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# COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT UNIT PROGRAM

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## *TECHNICAL REPORT II*

### USER AND GOVERNING OFFICIAL PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL MANAGEMENT



**OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
**OFFICE OF ANALYSIS AND INSPECTIONS**

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JUNE 1989

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**COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE  
SUPPORT UNIT PROGRAM**

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LOCAL MANAGEMENT**

**RICHARD P. KUSSEROW  
INSPECTOR GENERAL**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative user evaluation of the Cooperative Administrative Support Unit (CASU) Program.

Overall inspection aims were to: 1) conduct a user assessment of CASU services in operational CASUs; 2) provide the national CASU board with an overview of the CASU Program from a user or customer perspective; and 3) identify the generic strengths and weaknesses that affect the program's workability and success. This report was prepared at the request of the national CASU board and staff.

### BACKGROUND

The CASU Program is a Government-wide program, sponsored by the President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI), which operates under authority of Section 601 of the Economy Act of 1932. At the national level, the PCMI established a CASU Program National Board of Directors which sets policy, provides guidance, approved lead agencies and charters CASUs. In addition, a national interagency staff was organized to serve as a focal point for day-to-day operations of the national CASU Program. The local CASU support structure includes policy direction from a tenant board of directors, and managerial direction from a lead agency. The day-to-day operations of the local CASU are supervised by a local CASU director.

The CASU Program was established under the concept that local Federal agencies could cooperatively combine their resources to share common administrative services at reduced costs and with better service quality. Under the CASU concept, building tenants jointly share in establishing and managing an administrative support unit that provides, on a reimbursable basis, administrative services commonly needed by its members.

### FINDINGS

#### *CASU SERVICE PATTERNS VARY CONSIDERABLY*

The CASUs offer a broad variety of services.

The numbers of offered services and participating users vary widely among CASUs.

There is great variation in the growth and extent of service utilization among CASUs.

The CASUs provide their services in several modes, with most delivered directly by the CASU staff, but a significant number are provided by private contractors.

Most CASUs say they attempt to assess the best method of delivery for services they offer.

### ***BOTH USERS AND GOVERNING OFFICIALS SEE LOCAL CASU MANAGEMENT AS EFFECTIVE***

Current users and local officials rate high the general management and direction provided by CASU directors, lead agencies and tenant boards.

Improved understanding of CASU governing entity roles and responsibilities is needed.

In general, CASUs are effectively marketing their services to potential users and are adding, or planning to add, new services.

The CASU and customer communications are generally effective, with 83 percent of users rating them good to excellent.

The CASU billing procedures are fair, equitable and generally understood by users.

Most users say billing procedures are fair and that they generally understand both the services billed and the billing procedures.

A majority of users (75 percent) say they have experienced no billing problems.

While a majority of users (70 percent) say their CASU prices its services on a unit cost basis, a substantial minority (30 percent) either indicate this is not the case or do not know.

The CASU evaluations and audits deserve increased emphasis.

There is some confusion among users and local officials about the policy requirements for these management tools.

Relatively few CASU evaluations and audits have been conducted or planned.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Comparative Assessments of Service Delivery Sources***

The National CASU Board and staff should promote comparative assessments of the most practical and cost-effective means of delivering CASU services, both among existing CASUs and in new CASUs to be formed.

### ***Standard Role Descriptions for CASU Governing Officials***

To enhance cooperation and shared expectations, all CASUs should be encouraged to adopt a standard description of the roles and responsibilities of key CASU governing officials, such as that developed as part of the Seattle evaluation.

### ***Unit Cost Pricing***

The CASU staff should encourage the broadest, appropriate application of unit cost pricing of services in all new and existing CASUs. This should enhance user understanding and aid in analysis of service cost trends and cost comparisons of alternative service sources.

