

**An Enhanced and Integrated
Strategic Planning and
Program Assessment Strategy**
for the
National Sea Grant College Program



Draft
Report of the
Sea Grant Response Integration Team

In response to the
National Research Council
(Ocean Studies Board)
Committee on the Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process

Presented to
Dr. Leon M. Cammen
Director,
National Sea Grant College Program,
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Response Integration Team Members
Mr. Paul Anderson, President, Sea Grant Association
Dr. Nikola Garber, National Sea Grant Office
Dr. Jonathan Kramer, Past President, Sea Grant Association
Dr. James D. Murray, National Sea Grant Office

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Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team - Barry Costa-Pierce (RISG), Co-chair; Mike Voiland (NCSG), Co-chair; Megan Agy (NSGO); Jamie Krauk (NSGO);

Performance Assessment Sub-Team - Russ Moll (CASG), Chair; Chuck Wilson (LASG); Sami Grimes (NSGO); Terry Smith (NSGO)

National Sea Grant Operations Sub-Team - Jon Eigen (NSGO), Chair; Dorn Carlson (NSGO); Don Scavia (MISG); Nancy Targett (DESG).

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A committee report requires a good writer/editor to pull together the component parts and to make the message coherent. The RIT is grateful to Amy Painter (NSGO) for lending her writing and editing talents and for making this complex subject more understandable.

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Executive Summary

The National Research Council (NRC) report, *Evaluation of the Sea Grant Review Process* (2006), made recommendations for changes and improvements to the process by which Sea Grant programs are assessed. In order to address these recommendations, a Response Integration Team (RIT), was formed to provide guidance to the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) Director, who is charged with responding to the NRC report.

The RIT addressed all of the recommendations made by the NRC. However, it was not the RIT's intent to recommend the adoption of each recommendation independently and literally, but rather to develop an integrated system for planning and assessment that accurately addresses the intent of the entire suite of recommendations found therein.

This report presents the RIT's analyses, and offers guidance that will be useful for both the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) and the university-based programs as the Sea Grant enterprise implements measures to improve its strategic planning and assessment processes. The new planning and assessment system described in this report builds upon the former program assessment process and introduces several new concepts that are designed to better integrate Sea Grant planning and management to produce significant outcomes. In producing this report, the RIT has tried to be inclusive and has utilized intellectual talent from all parts of the network to conceptualize a holistic planning and assessment process.

Highlights

The current Performance Assessment Team (PAT) process has been in place for over 10 years. While several elements of program planning, organization, assessment and management will continue under the new integrated planning and assessment process, there are also several key differences. The most significant difference between these two processes is the elimination of the four-year PAT site-visit as the fundamental component of Sea Grant program assessment. Highlights from the new system include the following:

- **Emphasis:** Programs evaluated for ability to *integrate* research, extension and education programming to address strategic issues and produce significant impacts
- **Assessment:** PAT site-visit replaced by an independent Program Review Panel (PRP) to review all 31 programs concurrently, every five years, based upon briefing materials provided by programs. The process includes:
 - Director participation: University-based program directors invited to address the PRP during review process to answer questions and provide additional information
 - Mid-course review: Every two-and-a-half years, through PRP sub-group, largely to be based on aggregated annual reports

- **Annual reports:** More closely linked to strategic plans
- **Strategic plans:** Programs to align strategic plans with national plan
- **Program visit:** National Sea Grant College Program Director visits programs once every five years (with program officer and National Sea Grant Review Panel member)

Omnibus and outreach proposal cycles will remain the same. In addition, the new system recognizes the fundamental importance of ensuring programs the freedom and flexibility to respond to emerging issues and opportunities, as well as to critical state needs. These activities may extend beyond federal priorities and be funded by alternate means. The combination of these elements builds strength and credibility, and they may be reflected in program planning and reporting. Topical Assistance Teams (TATs) will become mandatory, and depending upon the expertise needed for a TAT, will involve National Sea Grant Review Panel members, along with other experts. As in the past, TATs will be based upon a program's desire to address deficiencies, or to foster program development and innovation. All TATs will be focused on program improvement.

Timeline

The RIT recognizes that the new model will have a number of important implications with regard to the timing of critical actions on the part of university-based programs, the National Sea Grant Office and National Sea Grant Review Panel. Below, is a summary of each step in the process over the next planning and assessment cycle.

2008

National Strategic Plan

A new national strategic plan will be completed by 2008. The national priorities will reflect strong input from key stakeholders as well as consensus on critical national needs from high-level analyses at state and federal levels (bottom-up and top-down inputs).

Initial Strategic Plan Alignment Process (beginning 2008)

Alignment of state and national strategic plans will be an essential process in the new planning and assessment system. During the transition period, programs will be required to align their new or existing strategic plans with the new national plan. Each Sea Grant program will have time to examine the new national plan and to fully consider how its current programming and existing strategic plan reflects (or does not reflect) new national plan focus areas. Programs will be expected to consider the goals and objectives of the 2008 national plan and whether their current plan is responsive to those needs. In some cases, programs may need to initiate some level of stakeholder engagement in order to identify which national priorities best match to local needs and interests. Approval by the NSGO will ensure that the aligned plan and the intentions of the program are understood as the basis for the upcoming program assessments.

Alignment Memo

All programs will be required to submit a written memo indicating how they intend to align their current strategic plan with the new national plan. This memo (up to five pages) will be due by April 1, 2008 after programs have solicited staff, and some form of stakeholder input. Close interaction between university-based program directors and their assigned NSGO program officers will facilitate development of a strong alignment memo, linking the state and national plans.

2009

Initial Rating Review (one-time event)

As the Sea Grant network transitions to a new planning and assessment system, there is need to re-gauge existing program ratings in order to update out-of-date ratings (some programs were last rated in 2003) and implement a more comparative program rating structure. In early 2009, all programs will be subject to re-rating by an independent panel of experts. All programs will be reviewed over the same four-year review period, which is defined as 2005-2008. Programs last reviewed as late as 2005 and 2006 will only need to update and modify their most recent briefing book by adding information for the last two or three-year period since the last assessment.

2011

Mid-Course Review (ongoing, every two-and-a-half years)

Although the NRC report emphasized the need for annual assessments, the RIT believes that wholesale rating reviews of the programs on an annual basis would be burdensome to all parts of the network. A mid-course review will allow a program's rating to be adjusted either up or down for demonstrated cause. This review will be conducted every two-and-a-half years by a sub-group, comprised of five or six members from the original 15-member Program Review Panel (PRP). This sub-group of the PRP (PRP-sub) will be charged with reviewing new information provided since the last PRP review and advising the NSGCP Director on changes that should be made to the original 2009 program ratings.

2012

Strategic Planning Process

The entire process is re-initiated in 2012 as a new national strategic plan is developed. Individual program planning will proceed in concert.

2013

Strategic Plan Alignment

All university-based program plans must be fully aligned with the national strategic plan by this date. **By the year 2013, all university-based programs will be on the same five-year planning cycle.**

Program Review (2013, and once every five years thereafter)

A periodic and comprehensive review is critical to continued program improvement and to the assessment of program performance. The PRP will focus on the important impacts (both planned and those attained in response to new opportunities) achieved within the planning framework established at the state and national levels. This review will

emphasize the linkage between program impacts and management actions that demonstrate strategic, integrated programming to achieve significant results. The PRP will focus on evaluating the quality of the outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as the management actions leading to them.

Between 2008 and 2013

The following will take place:

Program Visits

The NSGCP Director will visit each university-based program once during the assessment cycle. This visit will include the program officer and a member of the NSGRP and will be a brief visit to the host institution for the primary purpose of meeting with the program management team, advisory committees and university administration to review and discuss the broad issues related to institutional setting.

Topical Assistance Team (TAT)

The new system includes one TAT for each university-based program during the assessment cycle. The purpose of the TAT is largely for program improvement and will be based upon needs identified by previous reviews and/or the need for the program to identify and respond to new opportunities.

Annual/Biennial (ongoing)

Annual reporting and omnibus cycles will remain the same.

Conclusion

The RIT believes that adoption of the processes outlined in this report will encourage programs to be accountable to their strategic plans, thereby meeting the needs of their stakeholders and demonstrating the value of the federal-state partnership. Implementing these procedures will position the program as a more nationally-focused, outcome-based enterprise built “bottom-up” from its network of university-based, locally relevant programs and strengthened “top-down” by its federal mission.

I. Background

National Research Council Report

In 1993, the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) requested that the National Academies' National Research Council (NRC) review and evaluate the National Sea Grant College Program as part of an effort to prepare for the National Sea Grant College Program Reauthorization Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-160). By the following year, the NRC completed its review and produced a report entitled, *A Review of the NOAA National Sea Grant College Program* (1994). In the report, the NRC recommended several actions, including strengthening the strategic planning process at the national level, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) and the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel), and carrying out systematic, periodic reviews of the individual programs.

