



October 3, 2008

MEMORANDUM FOR: Sea Grant Directors

FROM: Leon M. Cammen 
Director

SUBJECT: State Plan Alignment

Thanks to the combined hard work of the entire Sea Grant Network, we have finalized the National Strategic Plan and have distributed for review a draft of the National Implementation Plan. Together these documents will constitute Sea Grant's National Program Plan for 2009-2013. These collective planning efforts are essential in order to fully implement the new Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (PIE) system, respond to recommendations of the National Review Council, and position Sea Grant as a critical national program that supports the federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes mission. The next step in the PIE process is for each program to align its planning with the national plans. There are two phases to this process:

- (1) Align your Sea Grant Program plan's goals and strategies with the goals and strategies in the National Strategic Plan (due November 21, 2008); and
- (2) Identify which national performance measures your program will be supporting and the targets relating to them. (due March 2009)

This memo provides guidance for the alignment process: it describes what is being asked of the programs; it provides instructions for preparing the alignment documents; and it explains the approval process.

WHAT IS THE ALIGNMENT PROCESS, AND WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO TAKE PART?

The alignment process concept was proposed by a team of representatives from the Sea Grant network as the primary tool to document and evaluate the relationships between the national plans and individual Program strategic plans. The National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) is a national program, thus all of its component Programs are expected to support the national strategic goals and strategies. Each Program is not expected to support *every* national goal and strategy. Programs have the flexibility and latitude to work in areas not included in the national plans, but a significant portion of your efforts should support the focus areas of the national plans.

The purpose of the alignment process is:

- (1) To assure all Program plans align with the national plans – documenting current and future plans used by all Programs and how they support the national plans.



(2) To assure from the outset of the PIE implementation that Program plans are ambitious with challenging goals and milestones, while meeting benchmarks of effective planning documents.

(3) To establish at the outset of the planning cycle a formal agreement between the Program and the NSGO that the Plan is acceptable and meets Sea Grant national planning criteria and standards.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE ALIGNMENT PROCESS AND WHEN ARE MATERIALS DUE?

The first phase requires Programs to work with their program officers to align their plan goals and strategies with the goals and strategies in the National Strategic Plan, and to estimate the percentage of resources/effort that will go towards each focus area. This portion of the alignment process is due November 21, 2008.

The second phase is to determine which national performance measures your Program will support, and to align your Program's performance measures with the national measures (if they differ) and the targets relating to them. Since the National Implementation Plan is not yet complete, this phase of the alignment process will not be due until March 2009.

Phase I

The first phase of the planning alignment process is prepared in two parts: a cover letter, and a completed alignment template (attached) detailing focus areas, goals, and strategies. Along with the cover letter and alignment template, please also include a copy of your most recent (operative) strategic plan. Programs should coordinate closely with their NSGO Program Officer when preparing these alignment materials.

The cover letter should include: the term of the Program's current plan, how it was created, and a general summary of the extent of alignment between the national plans and the state plan, including proposed actions, if any, to better align the two plans. Examples of actions include additional input from stakeholder groups and advisory committees.

The attached alignment template is an Excel spreadsheet. Tab 1 lists the focus areas, goals and strategies in the national plan and has spaces for Programs to insert the corresponding focus areas, goals and strategies from their own plans. Nomenclature used to develop state plans often differs from the language used in the national plan. The national plan refers to "focus areas, goals, and strategies," while states often use terms such as "issues, sub-goals, objectives, approaches, and action items." State Programs need to compare the language of their current plan with that of the national plans to make a determination as to how the nomenclature corresponds.

In order to show where Sea Grant is allocating funding within the strategic plan nationally, we are requesting the estimated percentage of federal dollars each Program will spend in 2009 per focus area in Tab 2. This information will be useful in telling the national story, highlighting how

our investments span across the four focus areas. There will be an opportunity to update this information during the second portion of the alignment process, as mentioned above.

Upon completion of the final draft of the National Implementation Plan (anticipated in November 2008), additional tabs will be added to the template to complete the second phase of this process, which will include information regarding outcomes, performance measures and targets. The National Implementation Plan will not be finalized until all state Program information is gathered and targets can be summed to provide the national measures and targets.

HOW WILL THE ALIGNMENT OF MY PLANS BE EVALUATED AND APPROVED?

For the first phase, Program Officers will work with the Program Directors to ensure that the state plan's goals and strategies align with those in the national plan. During the second phase of the alignment process, all alignment documents will be reviewed by a small team of SG Review Panel members, who will convene in early spring 2009 to recommend acceptance, or needed modifications to the NSGCP Director, based on the following questions:

- (1) Does the Program adequately support the national plan?
- (2) Is the Program devoting a significant portion of its resources towards supporting one or more of the focus areas of the national plan?
- (3) Relative to other Programs, is this plan ambitious—does the plan set challenging goals and ambitious milestones given the amount of resources dedicated to the overall program?

If the answer to these three questions is yes, the review team will issue a finding that the alignment between the state and national plans is sufficient and recommend that the NSGCP Director approve the state plan. In addition, the review team will provide beneficial and useful observations and comments resulting from the alignment process review to the Programs through the NSGCP Director.

Given the active participation of all Programs in the creation of the national plan, it seems unlikely that any Program's strategic plan does not already adequately support the national plans. In the unlikely event that a Program strategic plan does not adequately support the national plan, the Program will be asked to develop a strategy for adapting its plan to support the national plan, before its plan will be approved.