



Visions IV: A Strategic Plan for the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation (2017-2022)

About the Federation

The Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation (CERF) is a multi-disciplinary organization of individuals who study, manage, and promote awareness of coastal and estuarine ecosystems, including the effects of human activities on these environments. Federation members are dedicated to advancing understanding and appreciation of the Earth's estuaries and coasts, to promoting the wise use and management of these systems, and to making the results of their research and management actions available to their colleagues and to the public. Members of the Federation are researchers, managers, educators, consultants, students, and others who are interested in estuaries, wetlands, and the coastal ocean.

CERF is a private, nonprofit organization. The Federation was created in 1971, when members of two regionally based estuarine research societies in the United States decided that an international organization was needed to address estuarine and coastal issues more broadly. The regionally based Affiliate Societies now number seven and encompass coastal regions along the United States, Canada, and Mexico; CERF's vision is to more directly serve regions beyond North America.

Mission and Activities

The Federation advances understanding and stewardship of estuarine and coastal ecosystems worldwide. Its overall mission is to

- Promote research in estuarine and coastal ecosystems
- Support education of scientists, decision-makers, and the public
- Facilitate communication among these groups.

Membership in the Federation is open to all who support these goals. The Federation currently has approximately 1,400 members from more than 25 countries worldwide; Affiliate Societies have about 1,600 members (some with overlapping membership in CERF) who help to form the Federation.

The Federation addresses the purposes listed above through, but not limited to, the following activities:

- Convening international, biennial conferences
- Supporting frequent meetings of regional Affiliate Societies
- Publishing the scholarly journal *Estuaries and Coasts*, the quarterly Federation newsletter *CERFs Up!*, the management-focused electronic publication *Coastal and Estuarine Science News (CESN)*, and the textbook *Estuarine Ecology*
- Maintaining a CERF website and social media platforms
- Offering training and professional development through webinars, in-person workshops, and similar resources
- Providing advice on estuarine and coastal management and policy issues.

Previous Strategic Plans of the Federation

The Federation has developed three previous strategic plans. The first strategic plan covered the period 1993–2004, and the second spanned the period 2005–2011. Visions III, covering 2012–2016, was finalized under CERF President Susan Williams and implemented through the Governing Boards led by Walter Boynton (2011–2013), Ken Heck (2013–2015), and Robert Twilley (2015–2017). The goals of these three previous plans have largely been accomplished, although some are long term and ongoing.

At the beginning of Robert Twilley's administration, the Governing Board began strategic planning for Visions IV, to cover the period 2017–2022. The plan was developed by eight Governing Board committees: Affiliate Societies, Career Development and Education, Communications, Conference Strategy, International, Membership, Policy, and Publications. The Governing Board also sought extensive grassroots input from members and Affiliate Societies. The Visions IV strategic plan was ratified by the Governing Board in September 2017 and presented to the Federation at the 24th Biennial Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. It will guide the Federation's activities through the 50th anniversary celebration in 2021.

Vision for the Future of the Federation

CERF is the leading scientific society promoting research, education, and management in coastal and estuarine systems worldwide. The society is the international voice of coastal and estuarine science, with a closely networked membership that is connected to a global community of scientists, managers, policy-makers, educators, and the public. Core to this vision is to promote and to increase support for disciplinary and multidisciplinary scientific research, and to integrate new scientific understanding that improves the management and stewardship of coastal and estuarine ecosystems. Contributing to the vision of CERF are the following elements:

- Recognized leadership in advancing coastal and estuarine research and in communicating its value to society
- A broad, diverse, and inclusive membership within and outside of North America
- Mutually beneficial relationships with regional Affiliate Societies that strengthen and enhance capabilities of both CERF and the Affiliates
- Strong partnerships with related scientific societies and organizations around the world
- Consistently excellent publications and conferences that are highly valued by CERF members and the broader scientific community
- Rich professional development opportunities for members at all career stages and across a range of career paths
- Members who are better able to communicate science and engage with managers and policy-makers to ensure their science is useful and used.

Research Foundations

The Federation is founded on the value of scientific research to society, with a focus on improving the understanding of the structure and function of estuarine and coastal ecosystems. CERF supports and promotes scientific research that improves the fundamental understanding, and the management and stewardship, of coastal ecosystems. CERF serves this role by highlighting new discoveries in its journal, biennial conferences, and other publications and activities. CERF also promotes the communication of new discoveries and the synthesis of existing information to decision-makers and the public. This emphasis on high-quality research is a cross-cutting focus of the themes and objectives described in Visions IV. By promoting high-quality research at various scales, CERF helps to identify significant gaps in the technical knowledge and understanding of estuarine and coastal sciences and to articulate priority areas for new research. It also encourages academic institutions, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other groups to contribute institutional, collaborative, and financial support to address the priority research issues identified by CERF.