### ***Annual User Evaluations and Periodic Fiscal Audits***

The national CASU staff and board should:

1. Formalize CASU policy to require 1) annual user evaluations of CASU service delivery and user satisfaction, and 2) periodic fiscal audits by the lead agency inspector general or audit agency.
2. Develop, cooperatively with operational CASUs, suggested practical protocols for conducting CASU evaluations and audits. Regarding the evaluation protocol, we suggest use of simple evaluation tools, such as the form in the appendix to this report.

## **COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REPORT**

We shared the draft of our Executive Report on the CASU Program, and the three supporting technical reports, with the CASU National Board of Directors and the CASU national staff. They addressed their comments to the recommendations in the Executive Report since these are compiled from the three supporting technical reports in the OIG study. They generally agree with the findings of the reports. The full text of the CASU officials' comments is included in the appendix of the Executive Report.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE .....	1
BACKGROUND .....	1
METHODOLOGY .....	2
<b>FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>CASU SERVICE PATTERNS VARY CONSIDERABLY</b> .....	<b>3</b>
CASUs offer a wide variety of services .....	3
The number of offered services and users vary widely among CASUs .....	3
There is wide variation in the growth and extent of service utilization .....	3
<b>BOTH USERS AND GOVERNING OFFICIALS SEE LOCAL CASU MANAGEMENT AS EFFECTIVE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
CASU general management and direction are rated high .....	5
Improved understanding of CASU roles and responsibilities is needed .....	6
CASUs are effectively marketing their services .....	6
CASU and customer communications are effective .....	9
CASU billing procedures are fair, equitable and generally understood by users .....	9
CASU evaluations and audits deserve increased emphasis .....	11
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REPORT</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> Service Evaluation Tool .....	<b>14</b>

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## INTRODUCTION

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### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to conduct a qualitative user evaluation of the Cooperative Administrative Support Unit (CASU) Program.

Overall inspection aims were to: 1) conduct a user assessment of CASU services in operational CASUs; 2) provide the national CASU board with an overview of the CASU Program from a user or customer perspective; and 3) identify the generic strengths and weaknesses that affect the program's workability and success. This report was prepared at the request of the national CASU board and staff.

### BACKGROUND

The CASU Program is a Government-wide program, sponsored by the President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI), which operates under authority of Section 601 of the Economy Act of 1932. Under the CASU concept, agencies in multi-tenant, federally occupied buildings jointly share in establishing and managing an administrative support unit that provides, on a reimbursable basis, administrative services commonly needed by its members.

In October 1985, as part of a shared services initiative, the heads of the General Services Administration, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of Personnel Management, issued a joint memorandum to the heads of all Federal agencies introducing and encouraging support for the CASU Program.

To ensure strong policy support at the national level, the PCMI established a CASU Program National Board of Directors. The national board sets policy and provides program guidance, approves lead agencies and charters CASUs. A national interagency staff has also been organized to serve as a focal point for day-to-day operation of the national CASU Program. The staff advises the CASU board on policy and program issues and provides technical assistance in organizing and operating CASUs.

The national board has established a prototype structure for local CASUs which includes policy control and direction from a tenant board comprised of CASU service users or potential users. A lead agency, selected by the tenant board of directors, provides administrative management support to the CASU in such areas as financial management, staffing, personnel services, etc. The day-to-day direction and management of the CASU staff is provided by a CASU director.

Through marketing and intervention by the national CASU staff, the CASU Program recruits Federal agencies located in a single building or cluster of buildings to become members of a local CASU and to participate in its development, organization, and management. Recruited CASU sites undertake a feasibility study to determine if a CASU could successfully operate at their site, what administrative services their CASU should provide, and how a CASU could most effectively supply these services.

Once the decision to establish a CASU has been made, its prospective members establish its operating plans through a series of interagency memorandums of understanding. The national CASU board reviews these plans and, if appropriate, grants a CASU charter to the local site.

