

National Park Service, Desert Southwest Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (DSCESU) FY10

Roles and Responsibilities in a NPS DSCESU Project

FAQs: Who is responsible for what in a DSCESU project? Whose job is it to develop a project proposal, to approve invoices, or to ensure that deadlines are being met? And whose responsibility is it to troubleshoot problems? By definition, DSCESU projects are cooperative projects that require substantial involvement by the NPS and its partners. In order to ensure DSCESU project success, it is important that everyone involved have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Also, a thorough understanding among partners of what is expected will keep projects on track and go a long way in preventing problems.

The primary people involved in a DSCESU project are the NPS Key Official (aka ATR), the Principal Investigator, the Investigator, and, to a lesser degree, the DSCESU Research Coordinator and Cultural Resource Specialist. Following is a description of their roles and responsibilities.

The NPS Key Official Role and Responsibilities

The NPS Key Official (KO) or Agency Technical Representative (ATR) has primary responsibility for management of a DSCESU project. The Key Official represents the NPS park or program office that is the primary beneficiary of the project. As such, it is essential that the KO be substantially involved in and aware of DSCESU project activities from the time of initiation through completion. This is the only way to ensure that the project is on target, satisfactory progress is being made, and, if needed, any modification to the project schedule or products is formally submitted to the Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist for review. Substantial involvement by the KO is the best method to identify serious problems, initiate resolution, and ensure success. His/her responsibilities include:

- Preparing the proposal and budget for the project, in cooperation with the Principal Investigator. The proposal should provide a timeline, including due dates for interim reports, draft reports, and final products. Although the DSCESU Research Coordinator can assist in this effort, it is the KO's responsibility to ensure that the proposal adequately reflects the park or program office needs and expectations, and those of the partner.
- Completing the DSCESU project coversheet and submitting it (along with the proposal and budget) to the DSCESU Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist, as appropriate.
- Ensuring that the purchase request for the project is prepared, and processed through the Intermountain Region (Denver) Budget Office or the WASO budget office, as appropriate.
- Issuing research and collecting permit(s) [if KO is park-based], and obtaining the Investigator's Annual Report(s). Any KO who is not park-based is responsible for coordinating with the appropriate park staff to ensure that necessary research and collecting permits are issued and Investigator's Annual Reports are received in a timely manner.
- Providing active project management, including maintaining close communication with the Principal Investigator, monitoring project progress in relation to deadlines, reviewing draft products, and providing review comments.
- Ensuring that NPS "substantial involvement" in the project, as described in the proposal, is being met.

- Troubleshooting, as necessary. If, despite the best efforts of the Key Official, problems arise that jeopardize the timely completion of the desired products, the KO should contact the Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist for assistance in resolving the problem. Also, the Key Official should inform the Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist if a project is falling behind schedule and a “no-cost” extension will be required to get the project back on schedule.
- Recommending payment or non-payment of invoices. The Intermountain Region Budget Office will notify the KO by email when invoices have been submitted, and request approval to pay.
- Obtaining peer and/or management review of products. (Upon request, the DSCESU Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist will assist in identifying reviewers.)
- Applying findings to park management.
- Submitting an electronic copy of progress reports, the draft final report, and the final report (two CDs or DVDs, as appropriate) to the DSCESU Research Coordinator or Cultural Resource Specialist. If the final report contains sensitive locality information, a report abstract is acceptable.

The Principal Investigator Role and Responsibilities

The Principal Investigator (PI) is typically a university faculty member or non-government organization lead staffer who has the primary responsibility for completing the research, technical and/or educational assistance identified in the proposal. As such, the PI’s responsibilities include:

- Assisting the NPS Key Official in the preparation of the proposal and budget, and submitting same for processing by the partner.
- Filling out all partner-required forms and obtaining all necessary signatures.
- Maintaining a close working relationship and ongoing communication with the NPS Key Official.
- Keeping the project on schedule.
- Submitting invoices for payment.
- Preparing and submitting Investigator’s Annual Report(s), as required.
- Preparing and submitting all products, such as progress, draft and final reports, to the NPS Key Official.

The Investigator Role and Responsibilities

The Investigator, as identified on the DSCESU project cover sheet, assists the Principal Investigator in the completion of the project. In some cases, the PI undertakes the actual research, technical and/or educational assistance outlined in the scope of work. Often, however, the day-to-day tasks are performed by an Investigator – typically a graduate student – working under the supervision of the PI. While the NPS Key Official may have a closer day-to-day working relationship with the Investigator, it is still the Principal Investigator who has the primary responsibility for the project.

The Research Coordinator and Cultural Resource Specialist Roles and Responsibilities

The DSCESU Research Coordinator and the Cultural Resource Specialist facilitate projects between the NPS and its partners working primarily with the NPS Key Official and Park Superintendent. Their roles and responsibilities include:

- Assisting parks in finding qualified Principal Investigators for projects. This assistance can include working with NPS park units to solicit “statements of interest” from several university partners that may be interested in working with NPS on a potential project.
- Determining if the DSCESU cooperative agreement is the appropriate vehicle for a project, including an assessment as to whether or not there is substantial NPS involvement in the project.
- Providing assistance, as requested, in the development of a proposal, budget, and completion of the project cover sheet.
- Coordinating project initiation, including ensuring that all necessary paperwork is received from the NPS Key Official, and that all necessary paperwork is transmitted to the Intermountain Region budget office or the WASO budget office, as appropriate.
- Maintaining a database of all active NPS DSCESU projects, including project start and end dates.
- Assisting NPS Key Officials in project troubleshooting and dispute resolution.
- Assisting in the identification of peer-reviewers.
- Providing information on projects to the DSCESU Program Coordinator at The University of Arizona (host university) for inclusion in its annual reports and/or for posting of certain information on the DSCESU website.