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Enhancing Rural Sustainability Project Status Report

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Enhancing Rural Sustainability Project
Status Report
January 2001

Summary

Six Long-Term Policy Research Areas are presented for the Board's consideration:

1. Agriculture in Nebraska: Preserving Family Farms and Enhancing Agricultural Productivity (*Status Report* (SR), pp. 2-4)
2. Economic Development, Community Structuring, and Organization (SR, pp. 5-6)
3. Information and Communications Technology (SR, pp. 7-8)
4. Populations: Brain Drain and Immigration (SR, pp. 9-11)
5. Quality of Life: Health, Welfare, and Well-Being (SR, pp. 12-13)
6. Community Indicators (SR, p. 14)

Five Procedures/Approaches that can be used to initiate the research are identified:

1. PPC Primarily Responsible to Conduct Research (SR, pp. 16-17)
2. Ad Hoc Team of Researchers (SR, p. 17)
3. Faculty Member Spearheads Research (SR, p. 17)
4. Existing Unit Spearheads Research (SR, pp. 17-18)
5. RFP Process (SR, p. 18)*

*The RFP Process is the approach we recommend.

Costs for the research:

It is estimated that each project will cost between \$80,000-\$100,000 (SR, p. 19)

PPC Activities During 2000 Relevant to Enhancing Rural Sustainability

1. Carbon Sequestration (SR, p. 20)
2. Genetically Modified Foods (SR, p. 20)
3. Meat Inspection (SR, p. 20)
4. Paying for the Good Life (SR, pp. 20-21)
5. Policy Seminar Series (SR, p. 21)
6. Policy Updates for Legislators (SR, p. 21)
7. School Organization and Finance (SR, pp. 21-22)
8. Social Capital in Rural Nebraska (SR, p. 22)
9. Succession in Government and Community Leadership Project (SR, p. 22)
10. Survey of Public Policy Priorities of Urban and Rural Nebraskans (SR, p. 22)
11. Urban/Rural Well-Being Project (SR, p. 22)

Faculty Working on Issues Relevant to Enhancing Rural Sustainability (SR, Appendix I)

Research Proposal: Determining Turnover in Nebraska's State Government (SR, Appendix II)



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Background

For the past year, the PPC has been working to identify a small list of key issues related to enhancing rural sustainability that would benefit from University research, with special attention paid to research activities already underway or in the planning process at the University. We also have been considering procedural options to determine the best way to facilitate the research to be conducted.

We engaged in the following activities to identify the issues and resources:

- solicited input from University faculty and staff from all the campuses;
- conducted listening sessions with faculty and staff (10-20 faculty/staff per session);
- met with policymakers from the legislative (focusing on committee chairs) and executive branches of government, as well with individuals as from non-governmental agencies, associations, etc.; and,
- consulted with other experts outside Nebraska.

Six Long-Term Policy Research Areas

In light of the input we received, six research areas for the Board's consideration are identified:

1. Agriculture in Nebraska: Preserving Family Farms and Enhancing Agricultural Productivity (Status Report (SR), pp. 2-4)
2. Economic Development, Community Structuring, and Organization (SR, pp. 5-6)
3. Information and Communications Technology (SR, pp. 7-8)
4. Populations: Brain Drain and Immigration (SR, pp. 9-11)
5. Quality of Life: Health, Welfare, and Well-Being (SR, pp. 12-13)
6. Community Indicators (SR, p. 14)

Agriculture in Nebraska: Preserving Family Farms and Enhancing Agricultural Productivity

The viability of the family farm is one of the state's most challenging issues. Net family farm income has fallen dramatically. The paradox is that many family farms are failing or at-risk for failure, even though family farms are currently more productive than ever. Farms are increasingly either very large or are hobby farms. Many predict the demise of the traditional family farm. Value added agriculture provides some options for sustained and increased competitiveness. Greater access to capital is needed to fund agricultural activities if Nebraska's agricultural sector is going to remain competitive in national and international markets. Growth capital has been difficult for entrepreneurial farmers to access.