Current NRC Study

In response to the 1994 report, the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program requested that the National Sea Grant Review Panel establish a process for evaluating each individual program once over a four-year review cycle. The Panel responded by establishing a program assessment process in which Sea Grant program reviews are carried out through a series of site visits involving recognized experts in marine science and policy who focus on a uniform set of performance criteria, using a standardized set of benchmarks and indicators. This assessment process has evolved over time, in response both to experience gained during its execution and to the evolving expectations of Congress. The National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 (P.L. 107-299) directed NOAA to contract with the NRC to carry out a new review of the assessment process and make appropriate recommendations to improve its overall effectiveness.

NRC Statement of Task

The NRC's Committee on the Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process was charged with assessing new procedures adopted by the NSGCP since the publication of the 1994 NRC report. During this study, the NRC Committee assessed the impact of the new procedures and evaluation process on Sea Grant as a whole.

Specifically, the Committee was asked to examine:

1. The effectiveness of major changes instituted in response to the recommendations of the 1994 NRC report with regard to individual program performance and quality.
2. The effectiveness of program review procedures with regard to accuracy, accountability, and enhancement of individual program performance, including:

- Review the effectiveness of the evaluation and rating system in determining relative performance of programs with regard to management and quality of research, education, extension and training activities;
 - Evaluate whether there have been improvements in programs as a result of the evaluation process;
 - Evaluate the 2003 review procedures for their ability to meaningfully segregate individual programs into five categories based on competitive scores; and,
 - Compare the effectiveness of the previous and 2003 review procedures with regard to the dual objectives of maximizing the quality of each program and of rating programs relative to each other for the purpose of determining performance-based funding.
3. The usefulness and fairness of metrics developed to evaluate programs with different operational constraints, resources and local priorities, including:
- Evaluate metrics for relevance and clarity;
 - Determine whether metrics provide a quantitative measure of quality of performance; and,
 - Assess whether metrics improve consistency and objectivity of reviews from different teams evaluating a diverse portfolio of individual Sea Grant programs.

The Committee was also asked to make recommendations for improving the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process to ensure fairness, consistency and enhancement of performance.

Summary of NRC Recommendations

The NRC made a total of 24 recommendations in the following categories: strategic planning; evaluation; periodic assessment and performance criteria; program assessment teams and site visits; and, improving program cohesion, coordination and oversight. This report addresses those recommendations by presenting a new, integrated model for strategic planning and assessment.

II. Response Integration Team Process

Integrating Planning and Program Assessment: The Vision

The NRC report recognized the NSGCP as a strong and effective national partnership program. Through this unique partnership, the federal government engages a network of 31 university-based programs to achieve national goals. The outcomes and impacts resulting from Sea Grant activities provide enormous ecological and economic benefits to the public. The NRC report provides guidance and recommendations for how Sea Grant can enhance its ability to make these important societal contributions over time.

In order to develop a comprehensive and practical response to the NRC recommendations, the NSGCP Director established a Response Integration Team (RIT) comprised of members of the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), and the Sea Grant Association (SGA). The four-member RIT, with two representatives from the SGA, two from the NSGO and with input from the Panel, sought to develop a transparent process involving balanced input from the Sea Grant network. The primary objective was to provide advice to the Director about how best to respond to the NRC recommendations. The NSGCP Director will make the final decision about a revised Sea Grant planning and assessment system. This report presents the RIT's analyses, and offers guidance that will be useful for both the NSGO and the university-based programs as the Sea Grant enterprise implements measures to improve its strategic planning and assessment processes.

The premise underlying this report is that by integrating Sea Grant planning, management and assessment activities, the organization will enhance its ability to produce critical coastal and Great Lakes impacts, thus providing increased benefits to the public. This outcome-focused system contrasts with the previous assessment system by placing greater emphasis on the integration of planning and management to produce significant impacts/outcomes. The proposed system encourages programs to be accountable to their strategic plans, thereby meeting the needs of their stakeholders, and demonstrating the value of the federal-state partnership. The integrated planning and assessment system proposed in this report will enhance Sea Grant's cost-effectiveness while positioning the program as a more nationally-focused, outcome-based enterprise built "bottom-up" from its network of university-based, locally relevant programs and strengthened "top-down" by its federal mission.

The RIT addressed all of the recommendations outlined in the NRC report in the spirit in which they were offered. It was not the RIT's intent to recommend the adoption of each NRC recommendation independently and literally, but rather, to develop an integrated system for planning and assessment based on the entire suite of recommendations.

The RIT Structure

As a mechanism for coordinating the National Sea Grant College Program's response to the NRC Report, the RIT organized three Sub-Teams to address the issues identified in the report. These included: a Strategic Planning Process, a Performance Assessment Process, and a National Sea Grant Office Operations Sub-Team. The membership of each Sub-Team included two members of the NSGO, and two delegates of the SGA. Each group elected a chairperson. The RIT also designated a liaison to each Sub-Team to serve as the primary contact between the Sub-Team and the RIT, and to ensure integration with other Sub-Teams. The RIT has synthesized and incorporated many elements of the Sub-Team reports in this document. The full reports for each Sub-Team are available on web at: <http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov/input/rit/>

Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team

The NRC identified strategic planning as one of the central elements for consideration in the re-design of the program assessment process. Strategic planning is a cornerstone of the NRC report and central to the RIT's emphasis on planning for outcomes. Effective plans commit programs to explicit outcome-oriented goals and objectives, and provide a tangible link between state and national priorities.

The Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team provided guidance in two stages. During the first stage, the team recommended a process, led by the NSGO, to develop a National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan. During the second stage, the team provided guidance to help university-based programs strengthen their planning processes and align their plans to the priorities articulated in the NSGCP Strategic Plan (national strategic plan).

Performance Assessment Process Sub-Team

The NRC made a series of recommendations prescribing a new performance review process, revised metrics and benchmarks, and a new rating and assessment system. The Performance Assessment Process Sub-Team was asked to provide analysis and guidance in these three critical areas.

Based on the principles outlined by the NRC, the Sub-Team developed a set of recommendations to restructure the current program assessment system. The recommendations include the creation of a program improvement process and program assessment process. These two processes are linked via the formation and activities of an independent Program Review Panel that reviews all Sea Grant programs and provides initial and ongoing assessment of each program.

National Sea Grant Office Operations Sub-Team

The NRC identified the operations of the National Sea Grant Office as one of the elements for consideration in the re-design of the program assessment process. Effective two-way communication and guidance between the NSGO and the Sea Grant programs is essential for success in addressing state and national issues. All parties involved need to understand their respective roles and responsibilities while committing to open, transparent communication that enhances the effectiveness of the partnership.

The Sub-Team analyzed the NSGO's workforce needs for strategic planning and assessment, in part, based on the draft reports of the Strategic Planning Process and Performance Assessment Sub-Teams. In its analysis, the Sub-Team concentrated on the critical role that Program Officers should play in linking individual state programs with the national program through a coupled strategic planning/assessment model.

RIT Timetable

2006

September: RIT formed and initial meeting held

November: Sub-Team charges developed

2007

January: Sub-Teams formed; initial conference calls

February: Initial RIT meetings with Sub-Teams; chairs elected, Sub-Team schedules developed

March: Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team, Stage 1 Interim Report to RIT and distributed to network for comment

June: Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team, Stage 2 Interim Report to RIT

June: Draft Strategic Planning Process and Program Assessment Sub-Team reports distributed to Sea Grant network for comment to RIT

July: RIT completes draft report and seeks comments from Sub-Teams

August: NSGO Operations Sub-Team Report to RIT

August 28-30: RIT Retreat: Sub-Teams and Panel NRC Response Committee presented reports, gave feedback to the RIT on draft integration document, RIT created draft report

September: RIT produces draft report and provides to the SG network for comment

October: RIT presents draft report to the network at the SG gathering

October 15: Comments provided to RIT on the draft report

Late October: RIT reviews comments, creates a final report

November 1: RIT presents final report to National Sea Grant College Program Director

RIT Principles

In addressing the NRC's recommendations, and subsequently designing a revised planning and assessment system, the RIT approached its charge with one overarching principle: to do no harm to the Sea Grant program. The full set of RIT principles is available in **Appendix 1** (page 27). With this in mind, the RIT followed several specific principles that were first described by the Strategic Planning and Performance Assessment Sub-Teams (the full Sub-Team reports are available on the web: <http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov/input/rit/>)

The approach and recommendations contained in this report are presented as a set of actions that, taken as a whole, respond to the NRC recommendations and provide a new, integrated approach for Sea Grant planning and assessment. The RIT hopes that these concepts and ideas stimulate critical thinking and innovation by the Sea Grant network as it attempts to improve an already solid foundation of program planning and assessment.