Current CASUs provide such services as mail, moving and labor, physical fitness, shipping and receiving, photocopying, personal property management, conference and training room scheduling, child care, imprest fund and employee assistance programs. These services may be provided directly by the CASU staff, through shared services arrangements from the lead agency or other CASU participating agency or secured through private contracts. By consolidating services, the CASUs expect to provide less expensive, more accessible, and better quality services. The CASUs also expect to standardize and share administrative systems, accelerate use of automation, and to improve management information systems.

Currently, operational CASUs exist at the following locations: Anchorage, Alaska; Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; Cleveland, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Fort Worth, Texas; Jackson, Mississippi; Indianapolis, Indiana; Kansas City (12th Street), Missouri; Los Angeles, California; New York City (Javits Building), New York; and, Seattle, Washington. Additionally, five CASUs have been chartered at these locations: Boston, Massachusetts; Fresno, California; Kansas City (South), Missouri; New York City (Varick Street), New York; and, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This inspection is based on a mail survey, onsite structured interviews and selected background and informational materials provided by the national CASU staff. Our findings are based on a total of 155 respondents, including 34 CASU management and governing officials, 80 current and former CASU users and 41 potential users at 13 of the 14 currently chartered CASUs which were operational or projected to be operational by the end of the second quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 1989.



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## FINDINGS

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This is one of three technical reports prepared in conjunction with our Executive Report on the CASU Program. The Executive Report, "An Assessment by Users and Local Officials," summarizes the chief findings of our study. The technical reports provide details on our study findings as they relate to three separate aspects of the CASU Program. This technical report is "User and Governing Official Perceptions of Local Management." The other two are "User Assessment of Services" and "Local Official Perceptions of Policies and Implementation."

### I. CASU SERVICE PATTERNS VARY CONSIDERABLY.

#### A. CASUs OFFER A WIDE VARIETY OF SERVICES.

1. Of the 28 different services provided, 61 percent are offered by only 1 CASU.
2. Only 4 services are offered by 5 or more CASUs.
3. The top 10 services offered by the 10 operational CASUs are:
  - a. Mail (8)
  - b. Moving/Labor (7)
  - c. Physical Fitness (7)
  - d. Shipping/Receiving (5)
  - e. Photocopy (4)
  - f. Excess Personal Property (4)
  - g. Conference/Training Room Scheduling (4)
  - h. Child Care (3)
  - i. Imprest Fund (2)
  - j. Employee Assistance Programs (2)

#### B. THE NUMBER OF SERVICES EACH CASU OFFERS VARIES WIDELY, RANGING FROM 3 TO 13 SERVICES, WITH AN AVERAGE OF 6 OFFERED SERVICES.

#### C. THE NUMBER OF USERS AT EACH CASU VARIES SIGNIFICANTLY, RANGING FROM A LOW OF 7 TO A HIGH OF 35, WITH AN AVERAGE OF 17 USERS.

#### D. THERE IS SIGNIFICANT VARIATION IN THE GROWTH OF SERVICE UTILIZATION AMONG CASU USERS.

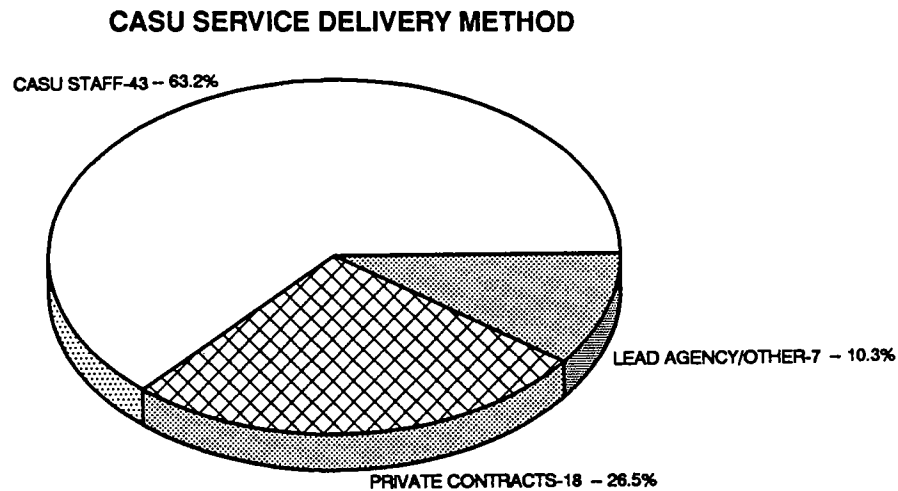
1. Five of the 10 operational CASUs report that some of their users have added to the number of services they use since joining the CASU.