SUGGESTED AGRICULTURE POLICY TOPICS

- Does the family farm in Nebraska realistically have a future?
 - ▶ what does that future look like?
 - ▶ assets of family farms
 - ▶ the challenges to family farm viability

- What is the relationship between farm viability and rural community viability?
 - ▶ economic strength or weakness in rural communities and the impact on family farms

- What is the role of "small farms" in the state economy?
 - ▶ conduct a study similar to the California study that examined the impact of small farms on the California economy

- Conduct a policy analysis of state and federal policies related to family farms.
 - ▶ barriers to family farm sustainability
 - ▶ supports of family farm sustainability

- Summarize the variety of entrepreneurial activities available to family farmers.
 - ▶ what is being done (Nebraska and elsewhere)?
 - ▶ what can be done?

- Investigate how to increase access to small business loans and risk capital and farmer risk management.
 - ▶ ways that family farms can get access to capital
 - ▶ advisability for the state to get involved in facilitating access to capital for farmers/producers, and, if so, how?

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- Catalog small business concepts that apply to family farms.
 - ▶ just-in-time inventory
 - ▶ customizing marketing

- Study value-added options available for Nebraska's farmers and livestock producers.
 - ▶ how to strengthen and expand links between agricultural producers and global markets; that is, how economic development infrastructure can help move beyond local markets into international markets
 - ▶ the incentives and mechanisms for environmental value-added opportunities (carbon storage markets, water markets, creating new resource markets)
 - ▶ whether state law could be changed to allow local lockers to sell/slaughter beef and pork and whether there a demand for it
 - ▶ agricultural niche markets (e.g., Omega 3 fatty acid eggs are not in production anywhere and Nebraska is one of the largest egg producers in US; use of soybeans in textiles; milk weeds to down)
 - ▶ alternative products/marketing/niche marketing for forest/tree products
 - ▶ use of animal production for human medicine (e.g., organ transplants from pigs)
 - ▶ overall opportunities and limits for agriculture in niche markets, value added markets, and access to markets

- Assessment of the market for sequestering carbon.
 - ▶ legal possibilities and barriers
 - ▶ what kinds of agricultural and forestry practices are available to Nebraskans to successfully compete in the market?
 - ▶ role for the state to play in facilitating and/or protecting this market?

- Studies of sustainable agriculture and their role in family farming activities.
 - ▶ water use efficiency
 - ▶ dry land crops
 - ▶ conjunctive use
 - ▶ water banking
 - ▶ alternative crops
 - ▶ land use practices and the impact of such practices on drought vulnerability and climate change

- Studies of what other states (e.g., Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota) have done successfully related to crop diversification, including horticultural crops.

- What are the effects of urban intrusion on family agricultural producers?

- What are the major trends affecting family farmers and impacting Nebraska's position as top agricultural producer?

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- Analyze the impact of Family Farm Amendment, including its effect on asset contributions to joint farm ventures and the impact on animal production.
- Study agricultural contracting options and cooperatives that reap higher profits for producers.
 - ▶ models of organizational communication to develop local food networks
- Examine how production systems influence public health.
 - ▶ environmental and human health impact (e.g., metal toxicity, use of estrogens) of large production units, including beef, poultry, chicken, turkey, etc.
 - ▶ costs and benefits of various environmental regulations on agriculture
 - ▶ agricultural health and ecological problems (e.g., lymphoma in rural NE and agrochemicals, such as Agrizine, that could initiate health problems even though not carcinogenic)
- What options for low-cost cow/calf production might family farmers utilize?
- Examine regulatory barriers to the production and use of industrialized hemp, and assess hemp's marketability.
- Examine how legal rulings might be used to set agricultural policy that benefits family farmers.
 - ▶ unfair purchasing (Pickett vs. IBP) and its impact on agricultural production
 - ▶ what constitutes a monopoly in various agricultural markets/industries?
 - ▶ are current anti-trust provisions being enforced?
- What does the history teach us?
 - ▶ farming on the Great Plains
 - ▶ international trends in family farming
- How does the situation in Nebraska compare to other jurisdictions?
 - ▶ national
 - ▶ international

Economic Development, and Community Structuring and Organization

Some of Nebraska's rural communities face the possibility of elimination, and there is even talk of county consolidation. The threat of the rural community is a threat to the sustainability of the family that farms. Yet not all is bleak in rural Nebraska. There are also numerous rural communities that have been thriving, are thriving, and will be thriving. For the most part, the sustainability of rural communities is rooted in their economic viability. But rural sustainability is more than just economics: The structures and organization of communities are important, too.

