



Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE)

[Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center](#)

2017 Request for Proposals

IMPORTANT DATES

Request for proposals release:	January 23, 2017
Informational webinar for applicants:	February 2, 2017
Concept paper due:	March 13, 2017
Full proposal (by invitation) due:	May 15, 2017
Funding period (up to 18 months):	July 11, 2017 – January 10, 2019

OBJECTIVE

The [Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center](#) seeks to support innovative economic research on domestic nutrition assistance programs and to broaden a network of researchers applying their expertise to USDA topics. The RIDGE Center seeks applications from a diverse community of experienced nutrition assistance researchers, graduate students, early career scholars, and established researchers who bring expertise in another research area.

OVERVIEW

Federal nutrition assistance programs are central to improving dietary quality and food security in the United States. Given the scope and reach of these programs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture invests in nutrition assistance research, including major initiatives to understand the determinants of caseload changes, program impact and administration, and the potential for new innovations to improve program effectiveness. USDA pursues a portfolio of large- and small-scale research projects in diverse research disciplines. Examples of large-scale initiatives include the National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS), major demonstration projects such as the completed Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) for participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and the current Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program.

To facilitate administration and build cross-project coherence, USDA implements important smaller-scale nutrition assistance research initiatives through extramural university-based research programs. For example, Economic Research Service (ERS), in partnership with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), has developed a strong behavioral economics research program providing support for two university-based research programs: the Duke-UNC Center for Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research (BECR), established in 2014, and the Cornell Center for Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Programs (BEN), established in 2010. Finally, the oldest program of extramural research established by ERS is the Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) program.

Launched in 1998, the RIDGE program has been funded by ERS and FNS to support innovative projects in food assistance research and develop a community of social science scholars working in this area. Beginning Fall 2016, the RIDGE program is administered by a new center hosted at two institutions with a long record of leadership in food assistance research. The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut have come together to establish the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center. The RIDGE Partnership between Tufts/UConn builds on the successful history of the RIDGE program and offers new initiatives to enhance visibility and relevance of the RIDGE funded projects. Extramural research funding is the key function of the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center. In addition to grant funding, USDA and the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center will offer insight into policy needs, data resources, and program expertise, as well as provide grantees with mentorship and guidance to help make their research more rigorous, visible, and useful.

What's New to the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center

Most features of this Request for Proposals (RFP) from the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center are unchanged from the successful RIDGE program developed through previous grant cycles. Some new features include the following:

- Three applicant types (faculty/standard, post-doctoral, and dissertation support).
- An online application submission procedure.
- A brief open concept paper application round, followed by a full proposal round (by invitation based on review of the concept papers).
- An online webinar option for the Interim Workshop for grantees.
- A video brief along with the executive summary for the final research deliverable.

Background Resources

A major goal of the center funding priorities is to support innovative and policy-relevant research that does not duplicate existing literature and ongoing research initiatives. Useful background material is provided on the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center website (ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu), including:

- Links to summaries of previous internal and external research supported by USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), including previous RIDGE Center projects.
- Links to background program information and research literature.
- An annotated list of potential data sources.
- Format and instructions for the ERS executive summary and a simple "how to" for the video briefs.

- Other funding opportunities for projects on food assistance programs

2017 RIDGE FUNDING PROGRAM

Priority Topic Areas

All applications **must focus on nutrition assistance programs**, targeting one or several of the following:

- (1) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- (2) Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC),
- (3) Child nutrition programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and smaller, less studied programs such as the Summer Food Service Program.

Applicants are encouraged to propose studies that respond to research priorities and topics of interest to the RIDGE Center funders, ERS and FNS. The suggested topics are outlined in the **three areas of interest** below. Extensions of these topics are welcome.

I. Food Choices: Economic Determinants and Consequences

USDA is interested in innovative policy-relevant research on the economic determinants and consequences of food choices and diet. This includes, but is not limited to, the effects of the food environment and prices, time use, program participation, labor market characteristics, state/local food and economic development policies. Among the consequences, some examples include food insecurity, health care expenditure, productivity, children's academic achievement, and body weight and dietary outcomes.

