**Submitting Interdisciplinary Environmental Proposals through CEREO**

***Prioritizing Interdisciplinary, Environmental Research***

The Center for Environmental Research, Education, and Outreach (CEREO) understands that funding agencies increasingly prioritize multi-institutional interdisciplinary research projects with tightly integrated research, education, and outreach activities. Environmental research is an important component of WSU’s research portfolio. It is a major component to the CAHNRS, CAS, and VCEA research mission statements, and is closely aligned with several of the WSU Grand Challenges.

What is critically needed, however, is improved cross-college interaction and coordination around environmental activities to expertly identify and address the breadth and complexity of WSU’s environmental research goals. Without affiliation to a single college, CEREO is an ideal entity for building these important connections.

The Center for Environmental Research, Education, and Outreach (CEREO) is a progressive network of 350+ faculty, staff, students, and industry leaders working to resolve the ever-growing challenges of environmental sustainability and climate change through collaborative partnerships.

Guided by a roster of distinguished scholars with expertise reaching from agriculture, biology, and communication to engineering and education, CEREO seeks to apply innovative ideas and tools to a wide range of environmental projects.

***CEREO is online at:*** <https://cereo.wsu.edu/>

CEREO is particularly well-suited to help with proposals that focus on environmental change and sustainability, especially those with complex interactions between humans and natural systems.

By submitting interdisciplinary proposals through CEREO, PIs gain numerous advantages including*:*

1. *Leveraging CEREO relationships with researchers, funders, and external partners.*
2. *Accessible and responsive pre- and post-award administrative support.*
3. *Increased availability of F&A returns for project-specific needs.*
4. *Facilitation of collaboration across disciplinary units.*

***Advantages to Submitting Environmental Proposals through CEREO***

*1. Leveraging CEREO relationships with researchers, funders and external partners.*

The CEREO network invests significant effort in learning about diverse WSU researchers' aspirations and also maintaining active communication with major funders of environmental research. Thus CEREO helps WSU researchers to shape the national dialog and also to rapidly assemble interdisciplinary teams that can effectively address emerging research priorities.

*2. Accessible and Responsive Pre- and Post-Award Administration*

Investigators on CEREO projects have access to multiple levels of administration. As the majority of the funds are placed on departmental subaccounts, researchers still retain access to college and department administration (F&A is returned to both the area and unit levels, see F&A distribution in Table 1).

In addition, investigators also have access to CEREO support, including:

* **For all proposals**, a grants/contract manager, a principal assistant, and access to CEREO core faculty for help with proposal generation and submission.
* **For larger multi-disciplinary proposals**, an opportunity to access post-award support at a higher (PhD)-level by either buying out personnel time through grant funds or through negotiation with CEREO and WSU administration for cost-sharing personnel time.

This type of post-award support is increasingly recognized as being important for enabling the project leadership team to focus on research tasks, while easing the administration burdens associated with large grants. Higher-level support is particularly useful for helping leadership teams integrate complex projects; i.e., CEREO can provide support in enabling the “cross-walk” between interdisciplinary project components through individuals trained in interdisciplinary research.

*3. Increased Availability of F&A Returns for Project-Specific Needs*

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| **Table 1. F&A distributions for CEREO grants** | | |
|  | Distribution for Center Grants | |
| Central | | 70% |
| Area (College) | | 8% |
| Unit (Dept.) | | 15% |
| CEREO | | 7% |

Based on an internal MOU, CEREO now operates using a modified F&A distribution for grants routed via the Center (Table 1). As with all WSU proposals, Percent Effort can be assigned either according to the amount of funds going to each investigator or according to another arrangement as determined by the proposal team.

Through the incentive structure offered by the Center:

* CEREO retains 7% of the F&A returns that would otherwise have been retained by the WSU central administration, which enables CEREO to offer PIs additional support. The allocation of additional F&A can be used to support proposals and grant administration through CEREO, the form of which can be agreed upon between the PI and CEREO to suit individualized needs.
* F&A funds returned to the areas units are according to the WSU standard F&A distribution.

*4. Facilitation of Collaboration across Disciplinary Units*

Barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration within a university partially arise through potentially inequitable distribution of F&A, Percent Effort, and/or documentation of research expenditures.

Interdisciplinary proposals submitted through the Center would see:

* The majority of the funds (e.g., salaries, benefits, and unit-specific equipment) on subaccounts to each collaborating unit.
* Only shared funds (e.g., project management or other funds at the discretion of the proposal team) retained by CEREO.

These subaccounts 1) reduce friction for departments and colleges (i.e., chairs can show research expenditures through their unit, which are important for external evaluation) and 2) allow for better control of project resources by co-PIs (with the recognition that the PI still has authority over budgeting decisions), with increased flexibility and ownership of their components of the overall project.

CEREO maintains strong collaborative relationships with other WSU units such as the State of Washington Water Research Center (WRC) and the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources (CSANR). We can help teams determine how best to leverage the resources and networks offered by these units.

***CEREO Contact Information***

For help in team-building or to discuss your ideas, please contact any of the following individuals:

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