National Sea Grant Review Panel Report and Advice

The NSGO Deputy Director served as liaison between the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) and the RIT, facilitating information flow as both groups developed their responses to the NRC recommendations. All RIT and RIT Sub-Team draft reports were provided to the Panel for comment. The Panel was also provided with periodic updates on RIT activities during monthly executive committee teleconferences.

The RIT utilized two draft Panel reports pertaining to program assessment: *Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee (November 2005)* and *Report and Recommendations of the NRC Report Implementation Committee (February 2007)*. The former report provided a number of recommendations designed to improve the program assessment process, while the latter addressed each of the 24 NRC recommendations. In addition, Mr. Frank Kudrna, on behalf of the Panel's NRC Report Implementation Committee, represented the Panel and shared its views on the RIT's preliminary draft report during an August 28, 2007 RIT retreat.

While the conclusions and recommendations in this report are the responsibility of the RIT, it should be noted that the Panel's response efforts informed the RIT process. The RIT addressed each of the evaluation issues of concern to the Panel with the exception of developing procedures for re-competition, recertification, decertification and re-designation of Sea Grant colleges and institutional programs (as the Panel recommended in its November 2005 report). The RIT determined its first priority was to focus on developing a comprehensive NRC response before the larger issue of re-competition of programs could be addressed.

III. The Conceptual & Operational Framework: Integrated Planning and Assessment

General Concepts

This model is derived from procedures employed over the past two program assessment cycles. The proposed modifications and new evaluative procedures reflect the recommendations made by the NRC and are based on the need to more substantively link planning to outcomes at all levels of the Sea Grant program.

Timeline

The RIT recognizes that the new model will have a number of important implications with regard to the timing of critical actions on the part of university-based programs, the NSGO and Panel. A chronology outlining each step in the process over the next planning and assessment cycle (2007-2013), is presented in **Table 1**, below. Details about each of these components are discussed, below.

Table 1. Timeline (Calendar Year 2007-2013)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
University-based Programs		State Strategic Plan Alignment Begins <i>Alignment Memo</i> (2 nd Quarter) <i>Briefing Books Prepared 2004-2008</i> (4 th Quarter)	Annual Report (3 rd Quarter)	Annual Report (3 rd Quarter)	Annual Report (3 rd Quarter)	<i>Briefing Books Prepared 2008-2012</i> (4 th Quarter)	State Strategic Plans Developed <i>Annual Report</i> (3 rd Quarter)
PRP (Program Review Panel)			<i>Initial Rating Review*</i> (1 st Quarter)		<i>Mid-Course Review**</i> (2 nd Quarter)		<i>5-year Performance Review*</i> (1 st Quarter)
NSGO	National Strategic Plan Development	National Strategic Plan Completed State Strategic Plan Approval TAT Leadership → PO & NSGCP Director Visits →				National Strategic Plan Completed	State Strategic Plan Approval
NSGRP		<i>Program Visit w/ NSGCP Dir</i> → <i>TAT Participation</i> →		<i>State of Sea Grant Report</i>		<i>State of Sea Grant Report</i>	

*PRP-Full; The 15 member Program Review Panel (PRP) convened to rate all programs

**PRP-Sub: A smaller (5-7 member) set of PRP members convened to consider re-rating all programs and to address petitions from programs

National Strategic Plan (2008)

A network-wide strategic planning process (currently underway) will identify a set of national priorities—areas in which Sea Grant is uniquely qualified and positioned to make large-scale contributions to issues of national need. As outlined by the Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team in its Phase I report (for the full report, visit: <http://www.seagrant.noaa.gov/input/rit/>), the priorities will reflect strong input from key stakeholders as well as consensus on critical national needs from high-level analyses at state and federal levels (bottom-up and top-down inputs). The university-based programs should find most of these priorities relevant and timely in their given states and regions. Strong participation in the planning process (by the programs) will help ensure willingness to work within the broad context set by these priorities.

Strategic Planning *During* the Transition

Initial Strategic Plan Alignment Process (beginning 2008)

Strategic planning at the state and national levels is central to the new program planning and assessment process. During the transition period, programs will be required to align their new or existing strategic plans with the new national plan. Each Sea Grant program will have time to examine the new national plan and to fully consider how its current programming and existing strategic plan reflects (or does not reflect) new national plan focus areas. Programs will be expected to consider the goals and objectives of the 2008 national plan and whether their current plan is responsive to those needs. In some cases, programs may need to initiate some level of stakeholder engagement in order to identify which national priorities best match to state needs and interests. **Programs due to submit a new strategic plan** will simply need to consider the content of the new national plan as they go through their new planning process. **Programs whose plans still have more than a year remaining** will be asked to modify their plans to address national priorities in an appropriate manner.

Strategic Plan Alignment Memorandum and NSGO Acceptance (2008)

All programs will be required to submit a written memo indicating how they intend to align their current strategic plan with the new national plan. This memo (up to five pages) will be due in 2008 after programs have solicited some form of staff and stakeholder input. The memo will be directed to the NSGCP Director with copies to the program officer. Close interaction between each university-based program director and the assigned NSGO program officer will facilitate development of a strong alignment memo, linking the state and national plans. Approval by the NSGO will ensure that the aligned plan and the intentions of the program are understood as the basis for the upcoming program assessments. **Appendix IV** (page 32), provides guidance for developing this memo, and explains the acceptance process.

Strategic Planning *After* the Transition

By the year 2013, all university-based programs will be on the same five-year planning cycle.

Alignment of Priority Areas and Assessment

Identification of national priority areas will remain the basic foundation for each Sea Grant program's plan. By 2013, each university-based program's strategic plan must be aligned with the priorities articulated in the national strategic plan.

The intersection of state and national strategic planning represents a critical juncture between planning and assessment. At this point, the state-to-national linkages are established, and the long-term (five-year) plan, against which the program will be evaluated, is set into motion. This alignment is a critical step in establishing the context for assessment—providing the foundation for how evaluators will determine if outcomes from a given state are making contributions to national priorities, and how the program is managing its resources.

Each program should be able to address a “critical subset” of the national strategic priorities. Programs must determine which priority areas are most relevant given state needs, drivers and resources, and must explain the context for addressing the particular national priorities selected.

State Priorities

Because many programs utilize and rely upon a mix of funds that extend beyond Omnibus NOAA Sea Grant funding and match, program plans can (and perhaps should) include additional priorities that reflect the diverse nature of support as well as critical needs within their respective states. A state strategic plan should accurately represent the diverse and unique challenges each program will address and emphasize. The plan should also articulate how resources, engagement, partnerships and entrepreneurial management will be utilized to develop impacts. In this manner, the plan is a true representation of the essential value of the federal-state partnership that underlies Sea Grant nationwide.

Emerging Issues and Opportunities

Although planning is critical to producing a set of anticipated outcomes and impacts upon which programs may be evaluated, there should also be provisions within each state strategic plan allowing programs the flexibility to respond to emerging issues and opportunities. Flexibility and responsiveness are among Sea Grant's greatest strengths. These core functions should be recognized as critical elements in strategic plans, and in turn, considered during the assessment process.

Planning Process

Programs will be expected to demonstrate a strong planning process. Guidance developed by the Strategic Planning Process Sub-Team outlines a robust planning process that includes endorsement by appropriate stakeholders and university administration, and is designed to produce plans that are sufficiently detailed and appropriately challenging. This process is based on input from a variety of well-established strategic planning

protocols. **Appendix II** (page 28) provides details of the expectations for a successful strategic plan.

Strategic Plan Approval by the NSGO (2013)

The programs, NSGO and the assessment body must understand why goals have been set, that they are sufficiently ambitious within the context of resources and peers, and that they reflect the ongoing balance between state and national drivers that shape each program. Programs must be able to justify the critical choices they have made and the context within each state. Close interaction between each program director and the assigned NSGO program officer will facilitate development of a strong plan and will be critical to the approval process. **Appendix V** (page 33) elaborates on the approval process.

Implementation Planning

Effective implementation planning articulates how resources will be utilized, and is therefore essential in this model. Programs may adopt a number of different formats and approaches for implementation planning. For instance, some programs may utilize integrated strategic and implementation plans, while others may separate these into different documents. Regardless of the model adopted, each program must articulate how its portfolio of resources (research, outreach and education) will be used to address strategic goals over specific timeframes. University-based program implementation plans should contain detailed descriptions of specific actions and timelines for meeting goals and objectives within the context of what is most important for the program in its state niche. The intersection between thematic and functional aspects of the programs should also be evident. Implementation plans may also articulate how other resources extending beyond Omnibus funding (i.e., leveraged funding, partnerships, etc.) will be deployed.