SUGGESTED "ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMUNITY STRUCTURING AND ORGANIZATION" POLICY TOPICS

- What are the role and needs of small businesses in rural communities?
- What can be done to promote additional job opportunities in rural areas?
 - ▶ what incentives are appropriate/feasible? (e.g., small, start-ups often don't qualify for tax breaks)
- What is the right economic mix for a local economy?
 - ▶ are there patterns of common characteristics across thriving Nebraska communities and the Great Plains?
 - ▶ are some communities simply unable to support certain type of industries (e.g., compare Wisconsin small manufacturing towns versus Nebraska's small communities)?
- Develop models of local economic development planning.
 - ▶ for decisionmakers to select among alternatives
 - ▶ problem of competing against governmental entities which also may be trying to provide services (e.g., local gravel suppliers competing with county governments)
- Examine economic risk management and diversification options.
 - ▶ making risk capital available to entrepreneurs
 - ▶ how can rural businesses capture capital?
 - ▶ what are models for promoting entrepreneurial development?
- How can wealth be created and kept in communities?
- Study non-profit community foundations in rural Nebraska.
 - ▶ who are they?
 - ▶ what are they funding?
 - ▶ using non-profit foundations as a mechanism to preserve wealth in rural communities.

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- Examine relationships between state and local governments, for the purpose of looking at whether rural sustainability is enhanced or frustrated by governmental activities.
 - ▶ overlap of responsibilities
 - ▶ duplication of efforts
 - ▶ the role of governmental regulation in ability/inability of local community structuring and organization (e.g., do local governments have autonomy/flexibility to address new realities?)
 - ▶ roads issues (e.g., what are the advantages/disadvantages of Nebraska's Department of Roads compared to other states' Departments of Transportation?).

- What is the impact of government employment (at the local, state, federal level) on local economies?
 - ▶ current impact
 - ▶ potential future impact

- Examine local government finances and services.
 - ▶ alternatives to property taxes on local level
 - ▶ the impact of property tax capping on local governments

- Look at local budgeting processes and catalog those that facilitate and those that hinder creative organization.
 - ▶ what is being done now and how does that compare to the "textbook" models of budgeting?

- ▶ What is the minimum level of funding required to provide government (and private) services in a community?
 - ▶ local tax and spending decisions and lids
 - ▶ cooperative agreements between/among local governments
 - ▶ governmental merger issues

- Examine administrative sustainability of small local governments.
 - ▶ current professionalism/capacity
 - ▶ future professionalism/capacity

- What can be done to increase the capacity and flexibility of local governments to respond to changing needs?
 - ▶ models of how local governments successfully adapt to changing conditions
 - ▶ models of how local governments successfully foster frank dialogue and planning in the community
 - ▶ role of strategic planning participation in local government decisionmaking
 - ▶ inter-local government cooperation

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- Study of how to assist local communities through COGS, regional organizations, and other policy-making entities.
- Examine aviation service issues.
 - ▶ what can be done to promote access to air travel?

Information and Communications Technology

Rural American is at a disadvantage when it comes to information and communications technology (ICT). Not only are there issues related to both basic and advanced connectivity, there also are concerns about disadvantages in the ability to use the technologies. Nebraska mirrors the problems that exist in other rural jurisdictions in the United States. Rural Nebraska suffers from deficiencies in broadband infrastructure. What will it take to connect the “last mile?” Will it be wireless service? Are physical pathways viable? The digital divide in Nebraska needs to be lessened. The promises inherent in telemedicine, e-commerce, e-government, telecommuting, and distance learning can allow rural communities to keep and attract residents, and they can keep, attract, and enhance current businesses.

SUGGESTED “INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY” POLICY TOPICS

- A comprehensive assessment of the digital divide in Nebraska.
 - ▶ what are the barriers to overcoming the divide?
 - ▶ who is being left behind?
- What are the intended and unintended impacts of state level telecommunications policy decisions on rural citizens?
- How will it be most efficient to provide broadband access for rural Nebraskans?
 - ▶ geosynchronous satellite wireless options
 - ▶ land based (microwave) wireless options
 - ▶ cable modem options
 - ▶ digital subscriber/telephone options
- Examine how information technology can be used as a means to attract/maintain younger families in rural communities.
- What is the impact of ICT for rural economic development?
 - ▶ money flowing into and out of rural communities
 - ▶ what are the opportunity costs of ignoring ICT are, in terms of local economy and workforce development and workforce availability?
 - ▶ how ICT is changing the nature of work, especially telecommuting
 - ▶ incentives for businesses which support telecommuting

