



Fact Sheet: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the CESU Network?

Seventeen Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs), representing biogeographic regions across the United States and its territories, comprise the CESU Network. Each CESU is a partnership between a host university, federal agencies, and additional academic and nonfederal partners. The CESUs provide research, technical assistance, and education to federal land management, environmental, and research agencies and their partners.

How do CESUs work?

CESUs bring together scientists, resource managers, and other conservation professionals from across the biological, physical, social, cultural, and engineering disciplines to conduct coordinated, collaborative, applied projects to address natural and cultural heritage resource issues at multiple scales and in an ecosystem context.

Where did the CESU Network originate?

The CESU program was created in response to legislation passed in 1998. The National Parks Omnibus Management Act (P.L. 105-391 §203) directed the Secretary of the Interior to establish a network of “cooperative study units” with academic and other nonfederal partners to provide research, technical assistance, and education related to the resources of National Park Service units and their larger regions. In 1999, federal agency administrators signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing the CESU Council and initiating the selection process for the first five CESUs. The signatory agencies agreed to fully support and work to expand the CESU Network within the missions and authorities of participating agencies.

How many organizations are in the CESU Network?

Currently, the CESU Network includes 15 federal agencies, 276 universities (including 58 minority serving institutions), and 90 other nonfederal partners (e.g., tribes and tribal organizations, state agencies, museums, aquariums and arboretums, conservation organizations).

What are the objectives of the CESU Network?

The primary objectives of the CESUs are to:

- provide usable knowledge to support informed decision making;
- ensure the independence and objectivity of research;
- create and maintain effective partnerships among the federal agencies and universities to share resources and expertise;
- take full advantage of university resources while benefiting faculty and students;
- encourage professional development of current and future federal scientists, resource managers, and environmental leaders; and
- manage federal resources effectively.



■ **From anthropology to zoology.** Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units projects cover the range of natural and cultural resource research, education, and technical assistance needs. Above, the Gulf Coast CESU partners take a field trip during their annual meeting. (*Gulf Coast CESU*)



How are the CESU Network and CESUs implemented?

Federal agencies participate in the CESU Network through the MOU and by joining individual CESUs. The CESU Network Council, composed of senior administrators from each participating federal agency, guides the network and appoints a national coordinator to manage the operational aspects of the network.

The Council held a rigorous competition process to establish the seventeen CESUs. Agencies have the opportunity to place CESU-affiliated federal research scientists at the host university (e.g., NPS has CESU Research Coordinators assigned to each of the CESUs). Each host university provides space and basic administrative support to the partners including hosting annual meetings, conducting general correspondence, distributing announcements, maintaining their CESU website, and maintaining a project database.

An individual CESU operates under a master cooperative agreement that binds the federal and nonfederal partners. This agreement also facilitates the transfer of federal financial assistance from partner agencies to support collaborative projects with nonfederal partners within the CESU. Individual projects are administered through a modification to the agreement.

What is the process for joining a CESU?

To join a CESU, a potential partner submits an application package to the CESU's host university representative expressing its interest in joining and outlining the competencies and expertise they would bring to the group. Nonfederal applicants must also document past experience working with federal agencies. The application package is distributed for consideration to the existing partners. If supported by the group, the CESU Network National Office drafts an amendment adding the new partner and circulates it for signature. Once the document is executed, the new partner can actively participate.

What is the duration of the membership in a CESU?

There is no expiration on membership. If an organization wishes to withdraw from the CESU, the partner can submit a written request to do so. Federal agency partners can submit a written request to the CESU Council for withdrawal from the national federal agency MOU.

What is the established overhead rate for the CESUs?

The current agreed-upon overhead/indirect cost rate across the CESU Network is 17.5%. For comparison, the average overhead rate across the top 100 U.S. research institutions (i.e., public and private) over the past 15 years was 51%. Participation in the CESU Network does not preclude continuation or development of new projects with federal partners through existing funding mechanisms.



■ Mentoring future resource managers.

CESU projects engage students by providing internships and research experience. Above, students in the Tahabi Program learn vegetation monitoring techniques. (Ben Baldwin/Utah State University)