Metrics

A considerable amount of effort has gone into defining metrics for the NSGCP over the past decade. This has occurred at both the national and university levels, where detailed implementation benchmarks and appropriate metrics have been institutionalized. Further guidance will be developed as part of the national strategic planning process to provide a set of national metrics and benchmarks. It is possible that some of these metrics will be derived directly from the previous PAT process, while others may be intended to help assess progress on localized goals and objectives, as articulated in state strategic plans. Programs will need to describe how they are working to meet these benchmarks with specific timelines, outputs and outcomes.

NSGO Program Officer Roles and Interactions

Program officers (POs) should be well-versed in how the Sea Grant programs are implementing their strategic plans. This “front-line” interaction between the NSGO and university-based programs must be maintained and enhanced. A number of options exist

to strengthen this engagement, along with greater opportunities for joint learning and exchange, in a shared process for program improvement and accountability.

Assessment Body and Processes

Program Review Panel

A periodic and comprehensive review is critical to continued program improvement and to the assessment of program performance. The first performance review for the individual Sea Grant programs under this new planning and assessment process is proposed as a five-year review. Rather than basing this process largely on a site visit, as in the past, the RIT proposes that all programs be reviewed by a Program Review Panel (PRP). The PRP is the primary mechanism for comparison among programs and will therefore provide justification to the NSGO for the assignment of merit funds. A detailed description of the PRP and its operations is found in **Appendix VII** (page 37).

The NSGCP Director will appoint 15 members to the PRP representing varying expertise (relevant research, outreach and education backgrounds) and a strong knowledge of Sea Grant.

The PRP will focus on the important impacts (both planned and those attained in response to new opportunities) achieved within the planning framework established at the state and national levels. This review will emphasize the linkages between program impacts and management actions that demonstrate strategic, integrated programming to achieve significant results. The PRP will focus on evaluating the quality of the outputs, outcomes and impacts, as well as the management actions leading to them. In doing so, the PRP must consider, understand and evaluate how well individual programs have met the goals of their strategic plans. The PRP will examine impacts and significant contributions from the state to national levels and their relevance to priorities articulated in the state and national strategic plans. The PRP will also recognize how emerging issues, opportunities and state-priorities are addressed. In this manner, there is continuity between this process and the former program assessment process.

State Program Director Input to PRP

Directors from each Sea Grant program will have the opportunity to meet with the PRP in order to address issues and answer questions.

Initial Rating Review (2009)

As the Sea Grant network transitions to a new planning and assessment system, there is need to re-gauge existing program ratings in order to update out-of-date ratings (some programs were last rated in 2003) and to implement a more comparative program rating structure. In early 2009, all programs will be subject to re-rating by the PRP. All programs will be reviewed for the same review period: 2005-2008. Programs last reviewed in either 2005 and 2006 will only need to update and modify their most recent briefing book by adding information for the last two or three-year period. The PRP will assess all 31 programs based on written materials provided in the briefing book, and the

program's response to recommendations from the most recent program assessment. POs should be available to answer questions or provide clarification on issues that arise. The PRP will provide solid evidence and rationale for its findings and conclusions, and will clearly articulate what a program should consider to improve upon a rating in a particular area.

Mid-Course Review (2011)

The NRC report emphasized the need for annual assessments, in part to recognize and reward programs for improvements made on a more regular basis, and in part to de-emphasize the event nature of the previous program assessment system. Although accountability and outcomes will be tracked annually through annual reports, the RIT believes that wholesale rating reviews of the programs on an annual basis would be burdensome to all parts of the network. A mid-course review is proposed, through which a program's rating could be adjusted either up or down for demonstrated cause. This review will be conducted by a mid-course review sub-group, comprised of five or six members from the original 15-member PRP. This sub-group of the PRP (PRP-sub) will be charged with reviewing new information provided since the last PRP review, and advising the NSGCP Director on changes that should be made to the original 2009 program ratings. See **Appendix VIII** (page 40) for further details.

Program Review (2013)

The PRP will utilize a set of documents generated over the lifespan of the strategic planning process to assess each program. Of particular importance are the briefing book and annual reports (described below). Additional materials will include: strategic and implementation plans, any mid-course correction documented during the review period, and any mid-course rating review documents.

Briefing Books

The development of briefing books has become a catalyst for programs to examine program accomplishments and management, and to organize and present these in a logical, understandable manner. The preparation of a briefing book is central to the RIT's proposed system, and is an essential tool that will be used to examine the long-term outcomes and impacts of planning and management. The book should be derived in large part from annual reports. Therefore, programs should seek ways to organize annual reports so that the most relevant information could easily be incorporated into briefing books. The briefing book will have a standardized format with requirements outlined for both the program and the PRP's benefit. Ideally, programs should also have some freedom to demonstrate their individual character in these documents. Programs will likely prepare these briefing books during the final quarter prior to the review year. The briefing materials should demonstrate how the program has achieved strategic outcomes and impacts articulated in its most recent strategic plan, and how the integration of the program's assets has resulted in impacts at the state, regional and national levels.

Annual Reports

At present, individual programs submit annual reports to the NSGO. These documents have evolved over time to compile impacts and broad contributions to NOAA priority areas. In the proposed system, annual reports take on a new role, linked much more closely to the strategic planning process at the state and national levels. Each program will examine progress toward its stated goals and benchmarks on an annual basis, and collate this information. The annual report will describe each state program's progress toward implementing and achieving its strategic plan goals and objectives. These reports should demonstrate how actively management is engaged, and show that outcomes and impacts are being tracked to both the state and national strategic plans. The annual report is an essential point of intersection between planning and assessment.

The entire process will be re-initiated in 2012 as a new national strategic plan is developed. See **Table I** (page 14). Individual program planning will proceed in concert.

By the year 2013, all university-based programs will be on the same five-year planning cycle.

Additional Tools for Program Improvement and Recognition

The NRC emphasized the need to continuously seek ways to improve programs on all levels. The following mechanisms: a site visit by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, and Topical Assistance Team (TAT) visits, are resources available to the national and university-based programs to aid in self-assessment and improvement.

Program Visit (NSGCP Director)

An active, vital link should exist between the state program, its NSGO program officer and the leadership of the NSGCP. Enhanced information exchange among these parties is essential to program improvement. Similarly, engaging members of the National Sea Grant Review Panel in continuous learning about programs stands to benefit the network as a whole. Once every five years, the NSGCP Director, the assigned PO and a Panel member will visit each Sea Grant program. Aside from the benefits associated with increased knowledge and information exchange, these visits will provide university-based program directors an opportunity to showcase their programs to senior university administrators, faculty and stakeholders. In addition, the NSGCP Director, by seeing each program and understanding its strengths, weaknesses and subsequent rating, will be able to appraise the success of the overall rating system.

This one or one-and-a-half day visit will involve Sea Grant program staff, university officials and advisory bodies. The criteria set forth in the designation of Sea Grant College Status, as described in the Code of Federal Regulations (Guidelines for Sea Grant Colleges—CFR, Vol. 44, No. 244; 12/18/7915 CFR part 918.3) could be used as a framework for fact-finding during this visit. These criteria include: leadership, relevance, programmed team approach, education and training, advisory services, relationships,

productivity and support. The NSGCP Director will visit approximately six programs per year. Each program should expect one visit during the course of a five-year review period. The director of each program, in consultation with the NSGO PO, will set the agenda.

Self-Assessment and Realizing Emerging Opportunities

Topical Assistance Team (TAT)

Effective programs “live” good strategic plans and commit to learning from them in an iterative manner. Self-assessment therefore, is an important tool to use throughout a planning interval. This process can signal where corrections need to be made if benchmarks are not being met, and help management determine how functional elements are working. Similarly, self-assessment can indicate whether or not new opportunities should be addressed.

While many programs have ideas and potential mechanisms to make improvements, they may need assistance in addressing opportunities or challenges—either thematic or functional. Programs also stand to benefit from outside experts who bring independent thinking, new ideas and a different kind of credibility to the process. The TAT approach has been viewed widely as a successful mechanism to help in this way.

Programs could identify an area(s) that needs improvement or an opportunity that could be realized with the help of a TAT. The program’s PO and a National Sea Grant Review Panel member (representing an appropriate area of expertise) would participate on the teams. A TAT visit would be required in a given planning cycle. The TAT report would be of primary use to the program. However, the state program director would have the option of sharing this information with the PRP.

State of Sea Grant Report

The planning and assessment process described here will provide a wealth of information pertinent to the national role and stature of Sea Grant, and will reflect upon how the program is managed at the national level. An in-depth analysis of this material should be done on a biennial basis.

In lieu of the biennial report the NSGO currently publishes, the NSGRP will create a *State of Sea Grant Report* that will be presented to key audiences, stakeholders and decision-makers. The report will document the overall program’s progress toward achieving national strategic plan goals and objectives. Much of the information should be aggregated from state program annual reports, briefing books and selected materials from the PRP process. The Panel should lead this analysis and the preparation of the final report. Just as individual program briefing books, annual reports and other synthesis materials provide the data and analysis that should inform a new state planning process, the *State of Sea Grant Report* should inform the new national planning process.