2. Among these 5 CASUs the percentage of users who have added services ranges from 25 to 100 percent.

**E. THE EXTENT OF UTILIZATION OF CASU SERVICES ALSO VARIES CONSIDERABLY.**

1. In none of the CASUs do all users participate in all services.
2. A majority of users participate in all offered services in only two CASUs.
3. In three CASUs 40 percent or more of the users participate in all offered services.
4. However, in six CASUs a strong majority of users (77 to 100%) utilize at least one-half of the offered services.
5. The percentage of CASU participants who use only one service is relatively small, ranging from 0 to 14 percent.
6. Users at two sites say the CASU attempts to require all users to participate in all offered services.

**F. CASUs PROVIDE THEIR SERVICES IN SEVERAL MODES, WITH MOST DELIVERED DIRECTLY BY THE CASU STAFF, BUT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER ARE PROVIDED BY PRIVATE CONTRACTORS.**



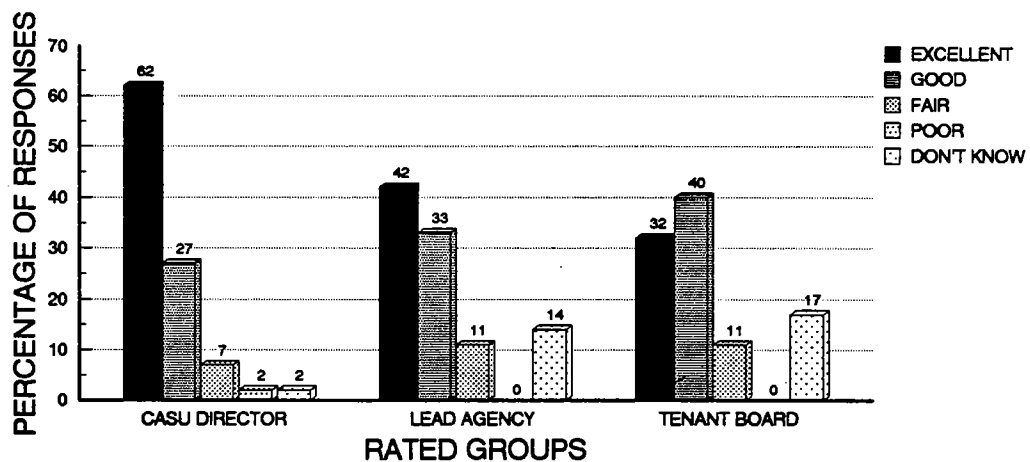
**G. MOST CASUs (9 OF 10) SAY THEY ATTEMPT TO ASSESS THE BEST METHOD OF SERVICE DELIVERY, I.E., DIRECT, CONTRACT OR SHARED SERVICE, FOR THE SERVICES THEY OFFER.**

**II. BOTH USERS AND GOVERNING OFFICIALS SEE LOCAL CASU MANAGEMENT AS EFFECTIVE.**

**A. CASU GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTION ARE RATED HIGH.**

1. Current users give high marks to the general management and direction provided by CASU directors, lead agencies and tenant boards.