II. Economic Incentives in Nutrition Assistance Programs

Participant individuals and households, program administrators, and food-related businesses all may respond to economic incentives. The RIDGE Center solicits innovative research to provide a cost-benefit analysis of alternative policy choices, including implications for program participants and non-participants. Of particular interest is research on improving the use of administrative data for evaluation purposes. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

Effective Use of Existing Data to Improve Evaluation Research

- Effectively use SNAP Quality Control data; SNAP-Ed (formerly Food Stamp Nutrition Education, or FSNE); school-district data on school meal participation and food purchases; WIC State food instrument issuance or redemption data; WIC EBT data; birth certificate data with WIC and Medicaid participation information; or point-of-sale scanner data.

Macroeconomic Factors

- Describe the relationship between unemployment and SNAP participation (e.g., in terms of timing and magnitude, training opportunities).
- Assess how changes in food assistance policies impact economic activity and household income across economic sectors, regions, and markets.

- Examine implications of major legislative acts and policy shifts, including the Affordable Care Act, for nutrition assistance programs.

Behavioral Economics

- Apply behavioral economics theory to food choice behavior, including consumer choices and decisions and strategic behavior of retailers and food manufacturers.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- Provide a cost-benefit analysis of alternative policy choices to improve program access (e.g., reducing client burden), targeting (e.g., working poor), and integrity.
- Assess the effect of SNAP eligibility rules and program operations on household decisions and choices regarding employment, marriage, child bearing, asset purchases, or savings.

Child Nutrition Programs

- Assess the effect of state and local school wellness policies on program participation, children's food consumption, academic outcomes, administration costs, and financial implications to schools and states.
- Assess the dietary, health and cost implications of the upcoming revisions to the CACFP meal patterns. Additional outcomes of interest include the likely impact on CACFP participation, food insecurity and variation in outcomes across states.
- Analyze the vast cross-state variation in CACFP participation rates and implications from poor participation for low-income families, child care providers and the state economy.

WIC

- Evaluate full costs of breastfeeding promotion (including the value of benefits to the breastfeeding mother-child dyad) as compared to providing infant formula by WIC State and local agencies).
- Examine factors that influence participation in WIC as well as the retention of children after their first birthday.

III. Food Assistance as an Economic Safety Net

The RIDGE Center solicits applications to understand how benefits from multiple nutrition assistance programs and cash income are combined to affect dietary quality and food security in the context of macroeconomic cycles and income shocks. Applications are encouraged to consider the impact of program design decisions on program participation, use novel methods to investigate the impact of food assistance on food security, and consider food security outcomes through the lens of a broader anti-poverty agenda. Examples of research questions of interest include:

Program Outcomes

- Investigate program effects on household food security, spending choices, food choices, and diet quality
- Consider how program policies and operational choices impact a household's ability to deal with economic disruption beyond food security and diet quality.

Multiple Program Interactions

- Determine what share of households participate in multiple nutrition assistance programs versus only one or none of the programs for which they are eligible, what factors influence these participation decisions, and how the programs work individually and collectively to create a safety net.

Income Shocks

- Measure the relationship between income shocks and participation in nutrition assistance programs.
- Explore how food and nutrition assistance programs affect the level and stability of spending patterns of different types of households (such as elderly households, households with and without children, single-adult households, and households with earnings).

Food Insecurity

- Analyze the dynamics of food insecurity among various food assistance population subgroups.
- Assess the correlates and consequences of persistent food insecurity.

Types of Studies

Proposed studies could include any of the following types of studies: secondary data analysis, including national datasets useful in food and nutrition assistance research, evaluations of promising interventions or natural experiments; small-scale experimental or quasi-experimental studies; retrospective analyses of national, state or local food policy changes; modeling studies, and cost-effectiveness analyses.

