Georgia Tech Overview of
United Nations University - Regional Centres of Expertise

1. What is a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE)?

A Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on education for sustainable development (ESD) is a network of individuals, institutions, organizations, and experts who are committed to using formal, nonformal, and informal education as a collaborative tool for increasing collective impact to build a sustainable future. RCEs are multi-stakeholder learning communities that address sustainability challenges through education, training, and public awareness campaigns. They build innovative platforms to share information and experiences, increase capacity, facilitate advocacy and program-development, empower youth, and promote outreach and dialogue among regional/local stakeholders through partnerships for sustainable development. RCE members are dedicated to creating more livable societies for present and future generations by influencing the learning processes at work in their regions. The network provides a structure through which they can align, coordinate, innovate, and report on their work for greater impact, both regionally and with other RCEs around the nation and world.

2. RCEs around the World

UNU has acknowledged 149 Regional Centers of Expertise around the world to date (Fig. 1-2).

In the US, there are five RCEs: Grand Rapids (MI), Greater Burlington (VT), Greater Portland (OR); North Texas (TX), Shenandoah Valley (VI).

![Figure 1: RCEs around the world](http://www.rcenetwork.org)

![Figure 2: RCEs regional distribution](http://www.rcenetwork.org)

Source: [http://www.rcenetwork.org](http://www.rcenetwork.org)

3. Who can participate in an RCE?

RCE members are dedicated to create more livable societies for present and future generations by influencing the learning processes at work in their region. RCE members include formal learning institutions like local schools, community colleges, universities and centers of environmental education, as well as informal learning establishments such as museums, botanical gardens, private companies, local government, non-profit organizations and informal educators, such as the media.

4. What types of activities and outcomes are supported by RCEs?

Each RCE is regionally-based. Members bring in-depth knowledge of the challenges facing the towns, cities and villages in their regions, as well as the resources that they can leverage to support collaboration and solve problems.
RCEs work on a range of initiatives from organizing sustainable development workshops for educators and building youth and college networks to conducting research and creating policies that focus on education for sustainable development. In addition, RCEs work with universities, community colleges and schools to make sure that sustainability issues are part of formal curricula and learning processes.

Example: RCE Greater Portland, aka, The Greater Portland Sustainability Education Network (GPSEN) is a multi-sector network of educators, students, non-profits, political and industry leaders, organizations, and community members collaborating to promote sustainability education in the Portland Metro region. Acknowledged as an RCE in 2013, GPSEN works on a variety of activities, including youth and college student networks, a Think Tank, ESD asset mapping, professional development, an annual research symposium, community engagement projects, service-learning, internships and fellowships, and collaboration on national and international ESD activities. Read more about one of their activities: “Case Study: Serving the Region – Hands On Greater Portland’s E4 Sustainability Teamworks Team.” (http://tinyurl.com/gpsencasestudy)

5. What are the advantages of being part of an RCE?
   • Learn from the RCE network:
     o Learn diverse practices
     o Potential for RCE members around the world to work together on joint projects and explore potential exchanges;
     o Participating in global and regional meetings of RCEs
   • Leverage:
     o UNU acknowledgement can serve as a mechanism to link and leverage the many activities already underway in different institutions in the same region
   • Increase funding opportunities:
     o While RCE status does not come with funding, an RCE provides a structure for identifying additional funding opportunities and collaborating rather than competing for funds.

6. What are the potential challenges related to being a RCE?
   • Participation:
     o Key sustainability leaders in the region may not see a compelling reason to participate in an RCE.
   • Leadership/Engagement:
     o Given the lack of initial funding, RCEs need to ensure that several organizations and individuals act as leads on the project and that they dedicate some in-kind resources (e.g. hosting meetings, conference calls, funding, time, etc). 
     o Volunteer engagement increases capacity and buy-in, but it does not insure long-term sustainability.
   • Time:
     o The task of preparing for the application and getting input from stakeholders throughout the process can take significant time of effort.
     o Maintaining a high-quality RCE requires significant time and effort.

7. What are the next steps we should follow to establish an RCE, if we wish to do so?
   • Identify:
     o Regional challenges related to ESD,
     o Regional assets and priorities related to ESD,
     o Existing capacity for forming and coordinating an RCE.
- Identify interested parties and bring them together to build a vision for an RCE.
- Determine potential governance structure.
  - Who will be major initiators and promoters of the RCE in your region?
  - How will we facilitate collaborative partnerships?
- Outline regional activities we wish to engage in as an RCE.
- Submit first draft of RCE application (deadline between May and June each year).