IV. Comparison of Previous Performance Assessment Process and New Planning and Assessment Process

The current Performance Assessment Team (PAT) process has been in place for over 10 years. Each of the university-based programs has been reviewed twice under this process. While several elements of program planning, organization, evaluation and management will continue under the new integrated planning and assessment process, some components differ. The chart below summarizes the differences and similarities in the major elements of the former and proposed processes.

The overall consequence of this new, integrated approach to program planning and assessment is to place greater emphasis on the end-to-end linkages between planning and achieving strategic outcomes through integrated programming. Where the former program assessment system was based upon the discreet evaluation of management, implementation processes, and producing significant results; the new system will assess programs based on their *ability to integrate* research, extension and education programming to effectively address strategically-identified issues or problems. The new system will recognize program management's ability to link program implementation to strategic planning and will also allow programs the flexibility to address emerging issues.

Differences

The most significant difference between these two processes is the elimination of the four-year PAT site-visit as the fundamental component of Sea Grant program assessment. Under the new process, the PAT site-visit is replaced by a peer-review approach that utilizes a Program Review Panel (PRP) to review all 31 programs concurrently, every five years, based upon briefing materials provided by the programs (described above). The Sea Grant directors (or designees) will be invited to address the PRP during this review process in order to answer questions and to provide additional information for consideration by the PRP.

Another important difference is the increased reliance on annual reporting under the new process. Although the format and information required in the new annual reports are yet to be determined, there will be changes to annual reporting that ensure linkage to strategic plans. As mentioned above, the information included in annual reports will aggregate over time, and will provide the primary basis for mid-course rating reviews and formal program assessment every five years by the PRP.

The university-based programs will need to align their strategic plans with the national strategic plan. In addition, depending on the current status of their strategic plans, programs will need to describe how their plans will be aligned with the national plan at present and in the future.

Whereas under the past PAT process, 25% of the programs are rated annually (and some, by default, are moved into a different category in the ranking system), the proposed process intends to review the ratings of all programs at mid-cycle (every two-and-a-half years) through the utilization of a Sub-team of the PRP (PRP-sub).

The PAT process rated all programs once every four or five years, while the new process will provide more frequent, mid-course ratings through the PRP-sub (based largely upon aggregated annual reports).

Another new element to this process is a visit to each university program once during the five-year period by the NSGCP Director, accompanied by the PO and a member of the Panel.

Common Elements

Although the linkage to the new national strategic plan provides a new context for university-based program planning, the need for a strategic plan and a scheme for implementing that plan remains the same for both of these processes. Omnibus cycles and outreach proposal processes will remain the same, as will each program’s ability to include other, discretionary, non-Sea Grant activities in its planning and reporting. Topical Assistance Team (TAT) visits will become mandatory and will involve panel members along with other experts. However, the TATs will be based on program improvements, innovations or proposed developments.

Table 2. A Summary of Differences and Similarities in the Major Elements of the Former and Proposed Processes

OLD	NEW	Change
Previous Program Assessment Process	Integrated Planning and Assessment Process	
Strategic and Implementation Plans Required Plans evaluated as part of program assessment process	Strategic and Implementation Plans Required	Formalized alignment with national strategic plan required Approval by NSGO required All Plans Synchronized starting in 2013 Plans are not evaluated in assessment process
Omnibus 2-year research proposals 4-year outreach proposals	Omnibus 2-year research proposals 4-year outreach proposals	
Other non-Sea Grant activities, funding, partners and regional approaches acknowledged and expected	Other non-Sea Grant activities, funding, partners and regional approaches acknowledged and expected	
Annual Reports	Annual Reports with new	Greater links to planned

	criteria and emphasis	accomplishments (state to national) to be detailed in new Annual Reports
PAT site visit	Program Review Panel (PRP) 5-year program assessment Mid-course review	No PAT site visit Program Review Panel (PRP) replaces PAT 5-year program assessment Mid-course review
Briefing Books	Briefing Books	
Topical Assistance Team visits (TAT) as needed	Topical Assistance Team visits (TAT) – required once every 5 years	Topical Assistance Team visits (TAT) – required once every 5 years
Rolling rating scheme over 4-5 year period	Mid-course review	Rolling rating scheme over 4-5 year period eliminated Mid-course review instituted
<i>Occasional</i> NSGRP Director visits	NSGCP Director visits to programs required once every five years	NSGCP Director visits to programs required once every five years

V. Implications for the NSGO

The National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) is central to the successful implementation of recommendations made by the RIT. Throughout its report, the NRC Report called for an increased role in planning and assessment by NSGO Program Officers (POs). As a result of budgetary constraints and staff shortages, the NSGO has lost PO capabilities in recent years.

A key question that must be addressed is whether or not the NSGO is presently organized or could be organized to implement this proposed planning and assessment system. Thus, to properly emphasize the vision of this document, the NSGO must be organized to highlight the critical role Program Officers (POs) play in linking individual university-based programs with the National Sea Grant College Program and NOAA via outcomes through planning. With proper staffing and organization, POs will communicate the needs of the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes communities to NOAA and identify opportunities for the Sea Grant network as new programs within the Agency are identified and developed.

Program Officer

The integration of strategic planning, accountability and assessment systems for the NSGCP relies upon POs to perform four main functions: program oversight, grants management, program planning and program assistance. Other functions of the NSGO critical to the successful operation of the NSGCP include: leading and coordinating activities at the national level (extension, education, communication, research and fiscal); communicating on a national level with internal and external stakeholders; managing national fellowship and strategic investment programs; supporting program development at NOAA; and completing performance and accountability requirements expected of all NOAA Programs. To learn more about the duties of a federal PO, see **Appendix III** (page 31).

Current and Ideal Workforce

The NSGO had 20 full-time equivalents (FTE) and three contractors as recently as 2005. Budget cuts over last two years have resulted in a corresponding loss in capacity. The NSGO has responded to this lost capacity in several ways, by: (1) reducing the amount of time spent on lower-priority activities while preserving, to the extent possible, the capacity to perform its highest-priority activities (providing PO support to university-based programs, and responding to NOAA and federal program requirements); (2) partnering with other NOAA programs (e.g., Aquaculture, Invasive Species) to achieve goals common to both programs at reduced cost; and, (3) using contractors, detail positions and more junior federal employees for tasks previously performed by more senior federal employees.

As of the end of FY 2007, the NSGO currently has 15 staff (11 FTEs, three contractors/IPAs, and one FTE detailed by NMFS). In addition, there are three other individuals who spend about 20% of their time on Sea Grant activities, but whose salaries are supported elsewhere. With the current budget, the NSGO can support a staff of 14 FTEs dedicated to Sea Grant activities.

Based on the information provided by the NSGO Operations Sub-Team, an ideal staff for the NSGO would be approximately 27 FTEs (or non-Federal equivalents). For this level of staffing to occur, additional funding opportunities need to be sought (i.e., increased Sea Grant appropriations or funds provided by OAR, NOAA or DOC).

In the meantime, the staffing must continue to be arranged to meet the current statutory and regulatory requirements. This includes a director, a Designated Federal Official (for FACA responsibilities), certified federal program officers sufficient to provide oversight and grants management, a fiscal officer, and planning and assessment staff. The next staffing priority should be to hire individuals to provide *all* of the PO functions described. New hires should be POs with collateral functional area duties (i.e., PO with Extension Director responsibilities).

Costs

In the previous program assessment system, the NSGO funded PATs, parts of non-mandatory TATs and occasional NSGRP Director visits. In the proposed new system, the NSGO would fund mandatory TATs, the five-year program assessment utilizing a Program Review Panel, the mid-course review and the Director's visit. In comparing the

approximate costs of the two systems, the estimated cost difference between the two systems was found to be minimal. Given the above information, the RIT believes the proposed system can be accomplished with the current staff. Without additional resources, the NSGCP Director will need to be willing to make difficult choices, and must be prepared to reduce or eliminate other non PO related activities.

Summary

The new planning and assessment system described in this report builds upon the former program assessment process and introduces several new concepts that are designed to better integrate Sea Grant planning and management to produce significant outcomes. In producing this report, the RIT has tried to be inclusive and has utilized intellectual talent from all parts of the network to conceptualize a holistic planning and assessment process that responds to the major recommendations of the NRC report. Adoption of the processes outlined in this report will encourage programs to be accountable to their strategic plans, thereby meeting the needs of their stakeholders, and demonstrating the value of the federal-state partnership. Implementing these procedures will position the program as a more nationally-focused, outcome-based enterprise built “bottom-up” from its network of university-based, locally relevant programs and strengthened “top-down” by its federal mission.