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- Assess the opportunities for telehealth.
 - ▶ medical services and consultations
 - ▶ nursing services and consultations
 - ▶ health promotion
 - ▶ preventive networks
 - ▶ distance education course for masters level training in allied health areas (currently, UNMC has a Med Tech program that is completely distance ed)

- What are the possibilities for use of distance learning technologies and activities?
 - ▶ rural community needs assessment (what do rural Nebraskans really want/need?)
 - ▶ Nebraska higher educational institutions working together to formulate distance ed opportunities

- Studies of how information technology can assist and/or transform government?
 - ▶ e-government
 - ▶ training of constitutional office holders
 - ▶ sharing of responsibilities through ICT
 - ▶ law enforcement applications
 - ▶ court system applications

- Research on overcoming barriers to linking IT systems.
 - ▶ for example, schools and hospitals are not currently linked, but such linkages could be useful for education and services

Populations: Brain Drain and Immigration

Shifts in Nebraska's populations in the past decades present important challenges to rural Nebraska. Too many young Nebraskans leave rural communities for higher education and/or economic opportunities in urban areas (in Nebraska or outside the state) and then do not return. The result in some communities is a substantial loss of the kind of talent necessary to sustain the community's viability, and a related graying of the communities they have left behind. In other rural communities, new economic opportunities are being filled by workers (many with families) who are new to Nebraska. Many of these new Nebraskans are also New Americans, and many do not speak English as their native language. Newcomers' language and cultural differences present many Nebraska communities with social, educational, and service needs that must be addressed, and the newcomers present a host of opportunities for Nebraska's communities. Relatedly, minorities – whether new immigrants or those who have long been residents of the United States – voice concerns about their integration and acceptance in Nebraska: What might be done to ensure a high quality of life for all those living in Nebraska? Finally, both new Nebraskans and long-time residents need services; yet it is difficult for many communities to figure out how to provide new services (for new Nebraskans, for older Nebraskans) when the existing services needs are so great and are not yet being successfully met.

SUGGESTED “POPULATIONS” POLICY TOPICS

- Studies of the out-migration from rural communities.
 - ▶ who is leaving?
 - issues related to rural youth
 - issues related to the rural wealthy elderly.
 - ▶ are there factors influencing out-migration other than education and economics?
- What do people (youth, elderly, general population) value about their rural communities?
- What are the socio-cultural issues that deter young people from living in small communities?
- Develop profiles of small communities throughout the Great Plains.
 - ▶ do Nebraska communities reflect what is happening in other Great Plains communities?
 - ▶ are declining rural communities/disappearance of family farms inevitable trends?

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- What will be the leadership challenges in rural communities?
 - ▶ who will be the next generation of community leaders?
 - ▶ promising models of providing leadership training for local board members and other new civic leaders (e.g., Michigan, Cornell, Georgia, and Texas A&M all have programs)
- What are the factors that make people want to stay in rural Nebraska?
 - ▶ how can this be capitalized upon to retain people?
- Why do some people leave and then return to rural Nebraska?
- What are the best ways to identify and recruit those who might be interested in moving to rural Nebraska?
- Who is migrating to Nebraska?
 - ▶ what are the backgrounds of those moving to Nebraska's rural communities?
 - ▶ what are their skills/assets?
 - ▶ what are their needs/problems?
- Examine issues related to minorities living in rural areas.
 - ▶ barriers
 - ▶ possibilities
- How are new Nebraskans (minorities and others) currently being integrated into communities?
 - ▶ model practices
 - ▶ what not to do
- How do other states deal with immigration issues?
 - ▶ model practices
 - ▶ what not to do
- Examine the impact of the increase in the proportion of older populations in most of Nebraska's counties.
 - ▶ health care and social services needed to care for aging populations
- What are the infrastructure and services needed to keep the elderly in rural areas?
 - ▶ medical and social services
 - ▶ transportation
 - ▶ recreation and culture

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One of the consequences of the out-migration from rural towns is there will likely be a shortage of workers to fill the state and county government positions that exist across Nebraska. What will the anticipated shortage be?

