

PRELIMINARY/DRAFT

Report and Recommendations

**NRC Report Implementation Committee
National Sea Grant Review Panel**

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June 16, 2006; National Research Council**

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**I. Recommendations of the National Research Council Report (“NRC
Report”)
Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process”
June 16, 2006; National Research Council**

**Recommendation 1: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program,
under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with the
National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant programs, should
strengthen the ability of the National Sea Grant Office to carry out meaningful,
ongoing internal assessment in order to complement periodic, external assessment
currently taking place.**

**Location of Recommendation 1: Summary Section/Effectiveness Post-2002
Evaluation (p. 5); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Effectiveness of
Post-1998 Evaluation (p. 89)**

Response to Recommendation 1: We concur with this recommendation. In order to accomplish this recommendation, the National Sea Grant Office must have adequate funding, and adequate staffing. The current resources that are available to the NSGO are seriously limited and insufficient to implement this NRC Recommendation.

Recommendation 2: Steps should be taken by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant programs, to strengthen strategic planning at both the national and individual program level. The strategic plans of the individual programs and the national program should represent a coordinated and collective effort to serve local, regional, and national needs.

Location of Recommendation 2: Summary Section/Strategic Planning (p. 6); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Strategic Planning (p. 91)

Response to Recommendation 2: We concur with this recommendation. The Director of the NSGO is implementing a schedule to revise the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan, and have individual Sea Grant Programs develop their own individual Strategic Plans consistent with the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan and the NOAA Strategic Plan. Each of these individual Sea Grant Program Strategic Plans, and the accompanying performance benchmarks, indicators and evaluation criteria should be reviewed and approved by the NSGO in partnership with the NSGRP and the SGA by the end of 2007 so that the next round of PATs can begin at the beginning of 2008. We strongly encourage adherence to this schedule.

Recommendation 3: Each individual Sea Grant program, in collaboration with its local network and the National Sea Grant Office, should develop an appropriately ambitious, high quality strategic plan that meets local and institutional needs while simultaneously reflecting the individual program's role in addressing the regional and national needs identified in the strategic plans of NOAA and National Sea Grant College Program.

Location of Recommendation 3: Chapter 4/Program Oversight and Management/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Strategic Planning Process (p. 84)

Response to Recommendation 3: We concur with this recommendation. In order to accomplish this recommendation, the National Sea Grant Office must have adequate funding, and adequate staffing. The current resources that are available to the NSGO are seriously limited and insufficient to implement this NRC Recommendation.

Recommendation 4: The National Sea Grant Office, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel and individual Sea Grant programs, should establish regular procedures (separate from annual and periodic performance evaluation) for working with the individual Sea Grant program to create and adopt an appropriately ambitious strategic plan, with goals and objectives against which the program would be evaluated at the next program evaluation period.

Location of Recommendation 4: Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings And Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 67)

Response to Recommendation 4: We concur with this recommendation. We believe that in combination with the submittal of individual Sea Grant Program Strategic Plans, performance benchmarks, indicators and evaluation criteria should be negotiated with each individual Sea Grant Program. To ensure consistency throughout the full PAT cycle, Strategic Plan elements, benchmarks, indicators and evaluation criteria of all programs should be negotiated concurrently.

Recommendation 5: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with National Sea Grant Review Panel, should formally review and approve each individual strategic plan.

Location of Recommendation 5: Chapter 4/Program Oversight and Management/Findings & Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Strategic Planning Process (p. 84)

Response to Recommendation 5: We concur with this recommendation.

Recommendation 6: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant Programs, should modify the benchmarks and indicators, as needed, to ensure that the performance of each

program is measured against the objectives outlined in the separately approved, program specific strategic plan called for in the previous recommendation.

Location of Recommendation 6: Summary Section/Performance Criteria (p. 6); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Performance Criteria (p. 92)

Response to Recommendation 6: We concur with this recommendation. We recommend that the PAT grading sheet should be modified by eliminating the grades for Strategic Planning, which now will be accomplished separately through a negotiated and approved Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan Performance Benchmarks will be integrated throughout the sub-elements of the PAT grading sheet. An equally weighted category (10%) will be established for grading regional coordination, collaboration and network building activities.

Recommendation 7: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant programs, should substantially reduce the overall number of scored criteria by combining various existing criteria, while adding cooperative, network-building activities as an explicitly evaluated, highly valued criterion.