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Appendix I

Planning and Program Assessment-Related Principles that Guided the RIT

Planning-related principles

- Include planning for both thematic (national ocean, coastal, Great Lake priorities) and functional (research, education, outreach) areas;
- Include input of stakeholders before the plan is finalized;
- Capture the “strategic planning landscape” by conducting both top-down and bottom-up analysis by reviewing existing national and state plans and priorities before finalizing a national plan;
- Make connections to other ocean/coastal/Great Lake agencies and stakeholders, and articulate timelines for completion of a national plan;
- Explain how the national planning process was “strategic” by elaborating upon the specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and niches for Sea Grant;
- Conduct gap and risk analyses in order to identify those priorities and niches; and,
- Recognize that the continuum of planning stems from a robust national strategic plan to a solidly aligned state strategic plan to a supportive and clear implementation plan—an implementation plan with clearly articulated milestones and expected outcomes that can easily be tracked for annual reporting and assessment, along with a process for the regular evaluation and revision of the strategic plan.

Program assessment-related principles

- At its core, the program assessment system should be designed to improve programs;
- To the extent possible, the performance system should be collegial and not adversarial;
- The program assessment system should provide accountability at the program, regional and national levels;
- The program assessment system should provide increased responsibility and an enhanced role for program officers;
- The program assessment system begins with integrated strategic and implementation planning and flows, in part, from benchmarks and milestones resulting from the planning process;
- Program assessment should relate to planned accomplishments;
- The program assessment system should account for a program's regional and national contributions;
- The program assessment system should be completely transparent; and,
- The program assessment system should be as simple as possible.

Appendix II

Considerations for Developing the Content of Strategic and Implementation Plans (2013)

Strategic and implementation planning are management tools. As such, they should help an organization do a better job. Strategic plans provide a clear focus of energy, ensure that members of the organization are working toward the same goals, and outline clear processes to assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. In short, strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. (Adapted from *Bryson's Strategic Planning in Public and Nonprofit Organizations*)

A. Principles of Planning

In conducting strategic planning, it is recommended that the university-based programs fully utilize an inclusive framework that tracks to the national strategic planning process and is tailored to meet the specific landscape in each state. A well designed strategic plan:

- Includes both thematic and functional areas;
- Includes extensive input of stakeholders before the plan is drafted;
- Captures the “strategic landscape” by reviewing existing national and state plans and priorities;
- Articulates the processes used to determine priorities;
- Makes connections to other agencies and stakeholders, and articulates timelines for completion;
- Explains how the process was “strategic” by elaborating upon the specific opportunities and niches;
- Conducts gap and risk analyses in order to identify those priorities and niches;
- Includes the recognition that the continuum of planning stems from a robust national strategic plan, to a solidly aligned state strategic plan;
- Includes clearly articulated milestones and expected outcomes that can easily be tracked for annual reporting and evaluation; and,
- Incorporates a process for the regular evaluation and revisions of state plans.

B. The Value of Stakeholders in Strategic Planning

The most effective programs utilize a sound strategic planning framework that includes input and advice from a broad array of stakeholders—including user, constituency and advisory groups—at appropriate levels and phases throughout the planning process. The strength of Sea Grant at the state and regional levels is in the diversity of stakeholders who are served by the university-based programs, and who are able to provide the programs with sound advice. Effective and ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders in the plan's development, approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is required

to ensure that the plan is based upon, and reflects priority needs at the local, state and regional levels.

C. Types of Planning

It is recommended that Sea Grant conduct two types of strategic planning—thematic and programmatic planning. Thematic planning captures the broad national and state scientific needs and develops a stakeholder process to prioritize them; while programmatic planning seeks to marshal and apply Sea Grant's research, education, outreach, legal, administrative and communications capabilities toward reaching strategic goals.

D. Identification of Consensus Focus Areas, Goals and Priorities

Once all sources of information are compiled, the university-based program must identify the top thematic and functional focus areas to shape the university-based plan. These focus areas must be in alignment with the national plan and other relevant plans, but will also likely include topics of specific mandate or interest to the state program that fit within the needs of the state. It is critical university-based programs have the flexibility to choose focus areas strategically, taking into account the variety of funding sources and interests served under the Sea Grant umbrella within the state. In the determination of the focus areas, consensus should be the aim. It will be critical to document the specific opportunities and niches available to Sea Grant and explain the processes followed for conducting gap and risk analyses in order to identify those focus (niche) areas. When choosing focus areas the program will keep the following in mind: Sea Grant's strengths, societal goals articulated locally and nationally, and needs articulated by relevant stakeholders. Once focus areas are identified, they should be shared and discussed with the NSGO Program Officer.

E. Expected Elements of Plans

Programs may adopt a number of different formats and approaches for strategic and subsequently, implementation planning. For instance, some programs may utilize integrated strategic and implementation plans, while others may separate these into different documents. Regardless of the final model employed plans should address both thematic and functional elements and include the following:

- **Vision:** defined as a description of the ideal future contribution/state of the organization. A consciously created image of what the organization would ideally like to be;
- **Goals:** defined as broad strategic positions or conditions the organization desires to reach. Goals close the gap between the organization's preferred vision and its current situation. An example are those thematically expressed in the Ocean Research Priorities Plan (ORPP) which represent national needs appropriate to Sea Grant's niche; that are sufficiently challenging; and where Sea Grant can have significant ownership;
- **Priorities:** defined as the finite areas that will be addressed given consideration of vision, capabilities, finances, and competitive position;

- **Objectives:** defined as specific implementation guidelines for the goals from the strategic planning exercise, each having a specific time frame. They are measurable statements of achievement that lead to the accomplishment of a goal. In the short-term and through the long-term, they provide indicators of progress;
- **Activities or Milestones with clearly articulated timelines and resources:** defined as statements of how the organization deploys resources to accomplish specific objectives. They include specific quantifiable activities that can be measured;
- **Benchmarks:** defined as the tangible markers of success that can be quantified by a baseline (current) and target (projected); and,
- **Expected outcomes:** defined as the specific end result that the objectives will meet.

F. Development of Robust Objectives and Milestones for Each Priority and Incorporation into the Draft Plan

Critical to the success of any program, are tangible, quantifiable measures of progress and performance. Objectives and milestones should be incorporated into the university-based strategic/implementation plan(s).

When developing quantifiable measures:

- i) Include a strategy for allocating resources;
- ii) Identify milestones and expected outcomes for the implementation of program goals and objectives for the two-year period;
- iii) Identify program elements and their context, as well as personnel needed;
- iv) Highlight the necessary time frame for implementation;
- v) Describe the evaluation process and how you will measure success; and,
- vi) Identify the degree of interaction and integration with other programs (both outside and inside the Sea Grant network).

Metrics should:

- i) Accurately describe and measure relevant aspects of the Sea Grant enterprise and be useful to managers at the state and national levels;
- ii) Take into account the nationally-required performance measures;
- iii) Be robust and designed in a manner that allows for broader analysis—in particular, they should enable reasonable comparisons to be made for individual programs over time, and between appropriate program peers;
- iv) Be readily attainable—specifically reflect ongoing “internal” self-assessment efforts and accumulate continuously; and,
- v) Be evaluated periodically to determine their effectiveness.

Appendix III

Duties of a Federal Program Officer

(1) Program oversight duties:

- Review and approve programs' competitive project selection processes.
- Review and approve omnibus and other program grant applications.
- Review and approve Annual Reports.
- Observe program activities, such as interactions with Advisory Boards and constituents.
- Report on, or otherwise address, program grant performance issues.

(2) Grants management

- Take mandatory grants Program Officer training.
- Process omnibus applications and other grant actions.
- Assure NEPA, budgetary and other required analyses of grant applications takes place.
- Communicate with programs regarding grants policies.

(3) Program planning

- Participate in program strategic and annual planning processes.
- Bring the program perspective into the NSGO annual planning process.
- Assist programs with implementing program improvement.

(4) Program assistance and facilitation

- Facilitate TATs
- Facilitate NSGCP Director's visit to the university-based Sea Grant programs.
- Participate in NOAA programs whose missions make them logical partners with Sea Grant programs.
- Facilitate communication and collaboration between Sea Grant and NOAA programs.
- When appropriate, represent NOAA at Sea Grant program events.

Appendix IV

Strategic Planning Alignment Memo Guidance

Each Sea Grant program will have time to examine the new national plan and to fully consider how its current programming and existing strategic plan reflects (or does not reflect) new national plan thrusts. Close interaction (e.g., telephone, postal and electronic mail, visits, etc.) between the university-based program's director and assigned NSGO program officer will facilitate strong alignment, linking the state and national plans, and acceptance by the NSGO. The strategic planning alignment memo should be sent directly to the NSGCP Director with copies sent to the program officer. The memo should not exceed five pages in length and will be due by April 1, 2008, or as soon as programs have had the opportunity to conduct processes for staff and stakeholder input.