Last year, a group of UNL faculty and staff met with staff from the legislature and from the state Department of Administrative Services to consider the issues. It seems certain there will be a problem filling both governmental service positions (e.g., Child Protection workers), as well as leadership positions (who will serve on the County Boards and Boards of Education?). Even assuming that governmental spending (state, county, local) stays the same in Nebraska's communities over the next decades— possibly an optimistic assumption – will there be people to fill the available positions?

The UNL Bureau of Business Research was asked to develop a small project that would begin to address some of these issues. BBR came up with a proposal for a project that would examine the labor supply in Nebraska over the next 10 to 15 years to assess, given current demographic trends across the state and assuming stasis in state positions, whether there will be an adequate pool of potential employees who could fill the positions.

The proposed BBR project would take a year to complete. The estimated cost is slightly over \$40,000.

The proposal is enclosed in Appendix II (Bureau of Business Research, Determining Turnover in Nebraska's State Government Workforce, December 6, 2000).

Quality of Life: Health, Welfare, and Well-Being

Nebraska is proud of its “good life.” Many are concerned that the good life is going away. What does it really mean to say there is the “good life in Nebraska?” What are the factors that go into the good life? What policies, new ones or existing ones, promote the good life? Quality of life issues implicate a variety of areas: schools, recreation, environment, social milieu, health care, economics, and so on.

SUGGESTED “QUALITY OF LIFE” POLICY TOPICS

- “Map” rural community assets.
- Examine issues related to lack of access (funds, time, distance) to medicine.
 - ▶ critical access hospitals
 - ▶ market analysis of hospitals (input and output markets) and their impact on the community
 - ▶ help communities decide their health priorities
 - ▶ preventive practices
 - ▶ mental health services
 - ▶ the needs of an aging population
 - ▶ promise of telemedicine
- Examine issues related to schools.
 - ▶ financing
 - ▶ independence, cooperation, elimination/consolidation
 - ▶ facilities
 - ▶ role of school in the community
 - ▶ high school training/career development in terms of brain drain issues
- Examine issues related to housing.
 - ▶ housing shortages (according to a small-scale assessment of 22 communities conducted by UNK faculty, only one out of 22 communities did not have a housing shortage)
 - ▶ needs assessment of lower and middle income housing
- Examine issues related to transportation.
 - ▶ air
 - ▶ roads
 - ▶ railroad
 - ▶ local services

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- Examine issues related to environment.
 - ▶ environment/natural resource sustainability and the link to community viability and vitality
 - ▶ river issues
 - flood control
 - recreational possibilities
 - irrigation needs
 - ▶ water quality policies
 - monitoring (e.g., for trace contaminants)
 - treatment (e.g., water treatment facilities)

- Examine issues related to leisure, recreation, and culture.
 - ▶ recreation opportunities
 - ▶ use of free time in rural areas
 - ▶ the role of the arts in communities

- Examine issues related to social/volunteer organizations and activities.

- Examine issues related to special populations.
 - ▶ elderly
 - ▶ persons with disabilities
 - ▶ women
 - ▶ Native Americans
 - ▶ ethnic minorities

- What are the values that constitute the “good life” in Nebraska?
 - ▶ what are the similarities across Nebraskans, what are the differences?
 - ▶ what are the different “prototypes” of Nebraskans who value different aspects of the good life?
 - economic focus
 - environment focus
 - education focus
 - health focus
 - social focus

Community Indicators

When there are decisions to be made about a rural community, such as whether to create a governmentally-funded economic investment program or in which community to build a new prison, there is little in the way of organized information that policymakers can use to assess the advisability of proceeding. A check-list of community indicators would allow policymakers to have a standard way to make determinations.

SUGGESTED “COMMUNITY INDICATORS” POLICY TOPICS

- Develop a check-list of important factors.
 - ▶ scale for rating each factor
 - ▶ does the check-list need to be different for various size communities, or does one indicator model fit all?

- Create a check-list that can be used for community asset mapping.

- Develop a list of “indicator” areas.
 - ▶ education
 - ▶ health and human services
 - ▶ child and family issues
 - ▶ economic infrastructure
 - ▶ diversity (and responses to diversity)
 - ▶ faith communities
 - ▶ housing
 - ▶ transportation
 - ▶ environment
 - ▶ NGOs

- What are the characteristics of thriving communities?
 - ▶ commonalities
 - ▶ differences

Five Procedures/Approaches to Facilitate Research Agenda

We consulted with other university public policy centers around the country to learn about their partnerships with state and local governments, in general, and to learn how large, multi-year research projects were developed and conducted, in particular. In light of the experiences of other policy centers and the charge of the Board, we have identified five procedures/approaches that could be used by the PPC to facilitate Enhancing Rural Sustainability policy research projects. In the following pages, we indicate the procedures/approaches in the *reverse* order of what we recommend. For each approach, some of the primary advantages and disadvantages are suggested.

