While the approach is not limited to rural areas, the strategy is to target a group of mid-sized communities adjacent to lagging towns and rural areas and create growth poles that can lead to self-sustaining economies. Key to this is understanding the specific socioeconomic attributes of individual communities.

A good reference tool is the United States Department of Agriculture’s “Atlas of Rural and Small Town America” (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/atlas-of-rural-and-small-town-america/>). Specifically, the Atlas provides socioeconomic data including:

- **People:** Demographic data from the American Community Survey (ACS), including age, race and ethnicity, migration and immigration, education, household size, and family composition.
- **Jobs:** Economic data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources, including information on employment trends, unemployment, and industrial composition of employment from the ACS.
- **County classifications:** The rural-urban continuum, economic dependence, persistent poverty, persistent child poverty, population loss, onshore oil/natural gas counties, and other Economic Research Service county typology codes.
- **Income:** Data on median household income, per capita income, and poverty (including child poverty).
- **Veterans:** Data on veterans, including service period, education, unemployment, income, and demographic characteristics.

The goal of papers for this area of research would be to analyze existing typologies for rural communities and to develop new frameworks that would lend themselves to specific policy opportunities. Research topics could include:

- Identify rural places with specific natural amenities that would make them attractive for tourism, recreation, or potential retirement destinations
- Rural places with a specific industry or natural resource, such as natural gas, oil, or ethanol
- Rural places adjacent to metropolitan areas
- Relative availability of key amenities such as health care and broadband access
- Workforce training and skill development within a county or region

Papers could investigate a specific type of rural place or create a typology for classifying all rural counties according to a set of selected attributes.

## 2. Quality of Life

Rural areas offer a variety of living environments and lifestyles attractive to a very diverse population. These physical environments include coastlines, valleys, forests, scenic deserts, and open farm land.

Regardless of their physical dissimilarities, many rural areas share the same opportunities and challenges. All have small towns, and the social ambiance of these communities is a key factor to their attractiveness. Most rural communities, unfortunately, also share a deficiency of services that can threaten the quality of life for their citizens – access to health care, Internet access, public safety, transportation, education/training services, and cultural opportunities, to name a few.

What attracts people to rural areas? Research resonates with quality-of-life amenities and family and cultural ties as reasons for living and working in rural communities. Rural environments aren't for everyone; yet, how can rural communities remain an appealing option for persons desiring this type of environment?

The goal of papers for this area of research is to probe the fundamental questions of quality of life in rural areas. Possible research topics include:

- What social and service barriers are stopping people and businesses from moving to their preferred rural environment? Equally important, what social and service barriers are pushing them to leave their preferred rural location?
- What makes small towns special?
- What advancements in the delivery of goods and services in rural areas has improved attractiveness to rural communities?
- What can be done to improve access to health care, especially for older residents who would like to remain in place?
- What are the housing challenges facing rural areas?
- What progress has been made and what challenges are still being faced with efforts to expand broadband access?

### **3. Talent**

Rural areas, not adjacent to growing urban areas, struggle with thin labor markets for high-demand specialized skills that can make them unattractive to technology-based growing industries. At the same time, while food processing may continue to grow, other production and assembly operations in rural areas continue to face strong international pressures. In short, rural areas, dependent on their natural-resource attributes, including agriculture, mining, and tourism, can find it difficult to retrain their existing workforce and/or to attract the required talent necessary to grow a more diversified economic base. This is a growing issue as a sizeable number of rural residents are feeling that they are being left behind economically, as well as culturally and socially. In addition, recent evidence suggests that fewer individuals and households are willing to move for employment opportunities.

If this trend strengthens and continues, it will put more pressure on policy makers to bolster economic incentives for rural development that are accessible to rural residents who are unemployed, underemployed, or have just given up looking for work.

Many policy makers are looking at endogenous growth opportunities such as entrepreneurship and promoting product development at existing firms. These efforts, to be successful, will also require strong partnerships with the area's community and technical colleges.