Support Coastal and Estuarine Research, Communication, and Management

CERF has many avenues for promoting and communicating coastal and estuarine science and management, both internally among members and externally to nonmember scientists, policy-makers, managers, and other audiences. CERF's core tools for supplying information are the biennial conference and CERF's primary publications: the scholarly journal *Estuaries and Coasts*, the newsletter *CERFs Up!*, the management-focused electronic publication *CESN*, and the textbook *Estuarine Ecology*. CERF's biennial conferences are also recognized as premier networking opportunities for the coastal and estuarine science, management, and education communities. CERF utilizes other communication methods to connect, educate, and engage members and other audiences, such as its website, webinars, social media, and supporting meetings of its regional Affiliate Societies. CERF is also active in education and outreach activities to various audiences including policy-makers, the coastal and estuarine science community, formal and informal educators, and the public through the development and implementation of diverse activities such as briefings, letters, and workshops.

Goal I-A. Improve the Federation's ability to promote research and to communicate key findings to the science and management communities

Objectives

1. Develop a communication strategy that specifies and targets key audiences and communication needs, and elucidates how CERF members can use communication tools to achieve the core objectives of the Visions IV strategic plan.
2. Develop or enhance communications tools to achieve communication strategy objectives and to promote key CERF activities.

3. Strengthen the quality of CERF publications, including ensuring publication of high-quality research, reviews, and syntheses, and promote CERF publications and activities worldwide.
4. Transform the CERF newsletter *CERFs Up!* into a magazine-style publication with expanded content.
5. Evaluate the scope, format, content, and policies of the CERF conference and recommend changes to the Conference Organizing Committee that will enhance collaboration with the Governing Board and its strategic vision for the Federation.
6. Identify and implement mechanisms for promoting interaction among scientists, managers, and students at the international level (i.e., that transcends the North American context).

Goal I-B. Enhance mechanisms for utilizing scientific findings to improve the effectiveness of policy and management

Objectives

1. Promote and sponsor educational activities that increase the understanding of coastal and estuarine systems and that enhance the capacity of CERF members and others to engage in outreach and in translation of scientific findings into effective resource management and policy.
2. Enhance and expand the communication of policy-relevant science and applications of scientific findings to support the wise stewardship and management of coastal and estuarine resources.
3. Enhance the role of the Affiliates as catalysts for regional collaborations that facilitate research and information sharing, increase knowledge, and generate syntheses that lead to management actions.
4. Partner with sister societies to leverage strengths and resources toward shared policy outreach goals and objectives.

Theme II

Create a Community that Fosters Collaboration and Advances the Education of Current and Future Federation Scientists

A fundamental aspect of the CERF mission is to advance the education of, and facilitate collaboration within, the coastal and estuarine community. CERF's value is in building a supportive network of individuals and teams dedicated to diverse aspects of coastal and estuarine science and management, and in providing resources to members to help them advance and succeed in their careers. Visions IV seeks to enhance the resources of the Federation and develop new benefits that help members develop their professional skills. In addition, Visions IV focuses on enhancing opportunities and outreach to key sectors, including the international community, underrepresented minorities, Affiliate Societies, and student and early-career professionals. By articulating and implementing its mission and values, CERF seeks to develop a broader, more diverse, and more inclusive society that will benefit all members.

Goal II-A. Enhance the member services of the Federation

Objectives

1. Enhance the value of CERF membership for individuals across the spectrum of coastal and estuarine science careers and throughout the full continuum of career stages by providing educational and professional development resources.
2. Increase the recruitment and retention of student members and the transition of students to professional members by promoting activities that benefit student and early-career development.

3. Expand CERF membership through outreach efforts that articulate CERF's value and through promotion of member benefits to key audiences, including *Estuaries and Coasts* authors, lapsed members, and the international community beyond North America.

Goal II-B. Enhance benefits to Affiliate Societies and other partner organizations

Objectives

1. Collaborate with Affiliate Societies to engage students, early-career scientists, and other potential members to expand opportunities for CERF and Affiliate members simultaneously.
2. Enhance communication and collaboration among Affiliate Societies and between the Affiliates and CERF.
3. Seek opportunities and establish protocols for formalizing new relationships with scientific societies and regional entities, particularly those outside North America, to promote estuarine and coastal science, management, and policy to a broader membership.

Goal II-C. Build a more inclusive and diverse Federation

Objectives

1. Broaden participation in CERF by promoting an inclusive culture and opportunities for underrepresented and underserved minorities in coastal and estuarine science at all career stages.
2. Enhance benefits for current and potential international members.

Implementation Plan

The implementation of this strategic plan is described in the actions, timelines, and metrics listed in a separate Implementation Plan table. The intent of a separate Implementation Plan is to allow the Governing Board and its committees the opportunity to develop detailed actions that can be added to and adjusted as conditions change. The Implementation Plan will be a living document that will be updated at least once during each two-year Governing Board period.