1. PPC staff have primary responsibility for organizing and conducting research projects selected by the Board, working with faculty from throughout the University as needed.

Advantages: *Using the PPC as the central research entity would allow for the necessary development and training of policy-focused researchers to examine on rural sustainability, policy issues, and there would be the opportunity for the PPC staff to develop on-going relationships with key policymakers to help ensure the use of the research.*

- ▶ successful in situations in which there is a sufficient infrastructure to focus on specific topic areas
- ▶ capitalizes on long-term commitment of the state and the university to a specific research area

Disadvantages: *Using the PPC as the central research entity would be duplicative of other units and activities at the University of Nebraska and incur unnecessary expense.*

- ▶ requires development of expertise in matters where there is already extensive expertise at the University; for example,
 - UNL Center for Applied Rural Innovation
 - UNMC Center for Rural Health Research, and the RUPRI Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis
 - UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service
 - UNK Center for Applied Rural Research and Development
 - President’s University Task Force on Rural Development
- ▶ requires unnecessary duplication of personnel and expenditures of funds that would be better deployed on sustainability projects themselves
- ▶ develops content infrastructure in a specific content area that counters PPC’s generalist infrastructure (that allows PPC staff to work in a diverse array of policy areas)

2. The PPC is asked to assemble an **ad hoc team of researchers** from across the University to conduct research projects selected by the Board.

Advantages: *Because the PPC has identified a wide-variety of rural sustainability issues, Center faculty are in a good position to ensure that research efforts focus on the important matters confronting Nebraska.*

- ▶ builds on PPC's on-going identification of the various faculty and staff working on issues related to rural sustainability
- ▶ manages inclusion of faculty and staff representing multiple disciplines, from across the University

Disadvantages: *Although the PPC has knowledge about a lot of activity at the University, there is likely to be more expertise than we would be able to identify.*

- ▶ possibility of overlooking researchers who have valuable expertise and ideas
- ▶ the ad hoc team may lack leadership

3. The Board and/or the PPC **select a faculty member to spearhead each research project** selected by the Board. The selected faculty member would receive assistance from the PPC in assembling a team of researchers to work on the project, in conducting the research, and so on.

Advantages: *Using an experienced researcher to spearhead the research utilizes the expertise that already exists at the University.*

Disadvantages: *The selection of one faculty member may serve as a disincentive for other faculty to get involved.*

- ▶ resistance of faculty from other campuses and disciplines to get involved in research efforts where there already is a primary investigator identified

4. The Board and/or the PPC **select an existing University unit or entity** (e.g., UNL Center for Applied Rural Innovation, President's University Task Force on Rural Development, etc.) **to spearhead each research project** selected by the Board. The PPC would be responsible for assisting the faculty members from the unit in assembling a team of researchers to work on the project, conducting the research, and so on.

Advantages: *This approach takes advantage of the expertise of research units that have expertise related to rural sustainability.*

- ▶ capitalizes on University resources and expertise
- ▶ builds on existing multi-disciplinary, multi-campus research efforts

Disadvantages: *The selection of one unit, similar to the choice of one faculty member, may serve as a disincentive for other faculty to get involved.*

- ▶ resistance of faculty/units from other campuses and disciplines to get involved in research efforts where there already is an identified unit or person leading the work

5. The PPC and the Board issue a **request for proposals** from university researchers to address the research topics selected by the Board. There are several matters that might be highlighted in as part of the proposal evaluation process. First, in order to provide incentives for collaborative efforts, there would be a premium placed on proposals that are multi-disciplinary and multi-campus. Second, in order to take advantage of activities already underway or successfully completed, a premium could be placed on relating proposals to other research efforts.

The PPC would be responsible for assisting potential applicants with links to relevant faculty (from disciplines other than the applicant's, from campuses other than the applicants). The PPC also can provide proposal development assistance, budgeting assistance, etc. The Board could be actively involved in selecting the successful applications.