Proposed studies may be conducted as extensions or supplements to existing studies if they address the RIDGE Center research priorities and offer innovative ideas. It is important that applicants specifically explain the additional gain from the requested RIDGE Center funds and how the proposed project is different from ongoing work.

For all types of studies, proposals must include specific plans for communicating and disseminating research results to a variety of diverse audiences, including researchers, advocates, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders.

Types of Grant Awards

A total of approximately \$330,000 will be awarded under this RFP for the three award types.

1) Standard Research Grants

These awards are intended for research projects by investigators with a faculty (or comparative research) appointment in an institution of higher education. Each standard research grant will be awarded up to **\$50,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

2) Post-doctoral Research Grants

These awards are intended for research support of eligible post-doctoral researchers or fellows. Each post-doctoral research award will be up to **\$30,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

3) *Dissertation Grants*

These awards provide dissertation support to eligible pre-doctoral candidates. Each dissertation grant will award up to **\$15,000**, inclusive of indirect costs.

All award totals are offered for a maximum funding period of **18 months** and must include funds for required travel (see Terms of Awards).

Eligibility

For All Award Types

- Applicant organizations must be accredited private or public institutions of higher education.
- Applicant organizations must be based in the United States or its territories.
- Investigators must have completed appropriate education for the proposed research.

For Post-Doctoral and Dissertation Award Types

- Applicants must identify a mentor, research or dissertation advisor on the proposed project and provide evidence of their commitment to the project (e.g., letter of support, budget) and a mentor's biosketch;
- An applicant for a post-doctoral award must hold a doctorate or terminal degree (e.g., PhD, MD, JD) at the time of the application;
- An applicant for a dissertation award must have advanced to doctoral candidacy (as determined by the applicant's institution) at the time of the application.

Diversity and Inclusion Commitment

The Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in food assistance research. It reflects a key RIDGE Center priority to build a network of researchers whose work benefits all participants in the USDA programs. The RIDGE Center encourages applications from investigators of every race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, and disability status. The center highly values diversity in perspectives, region of the country, life experiences, and backgrounds that can help expand our understanding of challenges faced by program participants and find innovative solutions to address them.

HOW TO APPLY

All applications in response to this RFP must be submitted online using the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center online system. Visit <http://ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu> and choose "Apply" under the *Funding* link. You will be required to register before you begin the application process.

The online application system provides templates and detailed instructions for each component of the grant application. Applicants must follow the instructions and use the templates provided

in the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center online system. We strongly recommend that applicants log in to the system and understand online submission requirements before the submission deadline. In fairness to all applicants, the RIDGE Center will not accept late proposals.

For all types of awards, there are **two phases** in the application process:

Phase 1: Concept Paper

All applicants must submit: 1) a concept paper describing the proposed study using the provided concept paper template (up to 3 pages) and 2) biosketches for key personnel (up to 4 per project). There is no need at this stage to include a budget (except for the anticipated total amount).

Phase 2: Full Proposals (if invited)

Selected applicants will be invited to submit: (1) a full proposal using a required narrative template (up to 10 pages), (2) a budget narrative, (3) supporting documents such as letters of support (required for post-doctoral and dissertation applications; optional for other researchers).

Deadlines for proposals and information about expected funding announcements and timeline are listed below.

Timeline of Important Dates

Concept Paper Due	Informational Webinar	Notification of Invitation to Submit a Full Proposal	Invited Full Proposals Due	Notification of Awards	Awards Begin	Interim Workshop (WebEx)	Final Conference at USDA (D.C.)
March 13, 2017 (5pm EST)	February 2, 2017	April 3, 2017	May 15, 2017 (5pm EST)	Mid-June 2017	July 11, 2017	March 2018	October 2018

