

**REQUEST FOR STATEMENT OF INTEREST FOR  
A POTENTIAL PROJECT THROUGH  
THE COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNITS (CESU) NETWORK**

**Prospective Project Title: Research and Development of Digital Junior Ranger program for National Historic Trails**

The National Park Service (NPS) is requesting information on your interest and qualifications to provide technical expertise and youth learning opportunities under a cooperative task agreement through the CESU Network. This is not a request for a formal project proposal and budget, nor is it an announcement of a funding opportunity. We will use supplied Statements of Interest (SOIs) to identify a pool of potential CESU partners and available expertise.

SOIs will be evaluated as received and must be received by February 9, 2018. If a suitable cooperator is identified, NPS would work with that cooperator to develop a scope of work and budget. The NPS will acknowledge receipt of your SOI and may follow-up with a request for additional information. For more information on the CESU program and links to contact information for NPS Research Coordinators, see: <http://www.cesu.psu.edu/default.htm>

**Materials Requested for Statement of Interest/Qualifications**

Please prepare a 1-3 page summary of how you would envision such a collaborative project. Include your name, department, university or organization, and contact information, as well as information about any relevant experience, past projects, and staff, faculty, or students who would be available to work on the project. **Please submit Statements of Interest by email to Sallie Hejl by February 9, 2018** (see contact information below).

**Background and Overview**

The National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) of the National Park Service (NPS) is based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with satellite offices in Salt Lake City, Utah and Albuquerque, New Mexico. NTIR administers nine national historic trails (NHTs). These trails are the California, Oregon, Pony Express, Mormon Pioneer, Trail of Tears, Santa Fe, Old Spanish, El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and El Camino Real de los Tejas NHTs. They cross 25,000 miles and 24 states. NTIR's staff of 20 interdisciplinary experts work with community groups, private landowners, nonprofit organizations, tribes, and federal, state, county, and local agencies to identify trail resources, provide site planning and design, map the trails on the ground, and develop educational opportunities. National historic trails are comprised of historic sites, buildings, roads, and trail segments that collectively tell the story of the trail travelers and their impact on our nation.

The interpretive team of NTIR works with partners all over the country who wish to educate, inform, and connect the public with the trails and their significant American stories. NTIR interpreters produce interpretive waysides, manage websites and social

media, create Story Maps, participate in design charrettes, and develop interpretive site plans and more. NTIR currently has two web-based media tours; NPS Santa Fe National Historic Trail, and Utah National Historic Trails Guide and is developing a native app for the Oregon National Historic Trail. What NTIR does not do is run a visitor center, have daily personal contact with visitors, or actively engage youth. However, NTIR's strategic plan calls for engaging with new and diverse audiences.

NTIR is anticipating receiving funding in 2018 to engage youth in the process of developing a digital Junior Ranger program modeled after the traditional NPS Junior Ranger program, but fitting within the confines of NHTs. Currently NTIR has only one formal Junior Ranger program for just one trail. The existing program, with hard copy JR books, requires hands-on participation by staff at NPS sites along the trail. This has proven to be unrealistic and NTIR is no longer funding it. A different and digital approach is needed.

NTIR proposes to develop the project in phases: 1) analysis of NHT Junior Ranger challenges and opportunities; 2) creation of a Junior Ranger technology development plan; and 3) building of a prototype to be tested in the field. The final product production will be funded and completed outside of this process.

Developing a first-of-a-kind stand-alone digital JR program is new in the NPS and new to trails. NTIR lacks the technical digital skills to develop this program from scratch and does not have the capacity to manage youth involvement. This project will connect federal and possibly state sites (such as National Parks, National Forests, and State Parks) across 24 states, 25,000 miles of trails, and along the nine NHTs that NTIR administers.

NTIR is seeking a partner who can engage youth ages 18 - 35 in all aspects of this project, from evaluating the situation to providing guidance on the best technology and way to integrate the trails into a mission-oriented, contextual, and age appropriate product that will appeal to children aged 9 - 12. A thorough evaluation of existing conditions, development and implementation of a plan, and the creation of a field testable prototype will ensure the end product is user friendly, educational, and supported by parks and partners along the trail. The exact nature of the final product will be determined only after the above steps have been taken.

NTIR will provide substantial involvement throughout the project. This involvement will include but is not limited to the following: training in the function and administration of national historic trails and how they are different than a traditional national park system unit (i.e. Yellowstone National Park); guidance on Federal, Departmental, and Agency policies and regulations governing creation and management of digital products; provision of historical background material; provision of relevant background or planning documents, including comprehensive management plans for the trails and the NTIR strategic plan; committed staff time to

participate in evaluation and planning meetings and discussions; and coordination between the CESU partner and other partners, as needed.

Specifically required by the partner institution will be knowledge of digital technologies; skills in development of digital media that engages youth; knowledge of 21<sup>st</sup> century youth education principles; knowledge of national history; willingness and ability to share diverse perspectives and create relevant and inclusive products; and the ability to engage youth in formally evaluating the situation, creating a plan, and developing a beta version to be tested at a minimum of three different locations along the national historic trails. The youth involved will conduct a thorough analysis of the prototype and their feedback will be used to guide the development of the final product, which will be funded and contracted outside of this process. Travel may be required to field test the prototype and or understand NHTs.

## **Objectives**

1. To expose youth to the National Park Service
2. To expose youth to collaborative, partnership driven trail administration
3. To give youth a voice in how they will learn about their heritage
4. To provide a forum for diverse perspectives to be shared amongst youth
5. To provide opportunities for youth to visit trail sites and segments
6. To facilitate youth engagement in Junior Ranger project development

## **Deliverables or Outcomes**

### Sequence of Events

1. Entry into a funded task agreement with a CESU partner by June 14, 2018:
  - a. Development of a project budget
  - b. Development of a project timeline
  - c. Development of an agreed upon statement of work for both the funding recipient and NPS
2. Project begins on agreed-upon date stated in task agreement, but will be no later than September 30, 2018.
3. Project is completed by agreed-upon date stated in task agreement, but no later than five years beyond the start date.

### Deliverables

1. Plan for youth (ages 18-35) involvement in all stages of the project
2. Evaluation of existing conditions, opportunities and challenges
3. Development of a Junior Ranger technology plan
4. Creation of a field testable prototype
5. Field tests of prototype in a minimum of three locations along the NHTs

6. Evaluation and specific recommendations based on the prototype field tests

#### Outcomes

1. Youth will connect with the NHT stories
2. Youth will be aware of the diversity of NPS programs and opportunities for employment
3. Youth will show an increased interest in trail stewardship and support
4. Youth will have access to media about the NHTs that they understand and expect
5. Creation of media that meets universal design, accessibility and NPS standards
6. Creation of media that is relevant and inclusive to diverse audiences

Note to respondents: Any and all data, reports, and products generated through or produced by a CESU Task Agreement will be the property of the NPS and the U.S. Government. The NPS will take delivery of such products by conclusion of the Task Agreement, and will happily work with PIs to preserve desired opportunities to publish data and analyses in peer-reviewed journals. Any forthcoming Task Agreement would be subject to the terms of the Master Cooperative Agreement for the pertinent CESU unit.

#### **Contact Information**

Respondents should send SOIs by email with subject line “SOI Response: Digital Junior Ranger Program” to Sallie Hejl. Feel free to contact Carole Wendler with questions about the project.

#### **NPS CESU Research Coordinator**

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#### **Project Technical Lead**

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