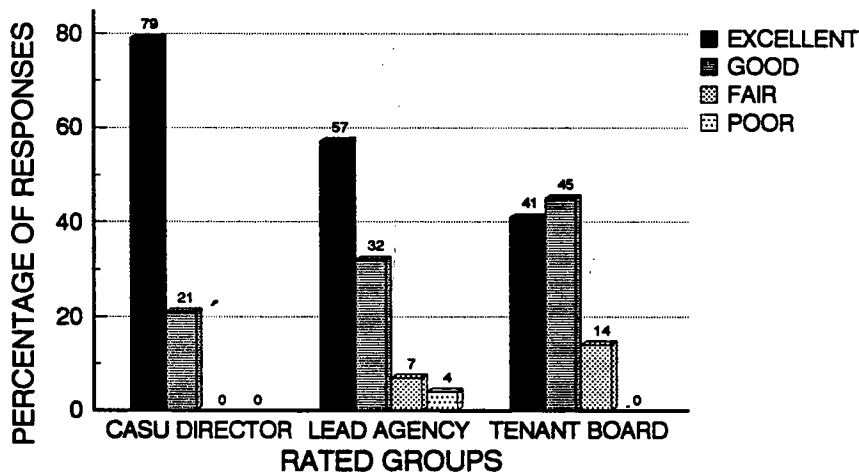
**USER EVALUATIONS OF GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTION PROVIDED BY THE CASU DIRECTOR, LEAD AGENCY, AND THE TENANT BOARD**



TOTAL RESPONSE: CASU DIRECTOR-44, 19, 4, 2, 2  
 LEAD AGENCY-30, 24, 8, 0, 10  
 TENANT BOARD-23, 29, 8, 0, 13

2. The CASU management and governing officials rate CASU directors, lead agencies and tenant boards fairly high on the general management and direction they give the CASU.

**GOVERNING OFFICIAL'S EVALUATIONS OF GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTION PROVIDED BY THE CASU DIRECTOR, LEAD AGENCY, AND THE TENANT BOARD**



TOTAL RESPONSES: CASU DIRECTOR-19, 5, 0, 0  
 LEAD AGENCY-16, 9, 2, 1  
 TENANT BOARD-12, 13, 4, 0

3. Overall, it is noteworthy that:

- Both respondent groups reserve their highest ratings for CASU director performance.
- None of the management or governing entities is given a combined excellent and good rating of less than 72 percent.

**B. *IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF CASU GOVERNING ENTITY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IS NEEDED.***

Asked if CASU tenant board and lead agency roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and correctly understood, local officials say:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
• Clearly Defined?	87%	13%
• Clearly Understood?	74%	26%

**C. *IN GENERAL, THE CASUs ARE EFFECTIVELY MARKETING THEIR SERVICES.***

***Current User Perceptions***

1. The CASUs do a good to excellent job of marketing, according to 82 percent of the current users. Few current users rate marketing efforts as fair (8 percent) or poor (6 percent).
2. Users also report CASUs are fairly effective in enlisting the marketing support of:

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>DK</b>
• Tenant Boards	75%	6%	19%
• Federal Executive Boards	61%	7%	32%

***Potential User Perceptions***

3. A majority of potential users (83 percent) say they have received an explanation of the local CASU concept, and 77 percent say this explanation was effective to very effective.
  - a. Most potential users (92 percent) know what a CASU is.
  - b. A large majority (88 percent) of potential users are familiar with some of the services offered by the CASU.