Advantages: *This "RFP" approach takes advantage of the existing expertise of researchers and capitalizes on existing research efforts and infrastructure.*

- ▶ there would be a built-in advantage for research units with developed expertise
- ▶ applied policy research directly tied to on-going research may have a better chance of succeeding than do new efforts
- ▶ positions the PPC as a resource to research activities already underway, rather than asking the PPC to re-create content expertise that already exists

Disadvantages: *Faculty will be asked to invest time and effort preparing applications.*

- ▶ some outstanding faculty may not have the time to prepare applications.
- ▶ there may be dissatisfaction by faculty or units who make a proposal but are not funded.
- ▶ time commitment by Board members, if the Board determines it wants to participate in the review of research proposals

Costs for the Research

The PPC needs input on the amounts of funds that will be available for each project. Where will the funds come from? How will the funds be made available to researchers?

Our investigations and experiences indicate long-term, policy-relevant research projects typically cost between \$80,000-\$100,000 per project. Costs can run significantly more if there are extensive economic analyses required as part of the research.

The attached research proposal by UNL's Bureau of Business Research is an example of a modest project, budgeted at \$43,000 and lasting approximately one year. **It is the PPC's recommendation that this project be funded at the amount requested as the first project to take place as part of the Enhancing Rural Sustainability Initiative.** Although it is not a multi-disciplinary, multi-campus project itself, the BBR's proposal is on a topic that is an important, rural sustainability issue.

PPC Activities During 2000 Relevant to Enhancing Rural Sustainability

During the past year, PPC faculty and staff have been actively involved in numerous activities as part of its rural sustainability initiative. We have participated in a variety of efforts, both inside the University as well as outside the University. In addition to participating in efforts initiated by others, the PPC has initiated several activities which have implications for rural sustainability. These activities, listed in alphabetical order, have included:

- **Carbon Sequestration.** The PPC is working with UNL Prof. Gary Lynne and the Department of Natural Resources, providing staff support for an analysis of legal, social, and policy issues related to the viability of carbon sequestration as a commodity. The results of the analyses will be given to the Department of Natural Resources and ultimately will be provided to the legislative task force examining carbon sequestration.
- **Genetically Modified Foods.** Project initiated by the PPC, with over 20 faculty partners from all campuses. The research is intended to study the perceptions of risk and safety and actual knowledge related to genetically modified foods (GMFs). In May, we submitted an \$800,000+ grant application to USDA. The project was not funded. In December, we submitted a small piece of the project, requesting less than \$50,000, to conduct focus group discussions about perceptions of GMF risk with rural and urban Nebraskans, both inside and outside the food industry. Several members of the Unicameral have indicated their interest in working with the PPC on this project.
- **Meat Inspection.** The PPC is working with UNL Prof. Sam Cordes on a project to examine the advisability of the development of a state-level meat inspection system. Contacts have been made in all 50 states, and processors in Kansas and Minnesota have been consulted. The study will be completed by February and the results provided to Sen. Dierks, Sen. Robak, and the Department of Agriculture.
- **Paying for the Good Life.** This project was initiated by PPC in collaboration with a faculty group led by UNL Prof. Lyn Kathlene. Other faculty actively involved are UNL's Charlyne Berens, Mike Jess, and Sandy Scofield. The purpose of the project is to examine the public policy values of Nebraskans hold important, and to document the commonalities and the differences across Nebraskans. A community-university forum was held at UNL in May of 2000; as part of this forum, leading Nebraskans (e.g., Treasurer Heineman) discussed the value-types and value positions.

As part of the PFGL project, the PFGL group worked with NET to examine the opinions of Seward citizens regarding the most important issues that should be addressed by Nebraska's candidates for public offices in the November, 2000, elections. The perspectives uncovered were used by NET to help structure their policy forum held in Seward in June 2000.

Additional collection of values data in rural areas is expected to take place in the summer of 2001. In addition, further urban data will be collected from ethnic minorities and low income respondents.

