National Sea Grant Review Panel

Administrative Review Committee
for the
National Sea Grant Office

STAFFING THE NATIONAL SEA GRANT OFFICE

Report to the Panel, May 2, 2008

Recommendation: On the basis of extensive documentation provided by the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), deliberations at two meetings of the Administrative Review Committee (ARC), and conversations with senior staff of the NSGO, the ARC recommends that funding for the NSGO be increased to cover a "full-staff model" (described below). The ARC believes that such a model offers the best opportunity for Sea Grant to break out of the constraints of inadequate recognition of its capabilities and potential (by NOAA and other cognizant federal agencies) to help address critical federal responsibilities in the coastal zone of the US and its territories.

Background: In response to current interest in re-authorization of the National Sea Grant College Program, the ARC has developed a recommendation under the general guidance provided by its charge "… *to determine the financial and human resource base necessary to allow the NSGO to efficiently and effectively fulfill its current and anticipated future core responsibilities, including those activities delineated in the NRC report* …" before addressing all the issues specified in the charge (December 19, 2007 memo from Nathaniel E. Robinson, Chair of the National Sea Grant Review Panel). Our recommendation is based on careful review of the material provided by the NSGO (whose cooperation has been most useful and is much appreciated), listed below:

- The 2002 "Duce" report ("Building Sea Grant; the Role of the National Sea Grant Office").

- Final Report of the RIT NSGO Operations Sub-Team (undated).

- NSGO functions (produced by the NSGO – 11/22/06).

- NSGO Program Officer/National Leader and Coordination Position Descriptions (produced by the NSGO – 1/22/07).

- NSGO Organization Chart (produced by the NSGO – Feb. 2008).

- Budget/FTE totals for NSGO and similar NOAA Offices (from L. Cammen's Sea Grant Week presentation to the SGA – 11/2/02).

- Discussion of NSGO 5% Administrative Cap (draft memo from L. Cammen to P. Anderson – undated).

- List of NSGO Staff since Dec. 2005 and NSGO FTE's since 1991 (compiled by J. Eigen – undated)

- NDGO Administrative Budgets 2003-2008 (compiled by J. Eigen with additional derived metrics by R. Heath – undated).

- Follow-up, Program Leadership and Administration (memo from J. Murray to the ARC in response to a request made at the Feb 15, 2008 meeting of the – 2/27/08)

- NSGO Office Build-Out (spread sheet of personnel needs from J. Murray – Revised 3/17/08)

- Updated Budget Projection (E-mail from L. Cammen – 3/18/08)

The recommendation is also based on conversations with senior NSGO staff on February 15, 2008 and March 5, 2008, as well as on deliberations of the ARC.

The ARC deliberations focused on four areas: the need to address the recent (post-2005) loss of staff, which is impacting the NSGO's ability to meet its day-to-day legal and management obligations to the state programs; the need to staff both the activities specified in the new strategic plan and the new PIE program that responds to the NRC report; the need to integrate the National Sea Grant College Program more effectively into all of NOAA's coastal and engagement activities (which requires that the NSGO have

enough senior staff to participate more actively in NOAA's budget process and provide leadership in coordinating like missions with other NOAA program offices); and the need to "market" Sea Grants capabilities and successes more widely within NOAA and other federal agencies with similar coastal programs (again requiring experienced NSGO staff leadership). It is striking that while Sea Grant was cited repeatedly in the Ocean Commission report for its ability to address many of the issues identified by the Commission, this recognition has not yet resulted in many of the related federal coastal programs taking advantage of Sea Grant's exceptional outreach capabilities and embedment in coastal communities around all the coasts of the US to help address their problems.

Rather than be in a position to address these tasks, however, the NSGO has seen its budget cap drop from $3.1 million in FY2005 to $2.8 million in FY2007, with a corresponding decline in staff numbers from 23 to 17. The ARC structured its discussion in terms of the number and level of staff and budget required to meet the responsibilities outlined below.

The "Full-Staff Model: Based on the information available, the ARC views the responsibilities of the NSGO as falling into four main areas:

- **National Leadership and Program Development** (creation of new partnerships with other offices of NOAA and other federal departments; implementation of new Sea Grant initiatives that draw on the unique strengths of SG to fill gaps in existing federal coastal programs; and "marketing" of Sea Grant's capabilities).

- **Optimization of Sea Grant's Role within NOAA** (participate in budget development; play a leadership role in coordination of NOAA's coastal programs; and play a leadership role in development of effective engagement of NOAA with its many constituents).

- **Network Leadership and Coordination** (lead focus teams; coordinate research, engagement (extension, communication, education) and assessment activities across the network; facilitate the exchange of innovative projects and "best management practices"; guide national program accountability; coordinate regional programs; and manage national initiatives).

- **Management and Assessment of Individual Programs** (carry out legally required activities to assure funding of state Sea Grant programs; provide support to state programs as required; and manage assessment activities).

Attachment 1 shows the number and level of staff required to meet these responsibilities. Each position type includes a brief description of its function, the appropriate GS or SES level, and identifies which of the four areas it contributes to.

Attachment 2 shows the budget associated with the "Full-Staff Model," together with actual NSGO administrative budgets for the past six years.

Although the proposed staffing level and cost of the "Full-Staff Model" represent significant increases over the *status quo*, the ARC believes that such increases are essential if the NSGO is to fully meet its current obligations and begin to move the program towards its proper role as a key player in the effective utilization, management, and conservation of the priceless but finite coastal resources of this country.

G. Ross Heath, Chair
Robert R. Stickney
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