

3.1 Initial Study

3.1.1 Introduction to Preparing Initial Studies

According to *CEQA Guidelines Section 15063(c)*, http://ceres.ca.gov/topic/env_law/ceqa/guidelines/art5.html the purpose of an Initial Study is to provide a preliminary analysis of a proposed action to determine whether a Negative Declaration or an Environmental Impact Report should be prepared. An Initial Study also enables an applicant or Lead Agency to modify a project, mitigating adverse impacts in lieu of preparing an EIR, thereby potentially enabling the project to qualify for a Negative Declaration. The Initial Study provides a factual basis for the Negative Declaration, or serves to focus an EIR on the significant effects of a project. The Initial Study should be used to determine the extent which the LRDP EIR analysis adequately addresses impacts of a subsequent project.

An Initial Study is not required if, through the environmental classification process, the campus determines that an EIR would clearly be required for the project; however, an Initial Study may still be desirable to identify the scope and potential cost of an EIR and may serve to eliminate some issues from further analysis.

An Initial Study is required for any project that is tiered under the LRDP EIR or any other Program EIR (*CEQA Statutes Section 21094 (c)* http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/stat/chap2_6.html and *CEQA Guidelines Section 15153(b)(1)*). http://ceres.ca.gov/topic/env_law/ceqa/guidelines/art10.html

UC CEQA Handbook Section 3.1.2 identifies the format for an Initial Study.

3.1.2 Initial Study Format and Content

The following is a list and description of the sections that should be included in an Initial Study prepared for a University of California proposed project.

Cover Page

The cover page of an Initial Study should identify the project name and number, the campus or site on which the project is proposed, the date on which the Initial Study is released, the name and address of the person(s) or department preparing the study, and the name and address of the office reviewing the study. The cover page should also contain a statement that the Initial Study has been prepared in compliance with CEQA.

Table of Contents

Documents longer than ten pages should include a table of contents that lists the sections within the Initial Study as well as the figures or tables included in the study.

Environmental Checklist Form

Refer to *UC CEQA Handbook, Appendix E* for an electronic version of the UC CEQA Checklist. The Environmental Checklist form is divided into the following sections:

- Project Information
- Project Description
- Environmental Factors Potentially Affected
- Determination
- Evaluation of Environmental Impacts

Project Information

This section contains basic project information, including the project title, project number, campus name, Lead Agency name and address, contact person's name and phone number, project location, project sponsor's name and address, custodian of the administrative record, and names and locations of previous EIRs relied upon for tiering purposes.

Project Description

Description of Project

This section should provide a detailed description of the proposed project, including its overall area, height, number of stories and orientation; the project's proposed function and any activities that would take place in or around it; design and mechanical features, including service areas; and the proposed circulation around and within the project area. If the project includes a number of different land uses, a table breaking down the overall area by uses could be included. Any unusual construction operations necessary for the completion of the proposed project should also be listed in this section.

All phases of project planning, implementation and operation should be described (*CEQA Guidelines Section 15063(a)(1)*). http://ceres.ca.gov/topic/env_law/ceqa/guidelines/art5.html. See *UC CEQA Handbook Section 3.3.4*, Project Description.

Project Objectives

The campus objectives in proposing the project should be stated here. Increases in student enrollment, new faculty positions, and/or growth in academic programs and resulting need for new or improved instruction and research facilities are examples of rationales for University of California projects. It is particularly important that a complete and accurate list of objectives be included in order to facilitate the evaluation of alternatives.

Surrounding Land Uses and Environmental Setting

This section should locate the project site relative to surrounding built and/or natural features of the campus. Three figures should be included within this section to illustrate the location of the proposed project. First, a regional location map places the respective campus within its general area in the State. This should be a regional, county, or city map showing State highways, major roads, and well-known features to orient the reader to the project location. Second, a project location map places the project site within the campus. Finally, a project site map presents a more detailed illustration of the proposed project site, outlining the project site boundary and surrounding facilities/land uses. All maps should include a scale and north arrow.

The project site's natural features, including approximate acreage, topographical characteristics and existing vegetation, should be described in this section. Any existing buildings or impervious surfaces on the site should be identified, as well as the status of other projects or proposals in the area.

Approval Authority

This section should identify the holder(s) of discretionary approval authority for the project and other public agencies whose approval is required, including permits, financing approval, or participation agreements.

Consistency with the LRDP

This section should describe the project's consistency with the scope of development projected in the LRDP; campus and community population levels projected in the LRDP; LRDP designation for this type of project; and applicable policy objectives and goals of the LRDP.

Environmental Factors Potentially Affected

This section displays each impact issue area alongside a square that may be marked to indicate that the Initial Study analysis identified an impact for the issue. The environmental factors with checked boxes

are those that would be potentially affected by the project, involving at least one impact that is identified as a “Potentially Significant Impact” in the checklist analysis.

Determination

An Initial Study or Preliminary Environmental Assessment may be prepared to support a Categorical Exemption, when it may be prudent to provide additional documentation to support such an exemption. In such cases, the determination should read:

On the basis of this initial evaluation, it is determined that the project is categorically exempt under Class ___ of the CEQA Guidelines.

Under most circumstances, however, one of the five determinations provided in the Environmental Checklist Form would be selected, based on the analysis provided in the Initial Study. These options are as follows:

“On the basis of the initial evaluation that follows:

- I find that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- I find that the proposed project MAY have a “potentially significant impact” or “potentially significant unless mitigated” impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. A TIERED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- I find that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, no further environmental document is required. FINDINGS consistent with this determination will be prepared.”

Evaluation of Environmental Impacts

The evaluation of environmental impacts is based upon the completion of the checklist portion of the Environmental Checklist Form, and consists of the analysis of each impact issue area required under CEQA. The analysis of each issue should identify any significance criteria or thresholds used to evaluate each impact question, and any mitigation measure(s) identified to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.

A list of supporting information sources should be attached to the checklist upon its completion.