- c. Most potential users report they have been invited to CASU meetings (77 percent) or received CASU newsletter, progress reports or other written information (83 percent).
  - d. Overall, potential users tend to have a more positive than negative image of the CASU:
    - Fifty-four percent say they hear positive feedback and supportive comments about the CASU.
    - Only two say current users are experiencing problems.
    - A majority (52 percent) say the CASU is most likely to either expand and grow in the future (43 percent) or remain the same (9 percent).
  - e. A majority (74 percent) of potential users say their agencies participated in the CASU feasibility study, with a majority saying it was thorough (73 percent), timely (60 percent) and objective (68 percent).
4. Potential users say they would be more likely to participate in CASU services if they had:
- a. Good cost savings data (62 percent).
  - b. Reliable information on the quality and responsiveness of CASU services (44 percent).
  - c. A directive to participate from their parent agency (24 percent) or if they could persuade their national headquarters that CASU is a good concept (8 percent).
  - d. Assurance they could return to the way they were if the CASU proved too costly, inefficient or ineffective.
- Note:* About one-half of the potential users say they either don't know (34 percent) if their national parent agency supports the CASUs or feel their agency is very to somewhat *unsupportive* (14 percent).
5. Regarding the likelihood of their agency participating in the CASU in the future, most potential users say:
- a. They will probably or definitely use *some* CASU services (57 percent). (30 percent are unsure; 13 percent probably will not.)
  - b. They will probably or definitely *not* use *all* CASU services (78 percent).
6. The main incentives to participate in the CASU program mentioned by potential users are to:
- a. Achieve potential cost savings. (24)
  - b. Receive better quality services. (8)

- c. Receive the same quality of service at lower cost. (6)
  - d. Obtain services not previously available. (5)
7. The main disincentives to participating in the CASU listed by potential users are:
- a. Fear losing control over services. (12)
  - b. Fear losing staff to the CASU. (6)
  - c. Risk that participation may increase rather than decrease costs. (5)
  - d. The requirement that users participate in all CASU services. (4)
  - e. The user agency is too small to have need for all CASU services. (4)

***Local Official Perceptions***

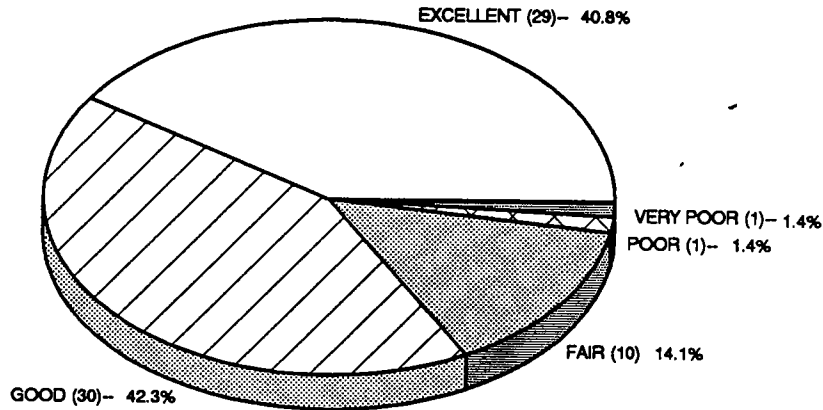
8. Most local officials say CASUs are actively marketing their services.
- a. The CASUs are marketing their services using a wide variety of methods:
    - Meeting with potential users to explain the CASU and its services.
    - Making special presentations (both group and solo).
    - Sharing status reports and CASU newsletters with potential users.
  - b. Local officials agree with users that CASUs are fairly effective in enlisting the support of their tenant boards and local Federal Executive Boards in marketing efforts.
9. The CASUs are adding, or planning to add, new services. This is an indication of their perceived effectiveness and user support.
- a. Five of the 10 operating CASUs indicate increasing the number of available services from those offered at the program's inception.
  - b. Seven of the 10 operating CASUs plan to increase the number of offered services.
  - c. The top 5 additional services CASUs plan to add are:

Service	Number of CASUs
• Photocopying	5
• Records Storage	4
• Excess Property/Warehousing	4
• Labor & Moving	2
• Typing/Clerical	2