Location of Recommendation 7: Summary Section/Performance Criteria (p. 7); and Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 65); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Performance Criteria (p. 92)

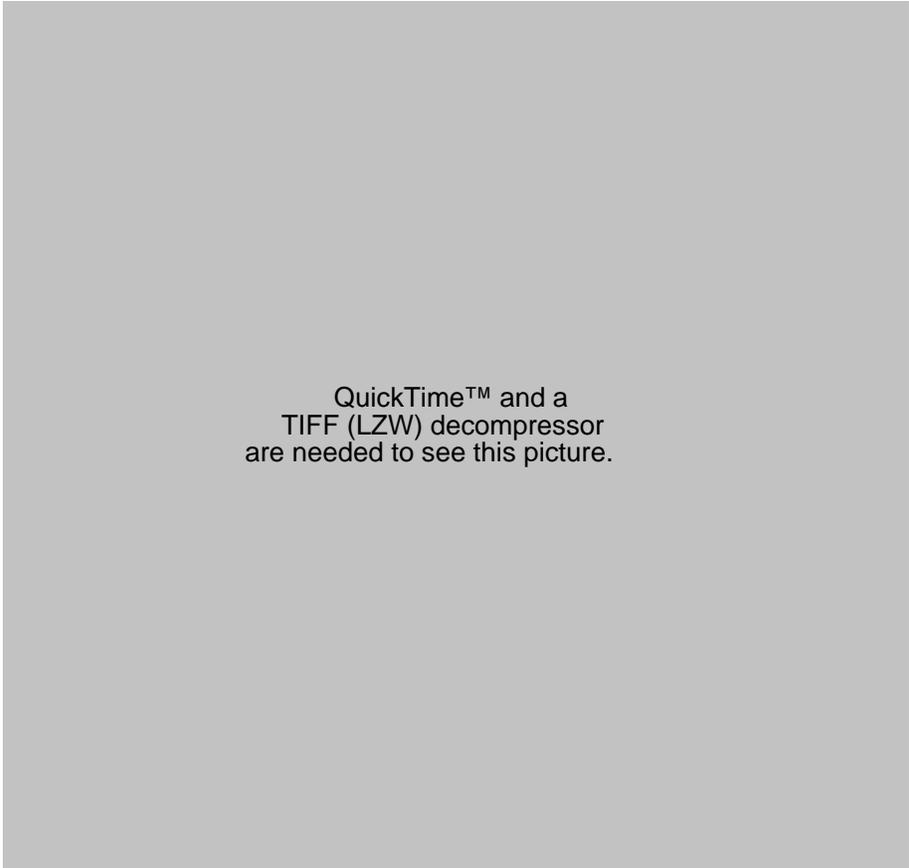
Response to Recommendation 7: We concur with adding explicit cooperative network building criteria. However, we have concerns regarding a reduction in the number of scored activities. The number of criteria must be sufficiently large to recognize and assess the uniqueness and diversity existing between the 30 Sea Grant Programs. A greater number than “4 to 6 broader criteria” appears to be advisable when considering the need to provide a reasonable gradation and classification to meet Congressional requirements for rating and ranking individual programs for the purpose of competitively awarding merit and bonus funds. If the Congressionally mandated requirements for rating and ranking individual Sea Grant Programs are eliminated in the future, we believe that the number of ranking criteria can be reduced.

Recommendation 8: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce, should revise the calculation of

bonus funding allocation relative to program rank to ensure that small differences in program rank do not result in large differences in bonus funding, while preserving or even enhancing the ability to competitively award bonus funds as required by the National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 (P.L. 107–299).

Location of Recommendation 8: Summary Section/Fairness in Competition (p. 9); and Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 67), and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Fairness in Competition (p. 95)

Response to Recommendation 8: We concur with this recommendation and feel it is easily handled by replacing the block grade distinctions with a curve, such as that in Figure 3.4 on page 60 of the NRC Report.



QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (LZW) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Recommendation 9: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, working with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should carefully review the present benchmarks and indicators to ensure that they are sufficiently ambitious and reflect characteristics deemed of high priority for the program as a whole.

Location of Recommendation 9: Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 64)

Response to Recommendation 9: We concur with this recommendation.

Recommendation 10: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, working with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should engage independent expertise to refine the benchmarks and grading instructions to meet professional methods and standards for reliability and to refine the training materials used to prepare individuals involved in the evaluation process, in a manner consistent with the recommendations made in this report.

