



National Sea Grant College Program



March 26, 2010

To: John Woeste, Chair, National Sea Grant Advisory Board

From: Leon M. Cammen, Director 

Subject: Charge to the National Sea Grant Advisory Board to Review Policies and Criteria for Allocating Sea Grant Funding Resources

Purpose: To develop policies and criteria for allocating Sea Grant funding resources that will be consistent with Sea Grant's legislative authority and will maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the National Sea Grant College Program.

Background

Following the 2002 reauthorization of the National Sea Grant College Program, a policy document, "*Policy for the Allocation of Funds, FY 2003 and Beyond*," was developed by a joint committee of the National Sea Grant Review Panel, the Sea Grant Association (SGA), and the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) to guide the allocation of appropriated funds in a manner consistent with the new legislation. The policy established four categories for Sea Grant's funding allocation: program base funding; merit funding; national competitions; and support for new programs. Almost a decade has passed since that policy was put in place, and there is new legislative language from the 2008 reauthorization that impacts the allocation of funds. In addition, state austerity budgets, coupled with years of relatively flat Federal funding and continued inflation, have increased the financial pressure on all state Sea Grant Programs. This has been especially difficult for the smaller programs that have less ability to absorb budget cuts.

Sea Grant's 2008 reauthorization (P.L. 110-394) requires that the Director, "subject to the availability of appropriations, allocate funding among sea grant colleges and sea grant institutes so as to —

- (i) promote healthy competition among sea grant colleges and institutes;
- (ii) encourage collaborations among sea grant colleges and sea grant institutes to address regional and national priorities established under subsection (c)(1);
- (iii) ensure successful implementation of sea grant programs;
- (iv) to the maximum extent consistent with other provisions of this Act, provide a stable base of funding for sea grant colleges and institutes;
- (v) encourage and promote coordination and cooperation between the research, education, and outreach programs of the Administration and those of academic institutions; and
- (vi) encourage cooperation with Minority Serving Institutions to enhance collaborative research opportunities and increase the number of such students graduating in NOAA science areas; and ensure compliance with the guidelines for merit review under subsection (c)(2)."

The legislation further provides that "In any fiscal year in which the appropriations made under subsection (a)(1) exceed the amounts appropriated for fiscal year 2003 [\$62.4M] for the purposes described in such subsection, the Secretary shall distribute any excess amounts (except amounts used for the administration of the sea grant program) to any combination of the following:

- (1) sea grant programs, according to their performance assessments;

- (2) regional or national strategic investments authorized under section 204(b)(4) [33 USCS § 1123(b)(4)];
- (3) a college, university, institution, association, or alliance for activities that are necessary for it to be designated as a sea grant college or sea grant institute; and
- (4) a sea grant college or sea grant institute designated after the date of enactment of the National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 [enacted Nov. 26, 2002] but not yet evaluated under section 204(d)(3)(A) [33 USCS § 1123(d)(3)(A)].”

The 2009 NSGO policy document entitled “*National Sea Grant College Program Evaluation*” described the process for evaluating the performance of Sea Grant programs and using those evaluations to allocate the available merit funds among the programs. However, it did not address the larger issue of the appropriate size of the merit funding pool relative to base funding for the programs. The National Sea Grant Advisory Board’s 2009 report, “*Sea Grant Research*,” considered several alternative models for funding allocation, outlining the positive and negative aspects of each, but did not make any recommendations regarding their potential adoption.

It is time to reconsider Sea Grant’s current allocation policy and determine whether it is still appropriate or whether we need to make changes in the way Sea Grant supports its local, state, regional, and national programming.

Charge to the National Sea Grant Advisory Board

The National Sea Grant Advisory Board should provide advice on an overall policy and criteria for allocating funding resources for Sea Grant programs and initiatives that will maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of the National Sea Grant College Program and be consistent with Sea Grant’s legislative authority. The allocation policy will need to meet the following objectives:

- Provide guidance for the allocation of funding among base programs, merit funding, regional and national strategic investments, and national program development
- Ensure that all Sea Grant programs will have sufficient resources, to the extent overall funding allows, to function effectively in their respective environments

In developing recommendations for the allocation policy, the Advisory Board should consider alternative models for allocating resources than the current policy, including those presented in the recent “*Sea Grant Research*” report. The Advisory Board should also consider whether guidelines are appropriate for the allocation of resources within Sea Grant programs for research, education, etc. and if so, what form those guidelines might take.

Participants

This policy review should be carried out by the Advisory Board through the appointment of an appropriate subcommittee. The subcommittee should include representatives from the Sea Grant Association and the National Sea Grant Office and may include any other individuals who could provide useful perspective both from within and external to the Sea Grant network. The National Office is prepared to provide staff support and travel funds as necessary to facilitate the subcommittee’s discussions.

Potential Schedule

A draft policy recommendation, with or without options, should be available for discussion at Sea Grant Week in October 2010 and should be finalized by the spring 2011 Board meeting.