

## **Common Elements of the Sea Grant Program**

### **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Mission**

To understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs.

### **Sea Grant Mission**

NOAA's National Sea Grant College Program "Enhances the practical use and conservation of coastal, marine and Great Lakes resources to create a sustainable economy and environment."

### **Purpose**

Sea Grant serves as a unifying mechanism within NOAA to engage top universities in meeting NOAA's mission. NOAA Sea Grant conducts research, extension, education, and communications to achieve a sustainable environment and to encourage the responsible use of America's coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes resources.

### **Infrastructure**

NOAA Sea Grant is a nationwide network of 30+ university-based programs that partner with coastal communities. Sea Grant provides a stable national infrastructure of programs located at universities in every coastal and Great Lakes state, and Puerto Rico, as well as projects in the Pacific region.

### **Size**

Sea Grant engages over 3,000 scientists, engineers, extension agents, educators, communications specialists, and students drawn from over 300 institutions.

### **Focus**

Sea Grant invests in high priority theme areas such as coastal communities and economies, coastal hazards mitigation, ecosystems and habitats, aquaculture, fisheries and seafood technology, marine biotechnology, the urban coast, ocean technology and education.

### **Principal Business**

NOAA Sea Grant is an open and competitive, science management, capacity building, service enterprise committed to creating new knowledge (research) and transferring science-based information to users through outreach (extension, education and communications) for mission-related objectives. The Sea Grant enterprise is organized nationally and implemented at the state and local levels in order to fully engage the network in sound research, education and outreach (extension and communications).

- **Research:** Gets resources to problems identified by coastal residents and businesses, and local, regional, state and federal agencies. Approximately 500

competitively-funded research projects are supported each year across the full spectrum of marine and coastal sciences.

- **Education:** Provides training and curriculum development for K-12 educators to bring the sciences into the classroom; fellowship opportunities for policy study in Washington, D.C. and for work with industry; and support for graduate research assistants. Sea Grant supports approximately 648 graduate students per year and 209 undergraduate students.
- **Extension:** Facilitates rapid transfer of easily understood scientific information in forms that are readily understood by coastal communities and decision makers. Approximately 300 agents connect community residents to the resources of the nation's top universities to address locally identified problems. Integrated teaching, research, and public service enables rapid research-based responses to critical, emerging issues.
- **Communications:** Serving as an honest broker of Sea Grant information to a wide range of audiences using multimedia approaches. Approximately 70 communications staff throughout the nation keep the public informed about current research and technology in the marine and aquatic sciences.

### **Competitive Process**

Sea Grant is fully open and competitive. Funds are awarded in four ways:

- **Core Program** – (about 85% of program funds plus match): State programs receive base funding and performance-based merit funding to carry out its research, outreach and education activities. All research projects are chosen locally, through peer-reviewed competitions based on annual or biennial RFP. Federal funding is augmented by a 50% matching contribution.
- **National Strategic Investments (NSIs)** – (about 10% of program funds plus match): Priority areas are established and projects selected through nationally competitive programs managed by NSGO. NSIs enable the entire Sea Grant network to make concentrated investments on specific issues of national importance.
- **Pass through Awards** – (about 3% of program funds): Sea Grant has legislative authority to accept funds from other NOAA offices and Federal agencies to support program activities through Sea Grant colleges.

Sea Grant programs are held to a high performance standard and are subject to thorough review by a team of outside reviewers, the NSGRP, and NSGO. The Sea Grant College Program Act requires a merit review process for proposals, solid program evaluation, and a periodic review of Sea Grant university institutions. According to the National Sea Grant College Program Amendments of 2002 (33 USC 2211 note.), programs are rated “according to their relative performance into no less than five categories with each of the two best-performing categories containing no more than 25 percent of the programs.” Programs are evaluated against four primary criteria: planning, management, user engagement and impacts.

## **Legislation**

The National Sea Grant College Program Act (HR 3389) of 2002 passed unanimously in both Houses of Congress and was signed by the President on November 26, 2002. The legislation is definitive on the assignment of Sea Grant to the Department of Commerce, and calls for a 50 percent increase in authorization over a five-year period. The Act also increases the oversight and coordination responsibilities of the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) in the areas of performance evaluation, national competitions, cooperation among NOAA, other federal agencies and Sea Grant programs, and promotion of growth of the Sea Grant Program.

## **Organizational structure**

Sea Grant has three main organizational elements: NSGO, the National Sea Grant Review Panel (NSGRP), and the Sea Grant Association (SGA).

NSGO is a federal office and is NOAA's primary interface with the Sea Grant programs, universities and multiple coastal constituencies. NSGO is legislatively mandated to administer the Sea Grant program within 5% of appropriated funds. Administrative costs on the Federal appropriation alone are 4.65%, less than the National Science Foundation benchmark of 5.32%. In actuality, NOAA's administrative costs for managing the Sea Grant Program are approximately 3% of its total Federal allocation since NSGO has oversight responsibility for all Sea Grant projects by law, including both the Federal funding and state match.

The NSGRP was established in 1976 and is authorized by the Sea Grant Act to advise the Secretary of Commerce, the Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere, and the Sea Grant Director on the direction, operations, and performance of the National Sea Grant College Program. The Secretary appoints the 15 members, not less than 8 of which have expertise in marine science. The other members are individuals with expertise in education, marine affairs and resource management, extension services, state government, industry, economics, planning, or other expertise regarding ocean, coastal, or Great Lake resources.

The SGA represents the state Sea Grant programs as a non-profit membership of universities that house Sea Grant programs. SGA is the mechanism for programs to coordinate activities, suggest regional and national priorities to NSGO, and provide a unified voice for Sea Grant institutions on ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes issues.