Location of Recommendation 10: Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/ Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 65)

Response to Recommendation 10: We concur with this recommendation and further recommend that the NSGO proceed with the suggestions on a continuing basis, working with the NSGRP. Consultation with independent expertise to assist in refining benchmarks, the grading process, and training is supported, subject to available funding.

Recommendation 11: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program should communicate the results of the FE (annual NSGO Final Evaluation) directly to individual Sea Grant program directors. This communication should include the final rating score received by that program (as begun in 2004) and document any substantial difference between the conclusions reached during the annual evaluation and the most recent periodic review. Furthermore, the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program should communicate the implication of the annual evaluation in terms of the rating and ranking process used to determine a program's eligibility or receipt of merit or bonus funding.

Location of Recommendation 11: Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 66)

Response to Recommendation 11: We concur with this recommendation.

Recommendation 12: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should work to establish an independent body to carry out the periodic assessments under the supervision of the National Sea Grant Review Panel.

Location of Recommendation 12: Chapter 4/Program Oversight and Management/Annual and Periodic Assessment Processes as Integral Elements of Program Administration (p. 79)

Response to Recommendation 12: We do not concur with this recommendation. We believe that the premise of this Recommendation is invalid, and is based on an inaccurate argument. We believe that the direct involvement of the National Sea Grant Review Panel in the review process enhances the evaluation of Sea Grant Programs and provides valuable understanding. Further, this knowledge and understanding is essential to the Panel in fulfilling their statutory responsibility to advise the Secretary of Commerce, the NOAA Administrator, and the Director of the NSGCP. Additionally, we recommend that the NSGRP should work with the NSGO to involve the NSGRP in addressing issues that have broad significance to the overall NSGCP.

Recommendation 13: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant programs, should shorten the duration and standardize the PAT site visits, based on the minimum time and material needed to cover essential, standardized elements of the program assessment.

Location of Recommendation 13: Summary Section/Program Assessment Teams and Site Visits (p. 7); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Program Assessment Team and Site Visit (p. 93)

Response to Recommendation 13: We concur with this recommendation. As a general rule, PATs should attempt to be completed within 3 working days, while allowing for flexibility. It will be important for the NSGO and NSGRP to develop a

template to define the timing and scheduling for preparation and presentations and for the Team to discuss and report findings. Such a template would also provide a degree of consistency for all PATs. It would also be desirable to place a nominal cost limit for the preparation by the program being reviewed. The NSGRP recently approved recommending that expenditures not exceed \$25,000 (please see Response to II C).

Recommendation 14: National Sea Grant Office and National Sea Grant Review Panel should reduce the effort and costs required to prepare for and conduct a Program Assessment Team site review by providing specific limits on the amount and kind of preparatory material to be provided to the Program Assessment Team and by limiting the site visit to no more than three days, including the time to draft the preliminary report and meet with program directors and institutional representatives.

Location of Recommendation 14: Chapter 3/Critique of the Periodic Assessment Process/Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Periodic Assessment Process (p. 66)

Response to Recommendation 14: We concur with this recommendation. As mentioned in Response to Recommendation 13, reduction of the effort and costs of PAT reviews is highly desirable. A general requirement limiting materials and a carefully scheduled 3-day visit that follows a specific template could benefit efforts to reduce preparation time and effort. A set maximum budget of \$25,000 would contain costs (please see Response to IIC). Future Program Assessments should maximize the use of existing plans, progress reports, etc.

Recommendation 15: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce, should rank the individual Sea Grant programs based on a program evaluation process that includes more robust, credible, and transparent annual assessments of each individual Sea Grant program.

Location of Recommendation 15: Summary Section/Providing Coordination and Facilitation Through Informed, Ongoing Oversight (p. 8); and Chapter 5/Major Findings and Recommendations/Providing Coordination and Facilitation Through Informed, Ongoing Oversight (p. 94)

Response to Recommendation 15: The NRC suggested that Sea Grant Programs be allowed to submit documentation of improvements made in their programs since their

last PAT, and that their grades be adjusted to reflect these responses to recommendations that were made during the PAT. We find difficulty in understanding this concept.

In an attempt to find a way for annual reviews to take place we developed, for example, the following concept:

Each individual Sea Grant Program, in an off-year cycle (i.e., the three-years in which they do not participate in a PAT) would have an opportunity, by October 1, to submit documentation to the National Sea Grant Office concerning:

- A. Changing a PAT grade based on specific improvements that have taken place in the Program.
- B. Any additional issues that an individual Sea Grant Program believes should be considered by the National Sea Grant Office. This response would be sent to the two NSGPR members who were on the PAT that conducted the initial PAT Review. The two NSGRP PAT members would, in turn, respond with their opinion of the adequacy of the Program's response. Both the Program response and the Panel members' response, along with the request by the Program for a grade amendment, would be submitted to the NSGO Final Review for their consideration.