Critical components of this memo include:

- Term of the current strategic plan;
- Identification of goals, objectives and themes for which there is already alignment between the university-based program plan and the national plan;
- Description of how elements of the existing plan might be modified in order to better align with the new national plan, and how these elements will contribute to the national effort to achieve those goals and objectives;
- Description of new elements of the state plan added as a result of consideration of the new national plan, and through input from stakeholder groups; and,
- Description of any stakeholder or advisory committee reviews that may have been utilized in formulating the alignment memo.

Alignment memo acceptance (2008)

Discussions between the PO and university-based director may result in revisions to the alignment memo. The agreed-upon alignment memo will be transmitted to the NSGCP Director for final approval and signature. Approval will be based upon the inclusion of the critical components listed above, the demonstration of stakeholder involvement, and demonstration that the plan links directly to elements of the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan.

Appendix V

Strategic Plan Approval by the NSGO (2013)

Starting 2013, strategic plans will be approved by the NSGO. Conversations between the NSGO program officer (PO) and the university-based director should be ongoing through the strategic planning process. Once the final university-based plan is complete, it should be submitted to the NSGO program officer for acceptance and approval by the NSGCP Director before adoption.

Steps:

- 1) NSGO Program officers will be trained in different strategic planning models through seminars, discussions and readings.
- 2) The university-based strategic plan should address the clear expectations outlined in **Appendix II**, “Considerations for Developing the Content of Strategic and Implementation Plans (2013).”
- 3) The NSGO PO should be involved continuously with the strategic planning process.
- 4) The university-based program will submit the strategic plan to the NSGO.
- 5) The NSGO PO will work in conjunction with the NSGO program planning and assessment group (PPA) to review the plan. Support for PPA could include experts from the field of strategic planning.
- 6) After input from the NSGO PO and PPA, the NSGCP Director will have the final approval and signature of each university-based strategic plan.

The NSGO PO and PPA input to the NSGO Director will include a review of the following:

- The establishment of a planning process must be evident.
- The planning process must demonstrate the appropriate involvement and endorsement of constituency and advisory groups (i.e. Advisory Board, university representatives and others) at every level; this involvement and endorsement should include conferring with stakeholders prior to the drafting and development of the plan, and continuing through plan approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Evidence must be presented that shows that the plan is subject to frequent review.
- The plan reflects local, state and/or regional needs.
- The plan demonstrates ties to the NSGO and NOAA Strategic Plans.
- The plan’s priorities and selection process are clearly articulated.
- The plan at least contains and specifically addresses the following core elements: vision, goals, objectives, priorities, benchmarks and expected outcomes.
- The plan is not so rigid as to preclude responding to issues and opportunities as they arise.

- Planning is done with other institutional and agency resources in mind, and complementary or supplementary programs are planned as appropriate.
- The plan includes both short and long-term programmatic and management goals.
- The plan demonstrates links from state to regional to national priorities.

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Appendix VI

Topical Assistance Team (TAT) Guidance

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish a framework for TAT procedures and to provide guidance to all parties involved with conducting TAT reviews (programs, NSGO, NSGRP, institution administrators, faculty, staff and stakeholders).

In 1998, the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) issued a policy document on the implementation of program assessment procedures in the National Sea Grant College Program. The policy document emphasized that program improvement and assessment “must be an ongoing, continuous process.” The document highlighted a new procedure for on-going self-improvement and assessment termed a topical assistance team (TAT), which provided an opportunity for a program to receive outside advice by a small team of experts on a specific program element and/or a specific program management mechanism. Many programs have utilized TAT procedures over the past decade to improve their program.

All programs have elements that can be improved, or new management directions that can be explored. Under the new planning and assessment system, utilizing a TAT is mandatory once each five-year review period. The purpose of a TAT is to provide the opportunity for a small team of persons knowledgeable in the topical area, working with the program director and invitees, to evaluate and offer advice on an element or area of the Sea Grant program through an exchange of information. The team’s responsibility is to render opinions, options and conclusions in a written report in an effort to improve the program element under review. TATs provide a focused, intensive review of a program element (management, research sub-program, communication, education, extension) or a specific issue that needs to be addressed. Examples might include implementing a new program planning process, developing a new research sub-program or re-organizing the communications program to utilize emerging communications technology. Because assessment decisions are de-coupled from the process, TAT reviews provide a venue for open and frank dialogue among the TAT members and affected parties in the program. TATs provide external expert opinion which can often be helpful to move internal, institutional decisions. The focus of a TAT should be decided upon by the director in consultation with the program officer.

Topical Assistance Team Review Procedures

Initiation Process – A TAT review must be conducted at least once during the five-year review cycle. Both the program director and the NSGO PO must mutually agree on the topic of the review, which may be informed by a number of sources, including but not limited to the PRP assessment. The director/PO agreement should also address how the costs of the topical assistance team review will be assigned. In general, the costs of TATs should be shared, with the NSGO covering costs and expenses associated with organizing and conducting the review team, and the program covering the costs associated with participation by faculty, staff, stakeholders, etc, at the program level. However, funding flexibility should be maintained to allow for unforeseen budgetary scenarios which should be negotiated between the PO and director. For planning, scheduling and budgeting purposes, parties are encouraged

to request TAT reviews by October 1 of the fiscal year in which the assessments are intended to take place. Given multiple program responsibilities by POs, the NSGO may have to negotiate an overall schedule with the directors to distribute TATs evenly over the five-year review period.

Scope of Advisory Team Reviews – Once a TAT review has been agreed to in principle, the scope of the review, the review objectives, and a tentative agenda will be determined by the director of the Sea Grant program in consultation with the NSGO PO. The Sea Grant director is responsible for communicating the purpose, procedures and schedule of the review to appropriate senior university officials, faculty, staff or stakeholders. In general, the senior university officials are encouraged to attend the exit interview and to participate in the advisory team review as appropriate. Because of their particular expertise, TAT members should be provided an opportunity for input to the agenda once the TAT is established.

Roles and Responsibilities for TAT Leadership –

NSGO Program Officer – The PO is responsible for agreeing on behalf of the NSGO to conduct the review on a given topic and time. The PO is also responsible for formally appointing members of the TAT after receiving recommendations for TAT members from the Sea Grant director. The PO, after consulting with the Sea Grant director, will name a chair from among the TAT members. A TAT typically has three to five members. The PO will participate as an ex-officio member of the TAT, serve as staff to it, and assume responsibilities for compiling, editing and distributing the final TAT report.

Sea Grant Director – The Sea Grant director of the host program is responsible for agreeing on behalf of the program to host the review. The Sea Grant director is also responsible for working with the PO to establish the goals, objectives and scope of the review and for logistics and travel arrangements within state during the review.

NSGRP – Depending upon the expertise needed for the TAT, it is expected that at least one member of the Panel will participate in a TAT. The PO will coordinate Panel member participation with the NSGO Deputy Director and the Chair of the Panel on an annual basis. Panel members will be selected for TAT participation based on their particular expertise.

TAT Report – A written report and an exit interview are required as part of the TAT process. The exit interview will be conducted by the TAT Chair prior to the team leaving the institution. Although it is expected that all TAT members will contribute sections of the written report, it is the responsibility of the NSGO PO to compile the final draft, which will be signed by the Chair of the TAT and distributed to the program from the NSGO. Typically, the TAT report will be distributed to the Sea Grant director and his/her institutional supervisor unless arrangements are negotiated for other distribution during the preliminary request for a TAT. Because federal funds are used to conduct TATs, TAT reports will be entered into the permanent NSGO program file. In order to maintain separation between program self-improvement and program assessment processes, the TAT report will only be made available to the PRP or PRP-sub upon the request of the director.

Appendix VII

Program Review Panel

The Program Review Panel (PRP) is a new structure within the Sea Grant assessment system. It is designed in part to address concerns regarding the Program Assessment Team model used in the past two assessment cycles. Specifically, the PRP will utilize a panel of well qualified individuals to evaluate all programs based on a consistent set of review documents (briefing book, annual reports and strategic plans) as well as direct interactions with program directors. The review will take place in the fifth year of the assessment cycle (see **Table I**, page 14) and will provide numerical scores for each program. The NSGCP Director will utilize these to assign a ranking that will set merit and bonus fund allocations as appropriate. The PRP will also establish the initial program ratings that will be the baseline for the new assessment process. In addition, a subcommittee of the PRP will be responsible for the mid-course review (see **Appendix VIII**, page 45).

PRP Composition

The PRP will be appointed by the NSGCP Director who may seek advice on and nominations for members as he/she sees fit. The PRP will be comprised of fifteen approximately (15) individuals encompassing a wide range of expertise. Research, outreach and education disciplines must be included on the panel, and all members should have a direct knowledge of and appreciation for Sea Grant in concept and practice. Each panel member must develop a strong working knowledge of the review process, its performance metrics and links to strategic planning.