**D. CASU AND CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS ARE EFFECTIVE.**

1. The CASU communications are rated as good to excellent by 83 percent of the users.

**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS**



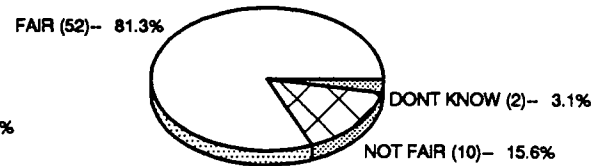
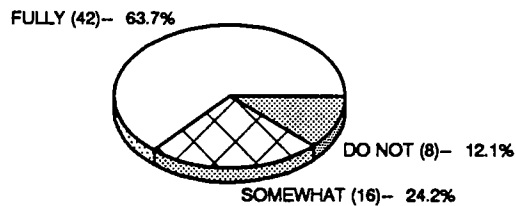
2. Most users say the CASU keeps them informed through regular reports, periodic meetings or other means:

	Yes	No	DK
• Reports	68%	30%	2%
• Meetings	86%	11%	3%

3. Local CASU officials agree that customer communications are effective.
  - a. Officials rate communications as excellent (53 percent) to good (40 percent).
  - b. They say users are kept informed on CASU operations mostly through periodic meetings, regular status reports, and newsletters.
  - c. User service issues or complaints are handled promptly and resolved effectively, according to the vast majority of CASU officials.

**E. CASU BILLING PROCEDURES ARE FAIR, EQUITABLE AND GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD BY USERS.**

1. Most users say CASU billing procedures are fair and equitable and that they generally understand both the services billed and the billing procedures.



#### UNDERSTAND BILLING PROCEDURES?

#### ARE BILLING FAIR AND EQUITABLE

- a. Most users (83 percent) say they fully understand which specific services are being billed by the CASU.
  - b. Most users (88 percent) say they understand the CASU billing computation procedures.
  - c. Most users (75 percent) say they have experienced *no billing problems* with the CASU (67 percent) or are unaware of any billing problems (8 percent).
  - d. A few users (25 percent) report having experienced such billing problems as delays, incorrect bills (miscalculation, wrong agency) lack of itemization or supporting documentation, and risk of funds lapsing in the fourth quarter when credits for unused advance quarterly billings are not made timely. In most cases respondents indicated problems had been satisfactorily resolved by working with CASU staff.
  - e. Most users (74 percent) say the CASU bills their agency for actual services received.
  - f. While a majority of users (70 percent) say their CASU prices its services on a unit cost basis, a substantial minority (30 percent) either indicate this is not the case or do not know.
2. Responses of local officials generally mirror those of users regarding CASU billing procedures.
- a. The CASU officials say users fully understand both the services they are billed for (100 percent) and the billing computation methods (96 percent).
  - b. Directors at 9 of the 10 operational CASUs view their billing methods as fair and equitable.
  - c. At 9 of the 10 operational CASUs, directors say billings normally are based on actual services received and usually are priced on a unit cost basis, whenever appropriate.



F. *CASU EVALUATIONS AND AUDITS DESERVE INCREASED EMPHASIS.*

1. Both users and local CASU officials appear to be somewhat confused or uninformed about whether their CASU's charter requires 1) an independent annual evaluation of CASU service delivery and user satisfaction, or 2) an annual fiscal audit.
  - a. Only 40 percent of users say an evaluation is required (5 percent say one is *not* required, and 55 percent do not know).
  - b. While 63 percent of local CASU officials say an evaluation is required, 15 percent say one is *not* required, and 22 percent do not know.
  - c. Fully 63 percent of users do not know if an annual audit is required (25 percent think one is required, and 12 percent do not think an audit is required).
  - d. Only 39 percent of local CASU officials say an annual audit is required (32 percent say one is *not* required, and 29 percent do not know).
2. Only 32 percent of users and 44 percent of the local CASU officials report an evaluation has been conducted at their CASU. Of course, in the case of newly operational CASUs, an evaluation might be premature.
3. Some local officials say an evaluation has not been conducted because:
  - The CASU is so new an evaluation would be premature. (4 CASUs)
  - The CASU is waiting until all services are operational before an evaluation is done. (1 CASU)
4. Only 4 users (6 percent) and the local officials at 1 CASU say their CASU's fiscal records have been audited.
5. Some local officials say an audit has not been conducted because:
  - The CASU is so new an audit would be premature. (5 CASUs)
  - The lead agency looks at the CASU as its own operation and subject to its own internal controls. (2 CASUs)
  - They haven't needed one, i.e., looking at the budget and other specific areas shows everything is fine. (1 CASU)

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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### ***Do Not Require Use of All Services***

Since participant needs vary widely, CASUs should not require users to utilize all offered services as a condition of participation.