The goal of papers for this area of research is to identify challenges and opportunities for rural workforce and business development, as well as areas where policy intervention is warranted. Possible research topics could include:

- The role of high schools and community colleges in steering students in rural areas toward gainful job opportunities
- Geographic mobility of young workers and the factors that would attract them to rural areas
- Assessing strategies used by businesses located in rural areas to attract and retain workers
- Policies that would spur sustainable job growth in rural areas
- Identifying the necessary ingredients to promote small business formation and entrepreneurship in rural areas

#### **4. Attracting and undertaking capital investment in rural communities**

Given the shortage of highly educated workers, an aging workforce, the lack of a diversified economic base, and the well-known advantages of urban areas to attract and retain high-tech operations, many rural areas find it difficult to attract capital investors. Moreover, financial institutions in rural areas do not have the expertise or experience to venture into more sophisticated and complex banking products. Further, venture capitalists tend to ignore rural areas due to the difficulty of monitoring potential investments.

The goal of papers for this area of research is to explore alternative financial resources and products that could support further business investment in rural areas. Possible research topics could include:

- What causes businesses and/or investors to not consider rural communities and why?
- What types of funding sources are available (traditional and nontraditional) from which rural investors can draw upon when considering whether to invest in rural development initiatives?
- How could community and regional banks collaborate on rural investment opportunities?
- What attracts investors and/or businesses to rural communities and why?

#### **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

Interested authors should submit paper proposals not exceeding 3 to 5 pages, double-spaced, describing the proposed research, data, and methodology. The proposed research must also address key issues and suggest policy implications that inform national and state policy. Authors must also submit a current curriculum vitae. **Submitted paper proposals should not have been previously published nor be currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.**

Paper proposals must be emailed to [edq@upjohn.org](mailto:edq@upjohn.org) by **May 31, 2019**. Please contact Claudette Robey, EDQ Managing Editor, with any questions at [edq@upjohn.org](mailto:edq@upjohn.org) or by phone at 269-385-0469.

Selected authors will be invited to present their completed research papers at a spring 2020 two-day conference in Grand Rapids, MI. While authors are expected to present completed papers at the conference, we understand that the findings may be preliminary and encourage authors to revise their manuscripts as they receive constructive feedback from conference panelists. **The senior author of the paper is expected to present at the conference.** Lodging will be paid for the selected authors, and transportation for the selected authors will be reimbursed.

Authors of selected proposals will also be invited to attend a pre-conference workshop at the Upjohn Institute in Kalamazoo, MI, October 29-30, 2019 to present and discuss preliminary dimensions of their research. Researchers from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, and the Upjohn Institute, as well as invited experts, will provide input and feedback to help guide authors in preparing their final research for the spring 2020 conference. Lodging will be paid for the selected authors, and transportation for the selected authors will be reimbursed.

Following the conference, authors will then be asked to submit their completed papers to EDQ no later than July 1, 2020. Papers are required to go through the journal's peer review process for inclusion in the special issue.

#### **TIMELINE**

- Paper proposals due by **May 31, 2019**
- Selected authors notified by **June 28, 2019**
- Pre-conference workshop at the Upjohn Institute in Kalamazoo, MI, **October 29-30, 2019**
- Selected authors present papers at conference in Grand Rapids, MI **spring 2020**
- Completed research papers submitted to EDQ no later than **July 1, 2020**
- Target release of EDQ special issue is **August 2021** (but may be published online in advance)

#### **SPONSORS**

The conference is sponsored by Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago; the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent public affairs organization devoted to providing factual, unbiased, independent information on significant issues concerning state and local government organization and finance; and the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent research organization devoted to investigating the causes and effects of unemployment ([www.upjohn.org](http://www.upjohn.org)). The Upjohn Institute houses *Economic Development Quarterly*, which is published by Sage Publications, and both are committed to advancing applied research on economic development and workforce development that can inform policy.