



# PolicyTalk

## August 2017

### National Science Foundation Grant Awarded

Project will boost graduate education in agricultural resilience

[A five-year, \\$2.9 million grant from the National Science Foundation has been awarded to an interdisciplinary team from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.](#) The program is led by Craig Allen, a research professor and director of the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit along with Sebastian Elbaum, Charles Bessey Professor of computer science and engineering; Francisco Munoz-Arriola, assistant professor of biological systems engineering; Dirac Twidwell, assistant professor of agronomy and horticulture; and Public Policy Center associate director, [Dr. Nancy Shank](#), all serving as a Co-Principal Investigators.

This project will launch an interdisciplinary graduate training program focused on understanding resilience and vulnerability in agricultural landscapes. The goal is to help students and professionals make informed decisions about how to best use limited natural resources as global demands for food, energy and water increase. Approximately 20 trainees will study resilience in the Platte River Basin, where agricultural systems are among the most efficient and productive in the world. But this success - and the economic livelihood of many Nebraskans - is threatened by water shortages, demographic shifts, climate variability and changing land use patterns. "The basin is an area of tremendous agricultural innovation," Allen said. "Understanding the resilience of that system should help us maintain it for the long term and replicate it globally to help ensure local and global food security."

Master's and doctoral students will take part in research, specialized coursework and seminars exposing them to resilience and panarchy theory, policy development, modeling and technology. To link theory with practice, the program also includes management

professionals from partnering agencies and nongovernmental institutions, including the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Nature Conservancy. The professionals will participate in short courses and co-learning opportunities with students. The students will also participate in externships at the partnering organizations. The international training piece of the project taps into an existing collaboration between the university and the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education in the Netherlands. Students will learn field, measurement and laboratory skills in an environment with Nebraska-like river systems but different climate, economic and social factors.

The first cohort of students is expected to begin training in January 2018.

## Lincoln Vital Signs 2017 Report Released

The newest report has been released and is available to the public

Since 2014, the Public Policy Center has worked with the Lincoln Community Foundation and leaders of the city's largest public and private charitable organizations to gather and analyze data about the community to help inform decisions, spark connections, and spur collaboration.

The [Lincoln Vital Signs reports](#) describe how the city has changed over the past 10 years and have been used by funders to target resources, local agencies for program development and the business community for recruitment purposes. [The 2017 report](#) continues the tradition of providing information about Lincoln comparing its recent past and to other communities in the United States. The latest report covers six categories including community profile, economy and workforce, basic needs, education, health, and safety. It finds that Lincoln is experiencing positive economic recovery but that opportunity gaps persist.

Center Associate Director, [Dr. Nancy Shank](#); Research Specialist, [Dr. Stacey Hoffman](#); and Graduate Research Assistant, [Taylor Smith](#) authored the report. Dr. Shank presented findings on August 23rd during the Prosper Lincoln Summit at the Pinnacle Bank Arena. Speakers at the Summit also included Governor Ricketts and Mayor Beutler.



## Grand Opening of Hazardous Waste Collection Site

With Public Policy Center assistance, collection site is now open

The Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department and the City of Lincoln Public Works and Utilities Department wanted to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent location for hazardous waste disposal. As part of this exploration, they wanted meaningful input from community members.

Researchers from the Center helped to promote community dialogue by using focus groups and surveys to gather ideas from the community on how a future permanent hazardous waste site should operate to maximize its impacts on health and safety. This community survey and facilitation process eventually led to [opening this hazardous waste collection facility](#).



## Center Researchers Present at Conferences

Two Public Policy Center staffers invited to discuss their work

[Dr. Frank Ferraro III](#) was an invited symposium speaker at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in Germany. The symposium focused on the multidisciplinary exploration of language memorizing and the complex cognitive activities within the working memory in the process of learning a foreign language. Dr. Ferraro's presentation was a discussion of his work on enhanced memory in young adults following a trip to the wilderness.

As a Citizen Corp coordinator, [Ryan Lowry](#) was part of a panel at the Region 7 Local Emergency Planning Committee and Tribal Emergency Response Commission Emergency Planning and Response Conference in Kansas City. He discussed how Citizen Corps works to make communities better prepared to respond to disasters across Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri; as well as the similarities and differences across Citizen Corps throughout the region.



L to R: Frank Ferraro III and Ryan Lowry

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Our mission is to link policy with research, process, and practice.

We team with policymakers and other stakeholders to actively inform public policy by bringing expertise in a variety of areas.

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