While we believe this is a method for achieving an annual review, we believe, from a practical standpoint, that leaving the current practice of only four-year reviews in place is more appropriate.

Recommendation 16: The Secretary of Commerce, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should take steps to ensure that sufficient human and fiscal resources are available to allow robust, ongoing, and meaningful interaction among the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, the staff of the National Sea Grant Office, the directors of individual Sea Grant programs, and the administrators of the home institutions of individual Sea Grant programs.

Location of Recommendation 16: Summary Section/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 9); and Chapter 5/Major Findings & Recommendations/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 96)

Response to Recommendation 16: We concur with this recommendation. We believe this is a budget issue that needs to be addressed by the Secretary of Commerce and

NOAA Administrator, as well as by the Congress. The National Sea Grant Office, at its current level of funding, with the 5% administrative cap, does not have sufficient resources to achieve robust staff interaction with individual Sea Grant Programs as proposed by the NRC.

Recommendation 17: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with National Sea Grant Review Panel and the individual Sea Grant programs, should undertake an evaluation of how work force capabilities and other components of effective program administration could be modified within the National Sea Grant Office to enhance its ability to coordinate and facilitate the actions of the individual Sea Grant programs.

Location of Recommendation 17: Summary Section/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 9-10); and Chapter 5/Major Findings and Recommendations/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 96)

Response to Recommendation 17: We concur with this recommendation. However it is clearly linked to resources available as identified in our response to Recommendation 16.

Recommendation 18: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, under supervision of the Secretary of Commerce, should take steps to ensure that the program assessment process (both the new annual assessment called for in this report and the Program Assessment Team review) is well-described and understood by individual program directors, congressional staff, personnel at the Office of Management and Budget, university and state administrators, and the general public.

Location of Recommendation 18: Summary Section/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 10); and Chapter 5/Major Findings and Recommendations/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 97)

Response to Recommendation 18: We concur with this recommendation and recommend that the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program develop a response.

Recommendation 19: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, acting under authority of the Secretary, should direct the National Sea Grant Review Panel to undertake the development of a systematic review of the “state of the Sea Grant program” once every four years. The review should rely extensively on information collected during the annual and periodic assessments, augmented with a site visit to the National Sea Grant Office, and it should focus on how the program is functioning as a whole.

Location of Recommendation 19: Summary Section/Improving Program Cohesion (p. 10); and Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Increasing Reliability and Transparency of Annual and Periodic Assessment (p. 85); and Chapter 5/Major Findings and Recommendations/Improving Program Cohesion (p 97)

Response to Recommendation 19: We concur with this recommendation. The Panel looks forward to developing an annual “State of the Sea Grant Program” review.

Recommendation 20: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program should ensure that program administration carried out by the National Sea Grant Office makes full and consistent use of annual reporting, frequent and meaningful interactions with individual Sea Grant programs by National Sea Grant Office program officers, and the development, approval, and implementation of strategic plans to monitor and assess the performance of the individual Sea Grant programs on an ongoing basis.

Location of Recommendation 20: Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Sea Grant Program Administration (p. 82)

Response to Recommendation 20: We concur with this recommendation.

Recommendation 21: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, working with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should redirect the focus from periodic external Program Assessment Team reviews towards identifying areas and mechanisms for improving the individual Sea Grant programs as well as the National Sea Grant Office’s efforts to facilitate and coordinate program efforts.

Location of Recommendation 21: Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Sea Grant Program Administration (p. 83)

Response to Recommendation 21: We concur with this recommendation.

Recommendation 22: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should create a process for determining the underlying causes of disagreement for instances where a Program Assessment Team review appears to reach conclusions at odds with the most recent annual assessment provided by the National Sea Grant Office.

Location of Recommendation 22: Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Sea Grant Program Administration (p. 83)

Response to Recommendation 22: We concur with this recommendation. We encourage the NSGO to review data trends, etc.

Recommendation 23: In order to effectively administer the Sea Grant program, the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program should take steps to ensure that sufficient qualified staff are available to interact with the individual Sea Grant programs, to ensure effective two-way communication, and to monitor and assess program performance on an ongoing basis.

