

# ReConnect Program: Frequently Asked Questions

## *Environmental Inquiries*

Updated March 19, 2020

**Question: Can a previous environmental study be used in the application process if it covers 90% of the PFSA?**

**Answer:** An applicant must provide an environmental analysis of all proposed funded service areas (PFSAs) within an application to be eligible. A recent environmental study could be used to satisfy or support the environmental information requested; but additional information will be required for areas not supported by the existing study at the time of the application. Applicants should also update any changes since the current study, so all current environmental information is represented within the application.

**Question: What will be required for the environmental portion of the application? Are maps required of the planned routes if claiming categorical exclusions?**

**Answer:** Project maps or site plans are required to identify cable routes, building locations, tower locations, equipment locations, and all structures and facilities that are part of the project.

Applicants will be required to draw sites and routes using the Construction Mapping Tool in the ReConnect Online Application System. The Application System will also require that applicants provide specific information on the cable routes and facility locations including the completion of Environmental Questionnaires (EQs). All project activities, specific project locations, and supporting documentation must be provided to assist the Agency's analysis of potential impacts on the environment, including whether a categorical exclusion applies to an area in a proposed project.

The Application Guide will address the specific requirements for the environmental portion of the application and will be available when the application window opens on January 31, 2020.

**Question: If an area is predominantly National Forest, but people live there and an applicant wants to place a tower structure, does the applicant work with the National Forest or just the private property owner?**

**Answer:** If the map shows the area as Forest Service property, the applicant must work with the U.S. Forest Service unless the applicant has proof that it is private property. The specifics of the property will

need to be analyzed and the applicant must prove that the property is private and not Forest Service owned.

**Question: Does an applicant need to contact USDA about EA or EIS before submission?**

**Answer:** Yes. If an applicant indicates “Yes” for either the Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) questions on the application, the applicant must contact RUS at [reconnectenvironmental@usda.gov](mailto:reconnectenvironmental@usda.gov) for further guidance. The Application System will require an upload as proof that the applicant has contacted USDA.

**Question: The Environmental section indicates that I am required to submit a Section 106 Environmental Questionnaire. How is the Application System determining that requirement?**

**Answer:** The Application System automatically determines whether your project requires a Section 106 Environmental Questionnaire (EQ). Below are all of the Site/Route description scenarios that would trigger a Section 106 EQ to be completed for a proposed project.

Please note that these are the system requirements. If you believe the system is requiring a Section 106 EQ in error, or have any additional questions about this issue, please submit a question through the Contact Us form within the Application System.

Sites and/or Routes:

- Is asset located on Tribal land – **Yes**, Section 106 becomes required.
- Is asset located on or cross Federally Managed Land – **Yes**, Section 106 becomes required.

Routes:

- Is the route in a previously developed, existing right-of-way? **No, a new right-of-way or easement will be required**, Section 106 becomes required.
- No matter the answer for question, "*Is the route in a previously developed, existing right-of-way?*", if the installation method is either '**Aerial Cables on New Poles**' or '**Underwater**', Section 106 becomes required.
- No matter the answer for question, "*Is the route in a previously-developed, existing right-of-way?*" if the answer to question, "Will associated cabinets or underground vaults be installed nearby in previously-disturbed or developed land?" is either '**No**' or '**Both in disturbed and undisturbed land**', Section 106 becomes required.

Site - Building:

- Is this an existing site or a site to be constructed? **To Be Constructed**
- Will the improvements require ground disturbance? **Yes**
- Is a FCC license required for any of the equipment? **Yes**
- Please select the type(s) of generator(s) that will be installed: **Primary generator**
- Are you collocating, upgrading, or installing a new antenna? **New**
- **\*WHEN\*** What is the estimated year in which the existing tower was constructed? **>49 years old**

Site - Tower:

- Is this an existing tower or a tower to be constructed? **To Be Constructed**
- Is a FCC license required for this tower/pole? **Yes**
- Is a FCC license required for any of the equipment? **Yes**
- Please select the type(s) of generator(s) that will be installed: **Primary generator**
- Are you collocating, upgrading, or installing a new antenna? **New**
- **\*WHEN\*** What is the estimated year in which the existing tower was constructed? **>49 years old**

Site - Access Road/Parking Lot:

- Is this an upgrade to an existing access road/parking lot, construction of a new access road/parking lot, or expansion of a new access road/parking lot? **'Construction of a new access road/parking lot'** or **'Expansion of a new access road/parking lot'**

Site - Large Enclosure:

- Is this an existing cabinet or a cabinet to be constructed? **To Be Constructed**
- Please select the type(s) of generator(s) that will be installed: **Primary generator**
- Will the improvements require ground disturbance? **Yes**
- Is a FCC license required for any of the equipment? **Yes**