### ***Comparative Assessments of Service Delivery Sources***

The national CASU board and staff should promote comparative assessments of the most practical and cost-effective means of delivering CASU services, both among existing CASUs and in new CASUs to be formed.

### ***Standard Role Descriptions for CASU Governing Officials***

To enhance cooperation and shared expectations, all CASUs should be encouraged to adopt a standard description of the roles and responsibilities of key CASU governing officials, such as that developed as part of the Seattle evaluation.

### ***Unit Cost Pricing***

The national CASU staff should

1. Encourage the broadest, appropriate application of unit cost pricing of services in all new and existing CASUs. This should enhance user understanding and aid in analysis of service cost trends and cost comparisons of alternative service sources.
2. Stress the importance of clear, specific and timely user service billings and assist new and existing CASUs in achieving this end.

### ***Annual User Evaluations and Periodic Fiscal Audits***

The national CASU staff and board should:

1. Formalize CASU policy to require a) annual user evaluations of CASU service delivery and user satisfaction, and b) periodic fiscal audits by the lead agency inspector general or audit agency.
2. Develop, cooperatively with operational CASUs, suggested practical protocols for conducting CASU evaluations and audits. Regarding the evaluation protocol, we suggest use of simple evaluation tools, such as the form in the appendix.

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**APPENDIX**

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**COOPERATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT UNITS**

**SERVICE EVALUATION TOOL**

SERVICE:

RESPONDENT:

Please rate this specific service for each of the following indicators by circling the appropriate response option. The respondent should complete this form for each of the CASU services it receives or previously received.

1. Accessibility and Convenience of Service

- a. To what extent is this service more responsive or timely under the CASU?
 

Much More Responsive	More Responsive	Same As Before CASU	Less Responsive	Much Less Responsive	Don't Know
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- b. To what extent has customer convenience improved due to the CASU?
 

Much More Convenient	Somewhat Convenient	Same As Before CASU	Less Convenient	Much Less Convenient	Don't Know
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- c. How would you rate customer control over service delivery under the CASU?
 

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
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2. Quality of Service

- a. To what extent is the quality of this service better under the CASU?
 

Much Better	Better	Same As Before CASU	Worse	Much Worse	Don't Know
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- b. To what extent is the quality of this service more consistent under the CASU?
 

Much More Consistent	More Consistent	Same As Before CASU	Less Consistent	Much Less Consistent	Don't Know
----------------------	-----------------	---------------------	-----------------	----------------------	------------
- c. How have service delivery methods or technology improved under the CASU?
 

Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Same As Before CASU	Somewhat Worse	Much Worse	Don't Know
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3. Availability of Service

- a. How has the CASU affected overall availability of this service?
 

Greatly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Same As Before CASU	Somewhat Worse	Much Worse	Don't Know
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- b. Was this specific service available to your agency before the CASU existed?
 

Yes	No	Don't Know
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4. Cost of Service

- a. Is the cost-effectiveness of this service better or worse under the CASU?
 

Much Better	Better	About Same	Somewhat Worse	Much Worse	Don't Know
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- b. How have your agency's costs for this service been affected by the CASU?
 

Costs Greatly Reduced	Costs Somewhat Reduced	Costs Same As Before CASU	Costs Somewhat Higher	Costs Much Higher	Don't Know
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- 5. What is your overall satisfaction with this CASU service?
 

Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Don't Know
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6. Please describe briefly any problems experienced with this service and how the problems were resolved.

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