Terms of Awards

1. Awards will be made directly to the principal investigator’s institution. Budget amounts include indirect costs at the applicant’s institution, if required. Statutory Authority 7 U.S.C. 3310 limits indirect costs to **28.2%** on direct costs or 22% of the total funds requested. We encourage lower rates, if possible. The funding maximum is stated previously in the section on types of awards. Proposals with budgets exceeding the funding maximum, inclusive of indirect costs, will not be accepted.
2. Grantees are expected to attend an **Interim Workshop** in early spring 2018 (through WebEx or in person in Boston, MA) to discuss their early research results. Workshop attendees are asked to prepare an early draft paper and submit it to the RIDGE Center coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu) at least 10 days prior to the workshop.
3. Budget amounts should include expenses incurred for obligatory participation in October 2018 **RIDGE Outcomes Conference** in Washington, DC. The RIDGE Center will not pay grantee travel costs, which should be included as part of the grant budget. Grantees

should submit a draft paper and video brief to the RIDGE Coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu) at least 10 days prior to the conference. This is an important deliverable due date.

4. The revised final report, executive summary, and video brief are due no later than January 31, 2019. This is an important deliverable due date. The final report will consist of the paper from the fall RIDGE Outcomes Conference, revised to respond to comments. The final report may appear in the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center Discussion Paper series. The executive summary must follow a format provided by ERS. These deliverables should be submitted to ridge@tufts.edu.
5. Grantees are required to furnish the RIDGE Center with quarterly progress reports, with an invoice for payment. The award agreement with the grantee's institution will stipulate a percentage of the total award that should be invoiced no earlier than submission of the deliverables in #3 and #4.

REVIEW PROCESS

The full proposals will be reviewed by external referees and internal program staff using the following criteria.

Research Merit of the Proposal (35 points)

Is the proposal innovative? Are the research aims and hypotheses adequate? Are the objectives clear? Does the proposal respond to USDA and RIDGE Center research priorities, as outlined in the RFP? Will the project advance policy knowledge and support program implementation? Will the results be suitable for USDA publication? Is the study population well-justified (either nationally representative or a population experiencing high levels of unmet need or food insecurity)?

Overall Approach (30 points)

Is the research design strong and rigorous? Are the data appropriate? Is the analysis plan clear, and are the correct statistical methods chosen? Do the methods avoid unnecessary complexity? Do the methods avoid excessive detail on secondary issues, while providing sufficient information to judge the most important research decisions? Is the project feasible and realistic? Will the project really be completed as planned? Is power calculation provided and reasonable? Are limitations well-thought of and acknowledged in the proposal?

Workplan, Budget, and Cost-Effectiveness (20 points)

Does the total budget adequately support the project? Is the budget cost-effective? Is there justification for any large or unusual expenditures? Is the workplan reasonable and sufficient to ensure timely implementation and completion of the study? Are personnel, facilities, and instrumentation available? When achievement of the workplan requires collaboration, are participating partners committed? Is there a reasonable plan for communication and dissemination activities?

Proposals should include how the researcher(s) plan to acquire the data they are proposing to analyze – source, cost and time. Do applicants provide evidence of securing access to the data prior to the start of the project: e.g., a letter of support or commitment from entities from whom they plan to obtain the data?

Key Personnel (15 points)

Are the key personnel qualified to carry out the project? Are they available and committed for the work time budgeted? Does the proposal bring investigators that are new to the RIDGE program and have not been funded by RIDGE in the past? Are these new investigators to food assistance research? Does the proposal connect investigators with new or underrepresented skills or backgrounds with the field of nutrition assistance research?

Resources

Please visit the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center website at <http://ridge.nutrition.tufts.edu> for useful background information and updates on the program.

Questions

Responsible staff members at the Tufts/UConn RIDGE Center are:

- Parke Wilde, *Director*
- Tatiana Andreyeva, *Associate Director*
- Whitney Hubbard, *Communications Manager*
- Sara John, *Program Coordinator*
- Jennifer Zahradnick, *Administrative Coordinator*
- Meryem Ould-Sfiya, *Financial Manager*

Please direct all questions to the RIDGE Program Coordinator (ridge@tufts.edu).