Location of Recommendation 23: Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Role of the National Sea Grant Office (p. 83)

Response to Recommendation 23: We concur with this recommendation. However, the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program is achieving as much as possible with available resources.

Recommendation 24: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel and the directors of the individual Sea Grant programs, should modify the NSGO Final Evaluation review process so that every individual Sea Grant program is rated and ranked each year. The rating (and subsequent ranking) should be based on an assessment of each

program’s progress for the reporting year based on annual reports of activities, outcomes, and impacts in the context of the unique strategic plans approved for each program.

Location of Recommendation 24: Chapter 4/Findings and Recommendations Regarding Program Oversight and Management/Increasing Reliability and Transparency of Annual & Periodic Assessment (p. 85)

Response to Recommendation 24: Please see response to Recommendation 15.

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II. Select Recommendations of the National Sea Grant Review Panel Program Evaluation Committee (from “Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel’s Program Evaluation Committee”; November 17, 2005)

The following recommendations (revised 022107) were previously submitted to the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) by the Panel Program Evaluation Committee as part of a 2005 Report from this Committee, “Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel’s Program Evaluation Committee”; November 17, 2005 (“NSGRP Program Evaluation Report”). Upon adoption of the NSGRP Program Evaluation Report and recommendations by the NSGRP Executive Committee on behalf of, and under authorization from, the full Panel they were forwarded to the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program. The most recent past Director of the NSGCP asked that these recommendations and the implementation of such be held until the conclusion of the 2nd PAT cycle in 2006.

A. Additional Recommendation A: Re-competition/Recertification/Decertification/Re-designation (Revised 022107)

ISSUE/PROBLEM

OMB and other entities have previously recommended that Sea Grant Programs be re-certified or re-designated on a reasonable and regular schedule. NOAA has recently moved in the direction of such a concept by requiring a review/re-competition of joint institutes.

DISCUSSION

The issues of re-certification and re-designation of Sea Grant Programs are outstanding issues with OMB, Congress, the Department of Commerce and other entities. These concerns should be taken seriously, in that these entities influence the Congressional authorization, Congressional appropriation, agency-level budgetary allocation, intra-and-inter-agency standing, overall perception and awareness of, and ultimate sustainability of the National Sea Grant College Program as a separate, distinct and valuable conduit for the investment of public funds vis-à-vis other federally appropriated entities within and outside of NOAA that claim to pursue similar goals and objectives as the NSGCP.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- The National Sea Grant Office, in consultation with the NSGRP, should review its procedures for Re-competition/Recertification/Decertification/Re-designation.

**B. Additional Recommendation B:
Additional Suggestions to the February NSGO Review (Revised 022107)**

DISCUSSION

The Committee believes the remaining two previous recommendations should be implemented with noted alterations, as discussed below. Additionally, there appears to be a question as to what additional data can or cannot be discussed during the February NSGO Review regarding Sea Grant College Programs.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- a) Panel members participating in a PAT should be provided any correspondence that has occurred since the PAT. They then should be given an opportunity to submit written comments to the NSGO Director to be used in the Final Review.
- b) The National Sea Grant Office should clearly define the additional information that can be considered in the February NSGO review.
- c) We further recommend that Panel members who participated in a PAT Review receive copies of the Director's Response to the PAT and the NSGO Final Evaluation letter. We also recommend that PAT Chairs (or Vice Chairs in their stead) have an opportunity to participate by phone in the portion of the NSGO Final Review that addresses the Sea Grant Program for which they served as Chair.

**C. Additional Recommendation C:
Cost Containment (Revised 022107)**

ISSUE/PROBLEM

The high estimates of PAT preparation costs provided by some Sea Grant Directors seem excessive. What actions should be taken to contain costs related to the PAT process?

DISCUSSION

We believe that additional cost containment guidance is necessary to Directors. Specifically, Directors have estimated that they have spent as much as several hundred thousand dollars on a PAT and in cases have chartered airplanes, created venues at multiple sites and brought in extensive Panels for discussion and input. We believe if Directors actually spent these amounts they are clearly excessive and inappropriate.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

We recommend that programs normally be limited to a \$25,000* expenditure for a PAT. We believe this can be accomplished if programs think about the ongoing elements of a PAT and incorporate matrix, data collection and presentation as a part of their normal material development process.

- Not included would be the National Office costs of providing the PAT, program officer and their travel expenses. Additionally the cost to the individual Sea Grant Programs for developing documentation of their Program, which is their on-going fiduciary responsibilities under grants received, would not be included in the suggested \$25,000.00 limit.