Preliminary Investigations – Overview for Panel Members

Prior to making financial investments in research projects, the Division of Research, Innovation and System Information (DRISI) conducts Preliminary Investigations (PIs) for Caltrans customers to address potential research topics. DRISI performs PIs with its consultant, CTC & Associates LLC. The cost of a PI is approximately $9,000, paid for by DRISI.

Most PIs include results from one or more of the following information-gathering efforts:

- **Literature search.** A search of published or in-progress research gathers publicly available domestic and international resources. For new topic areas, published research may be limited, and CTC & Associates may need to rely on a state-of-the-practice survey or consultations with experts (see below) to gather the information needed.

- **State-of-the-practice survey.** Surveys that gather information about a specific area of interest may target specific state transportation agencies or expand to cover a national audience. Limited international contacts may supplement domestic findings. Surveys are delivered using an online survey tool or via email.

  The limited scope of a PI requires matching the survey with the pool of potential respondents:
  - *Targeted list of potential respondents (50 or fewer).* Consider use of a longer survey with multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gather the information needed in a single survey.
  - *Larger pool of potential respondents (more than 50).* Use a two-part process. *Step 1:* Distribute a brief online survey with mostly multiple-choice questions. *Step 2:* Use the initial set of responses to identify a limited number of respondents for more detailed follow-up contacts.

- **Consultations with experts.** Contacts with selected experts can supplement findings from a literature search or survey. These interviews can be particularly helpful when investigating an emerging topic area.

PIs gather relevant, credible, mostly recent (from the last 10 years) information and summarize it. The PI is a snapshot of resources and survey findings available at the time of publication; it is not intended to be an exhaustive review of a topic area. The PI report will summarize what was learned from the literature and survey results, but it will not:

- Draw conclusions.
- Develop guidelines or specifications.
- Offer recommendations (other than to recommend ways to gather more information in a Next Steps section).

**PI Panel Member Participation**

Panel members typically attend three one-hour meetings:

- **1st - Kickoff Meeting:** This meeting is attended by the panel members and the PI team from DRISI. The purpose of this meeting is to review the PI request and narrow the scope if needed. This will ensure everyone is on the same page before discussing the request with the consultants.

- **2nd - Teleconference Meeting:** This meeting is attended by the panel members, PI team and consultants (via teleconference). This meeting provides the panel an opportunity to convey the intent of the PI directly to the consultants and respond to any questions. After the meeting, the consultant will prepare a scope of work based on the PI request and additional information discussed during the meeting. Once the scope of work is approved by the panel, it will take approximately eight weeks for the consultants to perform the work and prepare a draft report. The panel members will review and comment on the draft report, which the consultants will revise as necessary based on the comments.

- **3rd - Next Steps/Close-out Meeting:** This meeting is attended by the panel members and the PI team. The purpose is to review and discuss acceptance of the final report/survey. Also discussed are the next steps on how the PI results will be used (adopt best practices, request another PI, go forward with a research project).

**For More Information**

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DRISI Website: [http://www.dot.ca.gov/research/researchreports/preliminary_investigations/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/research/researchreports/preliminary_investigations/index.htm)

August 2018