

Executive Summary

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) provides national program leadership and Federal assistance to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities. The agency accomplishes this mission by providing program leadership and funding for research, education, and extension work within the land-grant university system and among other partner organizations.

Because CSREES accomplishes its mission through grants and other Federal funds provided to partners, reporting is critical to the agency's activities. CSREES collects reporting data to manage programs, ensure proper use of Federal funds, and to assess progress, outcomes and impacts of Federally-funded activities. However, current reporting processes often do not enable CSREES and its partners to effectively manage reporting data in support of the agency's mission, do not include key aspects of the agency's work, and prevent the agency from demonstrating the impacts and outcomes of its programs to the public. Further, inefficiencies in current reporting processes have created a significant time burden for partners in completing reporting and for staff in managing incoming data and creating oversight and accountability reports. These issues have developed due to CSREES' history as two separate agencies, the separate evolution of the agency's 60 programs (many with independent processes not integrated with other agency reporting), and a number of disconnected agency-wide and program-specific IT systems used to support reporting.

Partners currently face differing processes for submitting the nearly 100 data collections required by CSREES

These reporting issues and inefficiencies are exacerbated by the increasing demands for accountability data placed upon CSREES and its partners. Congress, OMB, and others are increasingly looking to the agency to provide data linking program inputs, outputs, and outcomes to the agency's strategic goals, through the Budget and Performance Integration initiative and the Program Analysis Rating Tool (PART) process. Although the agency and its partners have worked hard to provide the necessary data, a lack of agency-wide reporting capabilities and insufficient data collected (particularly regarding extension work) has resulted in increasing workloads requiring consultation with multiple sources and manually calculated results.

One Solution: An Integrated Approach to CSREES Reporting

One Solution seeks to address the shortcomings of the existing reporting environment through an integrated approach that ties together reporting systems and processes across all CSREES programs. One Solution will fulfill three major goals:

- Simplify reporting and reduce burdens for grantees;
- Improve the quality of accountability data and better equip the agency to meet increasing performance and budget reporting expectations; and
- Reduce effort required to complete reporting-related processes, allowing staff members to focus on program leadership and active, portfolio-based management.

One Solution provides a single approach to improving reporting for the agency and its partners, recognizing that the many programs, activities, and processes at CSREES require reporting capabilities that are flexible and take into account the unique needs of research, education, and extension. This approach encompasses both improvements to information technology systems and processes and procedures governing reporting at the agency:

One Solution is a focused, integrated business approach, not a new computer system

- **Information technology improvements.** To enable agency-wide collection, storage, and analysis of reporting data, One Solution will enhance existing reporting systems (such as REEIS), with data coordinated across systems by a central data repository and with all users (internal and external) accessing CSREES reporting systems through a single Web-based reporting ‘portal.’ New components will support a restructured Plan of Work and collect financial and compliance forms, enable capabilities for automated notifications of key events (such as reports received by the agency or report deadlines for partners), and allow electronic routing, review, and approval of reports. Finally, advanced analysis tools will allow for automated generation of key reports and display customized information for each system user on its reporting home page.
- **Business process and data improvements.** Because new technology and analysis features are not useful without processes to ensure that all necessary data is collected and appropriately managed, One Solution includes a number of business process and data improvements. Many of these focus on the development of data standards and structures to ensure that data can be consistently used across the agency’s programs, eliminating the need to collect the same information multiple times and ensuring that data can be aggregated across programs to provide a truly agency-wide view of CSREES’ activities. Further improvements focus on standardizing forms and processes across programs, minimizing the need for program-specific forms by developing forms and processes that can serve the needs of as many programs as possible.

An implementation approach that leverages existing systems, one of three options studied, will provide CSREES and its partners with all desired capabilities while minimizing cost and ensuring flexibility. This vision, to be implemented over a four-year period, has been carefully designed to rapidly provide key functionality (such as a system to enable collection and analysis of the new Plan of Work) in time to meet regulatory deadlines and to ensure that CSREES staff and partners begin realizing system benefits within the first year of implementation. Governance structures for managing reporting at the agency, identification and mitigation of risks, and establishment of performance metrics and targets will further support One Solution’s success.

Value for Staff, Partners, and the Public

One Solution’s new features and capabilities will have significant effects for all key CSREES stakeholders:

- **CSREES national program leaders and staff** will be able to more easily access and navigate reporting data and will have access to analysis tools that integrate data currently stored in disparate locations.
- **Land-grant universities and other partners** will face a reduced reporting burden, have access to more meaningful reports and analysis tools for managing their programs and reporting to state legislatures, and encounter an improved user experience.
- **Congress, OMB, other oversight bodies, and the public** will receive higher-quality, more accurate accountability data that more effectively demonstrates how CSREES' activities support its mission and goals.

In addition to improving the experiences and capabilities of CSREES' stakeholders, One Solution will support the agency's overall strategic, operational, and financial performance. Specifically, One Solution will benefit CSREES by enabling the agency to better support the President's Budget and Performance Integration, Management Agenda, and eGovernment initiatives, as well as the Agricultural Research, Education, and Extension Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA) and the Government Paperwork Elimination Act of 1998 (GPEA). The initiative will further improve agency operations by reducing the effort required for both partners and staff to create oversight and accountability reporting and significantly improving report quality.

Financial Value

One Solution will create significant financial value for CSREES and its partners. The initiative is conservatively estimated to generate over \$20 million in benefits over seven years, including savings to both the agency and its partners.

For every \$100 invested in One Solution, CSREES and its Partners will receive \$189 in benefits

These benefits are split across three major areas:

- **Technology savings**, including reductions in IT spending for both CSREES and its partners through improved coordination of IT activities and reduced need to enhance existing systems or build new ones;
- **Productivity benefits and time savings**, as both staff and partners will save significant time in reporting and administrative tasks that can be devoted to more mission-oriented program leadership or research, extension, and education work; and
- **Materials savings**, including reductions in printing, mailing, and storage costs enabled by migration from paper-based to electronic processes.

System design and implementation activities are estimated to cost approximately \$7.25 million over four years, with an additional \$1.1 million in transition costs across the partnership. This cost includes purchase of required hardware and software, effort required to implement new components and integrate existing systems, data standards and process development, training and communications, and program management costs. Not all of this \$7.25 million investment is likely to represent new costs to the agency. Approximately \$1.76 million represents CSREES



staff time and as funding, and some staff and financial resources may be able to be redirected from existing reporting-related IT projects to One Solution.

With the initiative’s significant benefits and limited costs, One Solution will provide a significant financial return to the agency and its partners. It will generate net present value of \$8.0 million and return on investment of 89%, indicating that the investment will add significant financial value to CSREES. The initiative’s financial analysis is summarized in the table below.

One Solution Financial Summary

METRIC	CSREES	PARTNERS
Benefits	\$9.30 Million	\$10.79 Million
- <i>Technology Savings</i>	\$2.00 Million	\$0.18 Million
- <i>Productivity and Time Savings</i>	\$7.25 Million	\$10.39 Million
- <i>Materials Savings</i>	\$0.06 Million	\$0.22 Million
Costs	\$7.25 million	\$1.1 million
Net Present Value (NPV)	\$8.0 million	
Return on Investment (ROI)	89%	
Payback Period	3 Years	

