

Ten Questions to Answer about Your Proposed Project

The following National Park Service guidelines are generally relevant for any federal agency project through the CESU.

1. *Do you have a well-defined project?* You must have a concrete project and a PI identified in the task agreement. This is not to say that creation of detailed work plans cannot be part of the project, in fact such documents are frequently very appropriate first deliverables.
2. *Do you require research or technical assistance?* Sometimes we may think we have a small research project, but the state-of-the-art of knowledge is such that what is really needed is interaction with experts or literature reviews. The CESUs are intended to link agency managers and planners with professionals who can provide technical assistance. A small amount of money will be allocated at the CESUs to assist with low-cost technical assistance projects without going through the entire task agreement process.
3. *Does the nature of your project and the resources of your federal agency combine to make a cooperative agreement appropriate? Who will provide substantial federal involvement during project performance and what will they do? Why is substantial federal involvement considered necessary?* If the product(s) derived from a project “will be delivered to the federal agency, without substantial involvement by the agency during performance, then a simplified purchase or a formal contract is the appropriate course of action,” not a cooperative agreement (NPS Director’s Order #20). CESU Task Agreements can be used for a variety of research, technical assistance, and education projects, but there are many situations where a contract or outright purchase is more appropriate.
4. *What are the relevant disciplines or professional skills pertinent to your project?* A primary intent of the CESU structure is the encouragement of multi-disciplinary teams when appropriate. It may be advantageous to meet with representatives of several disciplines early in your project.
5. *Do you have clear objectives?* Sometimes managers and planners know they need information but are not able to specifically describe their needs well enough to write a statement of work and to prepare a budget. It is the RC’s job either to help you or to identify people within the CESU consortium (or the federal system) who can assist in developing professional statements of work. Even if you think you have a good statement of work, it is advisable to have it reviewed by outside parties.
6. *Who will be your PI(s)?* You may have identified a PI with whom you want to work and perhaps have had some preliminary conversations about the project with this person. That is fine, however, you should discuss the project with the RC very early on. If you have not identified a PI, it is the RC’s responsibility to help you locate appropriate PI’s with the host university or its partner institutions, and to assist you in linking with

experts for preliminary advice in establishing projects. You will want to identify a PI and discuss the preliminary plans for the work before going very far with the project. In some cases, multiple, co-PIs and interdisciplinary teams will be appropriate.

7. *What level of peer review is appropriate for your project?* Not all CESU projects require peer review. However, for most research projects, peer review is essential in maximizing the success of the project. You should consider carefully whether the project work plan or scope of work should be peer reviewed. Who will conduct the peer review and how many peer reviewers will be required? The RC can assist identifying reviewers and can assist in coordination of such reviews. Generally, however, the Project Technical Representative is responsible for conducting peer review of draft deliverables. The RC's role is not, in most cases, to provide professional review of the substance of the project. Rather, they will coordinate and facilitate Agency access to the CESU partners and ensure the language of task agreements accurately reflects the required collaborative dimensions, etc. The RC may request that your proposed task agreement receive expert review before it is processed.
8. *Is your budget congruent with your project objectives and the time frame you have for deliverables? Are proposed costs accurate and appropriate?* Sometimes we simply don't know enough about an area to answer these questions until we talk to experts. Linking with these experts early in the creation of a project is part of what the cooperative nature of CESUs is all about. In any case, none of us want to invest in developing a task agreement, if the cost and time requirements are infeasible from the beginning. Similarly, we all need to be certain that our limited project funds are being spent wisely and appropriately.
9. *Would your project benefit from partnership with other federal CESU participants and host university partners?* An inherent strength of the CESU arrangement is that it provides a convenient vehicle and forum for organizing multi-agency research, technical assistance and education efforts. You should be alert to such opportunities. The CESU websites will be important sources of information regarding activities of federal agencies, the host universities, and partners.
10. *Are there special circumstances associated with your project?* There may be special circumstances surrounding your project of which you need to be aware. Some examples are: (1) if you are involved with human subjects, all Universities have oversight processes to ensure that policies protecting people participating in research projects are observed; (2) if you are doing social surveys, OMB approval is required; (3) if your research involves animals, all Universities have oversight procedures to ensure their humane treatment; (4) if your work involves Native American tribes or communities, your work may legally or ethically require the concurrence of those communities to proceed; (5) if your project involve aircraft, it needs to be reviewed by the Regional Aviation and Safety manager; and (6) at the park level, research and collecting permits may be required.