



*History suggests that a nation that relinquishes the torch of science puts its future prosperity at risk and jeopardizes its place in the history of civilization. The [National Science] Board believes that we must not let this fate befall our country.*

— National Science Board (NSB) 2020 Vision for the National Science Foundation,  
December 28, 2005

### **What is COPUS?**

COPUS ([www.copusproject.org](http://www.copusproject.org)) is a grassroots effort linking universities, scientific societies, science centers and museums, advocacy groups, media, educators, businesses, and industry in a peer network having as its goal a greater public understanding of the nature of science and its value to society. Full public engagement in science is critical to the long-term social well-being of the American people.

### **Why COPUS?**

There are disturbing trends in science education, low public scientific literacy, and increasing alarms about U.S. competitiveness:

- A recent National Science Board poll reports that two-thirds of Americans do not understand what science *is*, how it is conducted, and what one can expect from it
- A recent Gallup poll reports widespread and increasingly prevalent belief in pseudoscience
- There is a growing public complacency about and disengagement from science at the very moment when the impact of science on public life is greater than ever
- The Business Roundtable of major U.S. companies notes that the scientific and technical building blocks of our economic leadership are eroding at a time when many other nations are gathering strength

### **In response, COPUS aims to:**

- Develop a shared appreciation of science, its contributions to the quality of life, and its underlying role in advances in technology and engineering
- Inform and engage the public in and about science, its process and products—how it is done, how scientific issues can best be framed and communicated, what roles science and scientists play in society, the benefits of using the process of science to make informed decisions and address challenges
- Make science more accessible to everyone

### **To do this, COPUS is:**

- Building a network among all stakeholders, including the scientific, education, policy, media and business communities and the general public
- Providing a national online searchable database of its participating organizations' events and programs in the public understanding of science. The database allows COPUS organizations to share information with each other as well as helps the public to be aware of activities in their communities and establish contacts with COPUS organizations across the country
- Promoting events that showcase and celebrate science, such as the *Year of Science 2009* ([www.yearofscience2009.org](http://www.yearofscience2009.org))
- Integrating with other key national resources such as the *Understanding Science* website currently under development at [www.understandingscience.org](http://www.understandingscience.org)
- Creating forums—on the COPUS website as well as face-to-face—for sharing ideas, best practices, and resources

### **Participating in the COPUS network:**

As part of COPUS, your organization becomes part of a national network sharing resources and leveraging efforts. You have the opportunity to interact with others to promote common goals and develop joint strategies to improve the public understanding of science

### **Advantages to COPUS network participants:**

- Participation in a national effort to promote the public understanding of science in a year-long celebration: *Year of Science 2009*
- Your organization's activities highlighted on the COPUS website
- Access to COPUS communication resources, network, and databases
- Receipt of COPUS email alerts and newsletter
- A role in growing the COPUS community, providing input on COPUS direction and activities

### **Expectations of COPUS network participants:**

- Support the development of regional coalitions and partnerships in your area
- Work with others to develop activities and programs in support of *Year of Science 2009*
- Share best practices and evaluation data about those practices with the rest of the COPUS network
- Work with the COPUS network to develop common messages and themes
- Promote and embrace the full spectrum of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as critical to our societal well-being

### **Participants in the COPUS network agree to the following characterization of science:**

- Science is a way of learning about what is in the natural world and how it works
- Science involves a process for testing ideas
  - Science proposes broad natural explanations for how the natural world works and tests those explanations by making observations of the natural world
  - Scientific explanations must be predictive and hence, falsifiable or testable
- Science is an intellectual and social endeavor
  - The process described above is carried out by individuals and communities. In that sense, science is also a social system for building knowledge about the natural world
  - Science involves individual reasoning and large scale interactions among scientists all around the world. The social nature of science is a critical component of its success

### **COPUS contact information**

To learn more about COPUS and apply to become a part of the network, see [www.copusproject.org](http://www.copusproject.org) or contact the COPUS Network Project Manager, Sheri Potter at [spotter@copusproject.org](mailto:spotter@copusproject.org).

The COPUS national office is located in Washington DC, hosted by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS)

### **2007 COPUS Steering Committee**

**Lee Allison**, Director, Arizona Geological Survey

**Jack Hehn**, Director of Education, American Institute of Physics

**Jack Hess**, Executive Director, Geological Society of America

**Jay Labov**, Senior Advisor for Education and Communications, National Academy of Sciences

**Richard O'Grady**, Executive Director, American Institute of Biological Sciences

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