



HEROS

An Introduction to HUD's Newest Online Environmental Review Reporting Tool

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Executive Summary

If you are a Responsible Entity (RE) for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), you are well aware of the environmental review process. Often times a formidable and extensive process, the task of evaluating the environmental impact of a potential project is one of the most crucial steps when implementing HUD programs and initiatives.

To help Responsible Entities (REs) complete the environmental review process, HUD's Office of Environment and Energy (OEE) has developed the **HUD Environmental Review Online System (HEROS)**. HEROS is a web-based portal system for REs to prepare and manage their Environmental Review Records (ERR). HEROS applies to all environmental reviews for HUD-assisted projects.¹

As a HUD technical assistance (TA) provider, WFN has access to information, updates and trainings that are not yet public knowledge. This article aims to (1) provide an **overview** of the HEROS Online System; (2) identify the **requirements** for its implementation; (3) **project** future outcomes for the HEROS Online System; and (4) provide comprehensive **resources** for grantees who seek additional information.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2014, July). HUD Environmental Review Online System (HEROS) Part 58 User Guide. See Also <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/HUD-Environmental-Review-Online-System-User-Guide.pdf>.



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If you are a Responsible Entity (RE) for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), you are well aware of the obligation and process of completing an environmental review. Often times formidable and extensive, the task of evaluating the environmental impact of a potential project is one of the most crucial steps when implementing HUD programs and initiatives. To help Responsible Entities (REs) complete the environmental review process, HUD's Office of Environment and Energy (OEE) has developed the **HUD Environmental Review Online System (HEROS)**. HEROS is a web-based portal system for REs to prepare and manage their Environmental Review Records (ERR). HEROS applies to all environmental reviews for HUD-assisted projects.²

As a HUD technical assistance (TA) provider, WFN has access to the latest information and trainings that are available for grantees. This article aims to (1) provide an **overview** of the HEROS Online System; (2) identify the **requirements** for its implementation; (3) **project** future outcomes for the HEROS Online System; and (4) provide comprehensive **resources** for grantees who seek additional information.

I. Overview: *What is HEROS?*

HEROS streamlines the environmental review process for users by replacing the existing paper-based process with a comprehensive web-based system. Users are able to create electronic ERRs and manage their reviews from a central location. HEROS affords REs the opportunity to organize and improve upon their efforts of ensuring compliance with environmental regulations, and aims to eliminate the

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potential for error. Assessing the success that HUD has had with the HUD Exchange (formerly the OneCPD Resource Exchange) and capitalizing on the effective and efficient methods of online reporting, the OEE has established HEROS to maximize efforts for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other related Federal and state environmental laws. HEROS increases transparency of environmental reviews by posting them on the HUD Exchange for public review.

When will HEROS be made available to the Regions?

At this time, OEE is in the process of unveiling HEROS throughout HUD's 9 regions. In May 2014, HUD launched the HEROS reporting tool in Regions 7 and 8 as its pilot testing phase. As of August, Regions 1, 3, and 10 were offered voluntary access. HUD will utilize feedback and evaluation of the performance of HEROS within these regions to perfect and fix any issues before rolling out the system in more heavily populated Regions such as 6, 2, 5, and 4. These regions will have access to HEROS in late 2014 and early 2015. HEROS will be available to region 9 in 2015, as well. HUD has carefully selected the order in which HEROS is made available based on the size and funding provided in each region. Regions that receive smaller allocations will be tested first so that any deficiencies with the system can be corrected before HEROS is launched in the more heavily populated and highly funded regions.

2. Requirements: *What does HEROS mean for Responsible Entities?*

HEROS will set a new standard for data reporting on ERRs.

Whether you are a Responsible Entity, Non-Responsible Entity Recipient, State Agency, or a Consultant hired by a Responsible Entity, HEROS will serve as the universal tool for conducting environmental reviews. If you are completing an environmental assessment or simply completing an ERR categorically excluded not subject to (CENST) a statutory checklist, you will be required to create, maintain and complete the ERR through HEROS. While some procedures remain intact to ensure compliance – such as the standard operational process of downloading maps and other required back-up documentation – the institution of HEROS will eliminate the overuse of redundant paperwork. Historically, when a RE was required to Request a Release of Funds (RROF) from HUD, the RE would complete the ERR and submit the required documentation via regular mail, and wait for the required amount of time. HEROS will allow REs to make these requests electronically. Time sensitive questions and/or concerns can be addressed directly to the Field Environmental Officer (FEO) through HEROS, whereby the correspondence can be monitored and solutions presented in a timely manner.

Prior to the implementation of HEROS, RE jurisdictions had the authority to decide the format of their ERRs barring that they contain the required information. The HEROS template will now require users to enter descriptive project details that explain its compliance with all NEPA standards and other laws. If flood hazard insurance, historic preservation measures, or noise compliance are triggered, these items will become prerequisite before moving forward and completing the ERR. HEROS will guide the user through each step while providing point-in-time assistance and resources when needed.

3. Projections: *What does HEROS mean for HUD?*

HEROS may pose minor problems during its initial stages, specifically for RE jurisdictions that are not current on environmental training, and for those who do not have the staff capacity to produce thorough ERRs. However, once all of the preliminary obstacles are overcome, HEROS will increase efficiency and effectiveness for REs. Previous methods of completing ERRs could be labeled as daunting or time consuming, but HEROS will improve this process thereby increasing efficiency and allowing REs to focus on project implementation. The effectiveness of environmental reviews will improve as HEROS reduces doubts as to whether an ERR was prepared correctly.

If HEROS serves its purpose to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental reporting and compliance, HUD will be able to use it as a platform for other planned electronic/web-based systems.

4. Resources: *What resources are currently available to you?*

As with most electronic-based systems, HEROS will come with its own set of complications. REs with older model computers or more complicated systems for storage of records may have difficulties adjusting to this new method of reporting and recording ERRs. To help REs transition into this new process, a HEROS User Guide as well as training modules have been made available on the HUD Exchange for training purposes. Links to these resources are provided below:

HEROS Users Guide - <https://www.onecpd.info/resource/3150/heros-user-guide>

HEROS e-Tutorials - <https://www.onecpd.info/environmental-review/heros-e-tutorials>

HUD also encourages REs to contact their designated Field Office Representative from the Office of Environment and Energy (OEE). OEE Staff will be available to assist with troubleshooting issues and to ease REs through the transition.

Designed to replace an outdated reporting system, and help conserve on the amount of paper HUD programs produce, OEE has developed the HUD Environmental Review Online System (HEROS). Let us walk you through the transition from paper-to-web.

Need More Information?

If your community or organization wants more information about Environmental Reviews or HEROS, WFN Consulting has experienced practitioners who have been administering local HUD Program grants since 1981. The WFN Consulting team may be reached by telephone 770.420.5634, by email mail@wfnconsulting.com or by visiting our website www.wfnconsulting.com.

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