- **Policy Seminar Series.** The PPC's policy seminar series is intended to provide policy information to people who participate in policy-relevant activities but do not have formal training in policy. In the fall of 2000, the following policy seminars were offered:
 - ▶ **Education Policy** (Sen. Ardyce Bohlke; UNL Prof. Jody Isernhagen and Sandra Scofield)
 - ▶ **Health Policy** (UNMC Prof. Magda Peck; UNO Prof. Alice Schumaker; Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department Director Leon Vinci)
 - ▶ **Environmental Policy** (Department of Natural Resources, Head of Division of Planning and Assistance, Steve Gaul; UNL Prof. Robert Kuzelka and Mike Jess)
 - ▶ **Participating in the Policy Process** (UNL Prof. Kevin Smith; UNO Prof. Ethel Williams)
 - ▶ **Public Policy Formulation and Analysis** (UNK Prof. John Anderson; UNL Prof. Lyn Kathlene)

In the winter/spring of 2001, the following policy seminars will be offered:

- ▶ **Participating in the Policy Process** (UNL Prof. Kevin Smith)
 - ▶ **Public Policy Formulation and Analysis** (UNL Prof. Lyn Kathlene)
 - ▶ **Rural and Urban Economic Development** (UNO Prof. Robert Blair; Sen. Kermit Brashear, State Director of US Department of Agriculture Rural Development Jim Otto; Director of Nebraska Department of Economic Development Al Wenstrand)
 - ▶ **Rural and Urban Education Policy** (Sen. Ardyce Bohlke; Commissioner of Education Doug Christensen; UNL Prof. Jody Isernhagen)
 - ▶ **Rural and Urban Health Policy** (Administrator of the Office of Public Health, HHS, David Palm; UNMC Prof. Magda Peck; Sen. DiAnna Schimek; UNO Prof. Alice Schumaker)
 - ▶ **Rural and Urban Tax Policy** (UNO Prof. John Bartle; UNO Prof. Carol Ebdon; Tax Commissioner Mary Jane Egr; Sen. Bob Wickersham)
 - ▶ **Sorensen Forum for Political Leadership** (Union Pacific Director of Government Affairs Scott Moore; IANR Emeritus Vice President Irv Omtvedt; NU Vice President for External Affairs Kim Robak)
- **Policy Updates for Legislators.** The PPC submitted a grant (denied) to create a seminar series for legislators and legislative staff to update them on the most pressing rural and urban issues facing Nebraska. The PPC continues to be interested in developing this idea.
 - ▶ **School Organization and Finance.** The PPC initiated a project to bring together education policymakers with University faculty who are interested in school organization and finance issues. Policymakers have included Sen. Ardyce Bohlke, Commissioner Doug

Christensen, and Coordinating Commission for Post-Secondary Education Commissioner Dick Davis; University faculty have included UNO Dean John Christiansen, UNL Professors Jerry Hoffman and Harold Keller, UNK Prof. Peter Longo, UNL Prof. Anna Shavers, UNL Prof. Kevin Smith, UNL Dean Steve Willborn. In October 2000, a statewide conference, co-sponsored by the University and the Legislative Committee on Education, was held. The purpose of the conference was to identify issues that would benefit from collaborative research among University researchers, policymakers, and educators.

- ▶ **Social Capital in Rural Nebraska.** The PPC is collaborating with John Anderson (UNK Political Science) to identify social capital formation in rural Nebraska communities to determine whether the density of social networks predicts economic vitality of a community.
- ▶ **Succession in Government and Community Leadership Project.** The PPC initiated a project to examine the extent to which there will be a workforce available to fill rural leadership positions, in elected offices and elsewhere in government, and fill other government positions in Nebraska. UNL's Bureau of Business Research has proposed a small study to make demographic projections (see Appendix II).
- ▶ **Survey of Public Policy Priorities of Urban and Rural Nebraskans.** The PPC is participating in the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey telephone survey to identify the top public policy priorities of Nebraskans. Results will be broken out so that rural and urban differences (as well as other variables such as income, ethnicity, etc.) can be detected.
- ▶ **Urban/Rural Well-Being Project.** The PPC is working in partnership with UNL's Center on Children, Families, and the Law on an Urban Institute/Annie E. Casey funded project to examine issues related to urban versus rural health and well-being. The study will make use of the National Survey of American Families.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: **Faculty** Working on Issues Relevant to Enhancing Rural Sustainability

Agriculture in Nebraska: Preserving Family Farms and Enhancing Agricultural Productivity	A-1
Economic Development, and Community Structuring and Organization	A-4
Information and Communications Technology	A-5
Populations: Brain Drain and Immigration	A-6
Quality of Life: Health, Welfare, and Well-Being	A-7
Community Indicators	A-11

APPENDIX II: **Research Proposal**

Determining Turnover in Nebraska's State Government (December 6, 2000)	A-12
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