Expectations of each PRP Member

The PRP members must be willing to contribute a minimum of 4-6 weeks of time in the review year. A sub-set of the PRP (five or six members) will be expected to participate in the mid-course review. It is anticipated that members will be compensated fully at appropriate federal rates for their participation on the PRP. PRP Meetings may take place at NOAA headquarters in Silver Spring or at appropriate locations nationwide as determined by the NSGCP Director. Each PRP member must read all briefing materials for every program and be prepared to discuss and score them. More detailed analyses by members of the PRP are expected for a subset of programs under review (see below).

Organization of the PRP Review

The 31 Sea Grant programs will be divided into two groups to be evaluated in one of two weeklong sessions. These sessions will be separated by a one-week “break” for the PRP. Each panel member will be expected to review briefing materials for every program and be prepared to discuss them in plenary session. In addition, each panelist will be assigned as the primary, secondary or tertiary reviewer for a set of programs. The primary reviewer will be responsible for leading the discussion on each program with substantive input from secondary and tertiary panelists. Written briefing materials are central to the

process (see below). In addition, each Sea Grant director (or designee) will have the opportunity to answer questions. This “Director’s Q&A” will be facilitated by the primary panelist and will also include at least one of the secondary or tertiary reviewers. A written summary of the session will be prepared. It is anticipated that these sessions will take about 1-2 hours. The POs will be available to answer any questions during the discussion of their respective programs.

A possible chronology of the PRP review would include the following:

Days 1-2: PRP members discuss all programs individually in plenary session for the first group of 15 or 16 programs under review. Discussions will be lead by the primary panelist with input from the secondary and tertiary reviewers. Questions and comments can be provided by these reviewers and/or any other member of the PRP. Points of clarification and questions will be annotated by the primary panelist and brought to the attention of the Sea Grant director.

Day 3: Each Sea Grant director will meet with their assigned panelists for approximately 1-2 hours. While in-person meetings are encouraged, conference calls are also appropriate.

Days 4-5: The full PRP will re-convene to discuss each program in a format that follows the discussions held on days 1-2. The primary panelist will convey the results of the Director’s Q&A to the PRP at this time. Following this discussion, each PRP member will provide a score based on approved performance metrics. The primary panelist will be responsible for summarizing PRP discussions as well as additional information gleaned from discussions with the director. This PRP summary will be provided to the NSGCP Director.

The process will be repeated for the remaining programs after a hiatus of one week.

The Role of the NSGO Post-PRP

Upon the completion of the entire review process, all scores will be provided to the NSGCP Director who will collate them and generate a final rating for each program. The summary rating and written PRP Summary will be conveyed to each program director. Ratings will stand for a minimum until the mid-course review.

Briefing Materials

Each program will be required to submit a package of materials to the PRP. Included, will be a briefing book analogous to those prepared in previous assessment cycles. A greater emphasis will be placed on the link between planning and outcomes for this review. However within the confines of a standard format, (i.e., page length and required components) programs will be able to describe how they have responded to state, regional and national priorities as well as emerging opportunities and unanticipated needs.

Performance Metrics and Scoring Criteria

The PRP will score programs based on a set of criteria developed once strategic priorities are established for the National Sea Grant Program. It is anticipated that the NSGCP Director will establish a task force to accomplish this in late 2007 or early 2008. Consideration should be given to using appropriate metrics from the previous assessment system with emphasis placed on outputs of quality and quantity that contribute to planned goals. Consultation with experts in the development of performance metrics for science-based programs is anticipated as the task force develops its guidance.

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Appendix VIII

Mid-Course Review (2011)

The proposed midcourse review system will provide an opportunity for program ratings to be adjusted either up or down for demonstrated cause midway through the five-year review period. The midcourse review encourages self-improvement by providing an opportunity for the program to receive higher ratings for improvements made in response to suggestions by the PRP.

Team composition and charge

A mid-course review sub-group, comprised of five or six members from the original 15-member PRP, will be convened in 2011, two years after the initial rating review. This sub-group of the PRP (PRP-sub) will be charged with reviewing new information provided since the last PRP review and advising the NSGCP Director on changes that should be made to the original 2009 program ratings. The PRP-sub will be familiar with and have available the rationale provided for the previous rating, the two most recent annual reports, and a formal request from the state program director for a rating change based on good cause. The rating criteria for this 2011 mid-course review will remain the same as for 2009 initial rating review, but will change to the new performance criteria in subsequent reviews.

Rating changes

It is expected that the formal request from the state program director for a rating change will be concise, (a short memo of no more than two or three pages) and directed at one or more of the reasons provided by the PRP for a less than optimal rating. Alternately, for justified cause, a state program's PO, or the NSGCP Director, based on observations from the on-site visit or other evidence, can request a lower rating by the PRP-sub for one or more rating criteria. A request for a lower rating must be made transparent, and presented in writing, with copies of the request provided to the state program director, who will have an opportunity to respond in writing.

The PRP-sub is not a decision-making entity, but rather is an independent panel which advises the NSGCP Director on whether or not there is enough evidence to justify a rating change for any program. The NSGCP Director, in consultation with the state program's PO, will make all final decisions regarding a rating change. It is anticipated that these mid-course review procedures will encourage and reward program self-improvement and provide each program an opportunity to petition against what the program perceives to be an unfair rating. Similarly, if a program is determined to be regressing in a rating category, there is an opportunity to reflect the poorer performance through a revised rating.

For the 2011 mid-course review, Sea Grant will still be in a transition period as it moves toward full implementation of the new planning and assessment system. The 2009 PRP

ratings, which will be the subject of review and possible adjustment in 2011, will be based on the previous criteria of the former program assessment system. The rating criteria for the 2011 mid-course review will therefore rely on the original program assessment criteria as described in detail in the Program Assessment Team Manual and as applied by the 2009 PRP. In addition, the state program will have specific guidance and criteria on how the program can improve from the original program ratings by the PRP. Further, the PO and the state program director should be in regular communication about steps underway toward program improvement.

The mid-course review is ideally suited for acknowledging and rewarding program self improvement. Over time, the ultimate goal is to have all Sea Grant programs rate in the highest performance category. It is important to note, however, that under the current ranking scheme required by Sea Grant legislation, re-rating one program higher into one of the top two rating categories would necessarily require moving another program out of that same category and into a lower one. If this congressionally mandated ranking system still remains in the 2008 Sea Grant legislation, then all programs, including those with highest ratings, may be affected by the revised ratings of some. Therefore, all programs will be provided the opportunity to request a rating change, or to provide rationale for maintaining their current high rating, by summarizing additional improvements or new outcomes that have occurred in their program. The annual reports should contain the relevant new information from which the program makes its case to maintain a rating or to be rated in a higher category.

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Appendix VIIV

RIT Response to Individual NRC Report Recommendations

The RIT Response to the Individual Recommendations of the National Research Council 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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 1: By implementing several new components of the planning and assessment system outlined in this report, program officers will be more routinely involved with and informed of Sea Grant program operations. Thus, implementing ongoing periodic assessments will be more easily achievable. These new components include: 1) involving the NSGO POs in the state Sea Grant program's strategic planning process, including the plan's approval; 2) on-site visits by the Director of the NSGCP; and, 3) TATs. In addition, we recommend that the Director make as a priority the support and funding of new program officers, and be prepared to make necessary trade-offs by limiting, as needed, other non-PO activities.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 2: We agree with this recommendation and its implementation is well underway.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 3: We agree with this recommendation. The foundation of the new planning and evaluation system proposed by the RIT is inherently dependent on ambitious, high quality state strategic plans. Throughout the RIT report, the need for both a top down and bottom-up approach to strategic planning is emphasized.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 4: We agree with this recommendation. As per the advice of a strategic planning consultant, the goals and objectives against which individual Sea Grant programs will be evaluated will be developed in November by a separate committee once the national strategic plan is developed. A consultant will be employed to assist in the development of benchmarks and performance measures that emanate from the goals and objectives of the new national Sea Grant strategic plan.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 5: The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with the individual Sea Grant program's PO, will formally review and approve each individual strategic plan. We do not agree that the National Sea Grant Review Panel needs to consult at the level of review and approval of each program's strategic plan. Rather, we believe the Panel should concentrate its efforts on participating in and reviewing the National Sea Grant Strategic Plan.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 6: See response to recommendation Number 4.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 7: We agree with this recommendation. The details of the scoring system will be developed once the focus areas of the national strategic plan are known. However, it is our intent that the overall number of scored criteria be reduced and that a scoring incentive be introduced to encourage and reward Sea Grant programs for participating in network building activities.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 8: We agree with this recommendation.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 9: See response to recommendation Number 4.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 10: An independent consultant has been retained and will assist the NSGO to refine benchmarks and grading instructions once the national strategic plan is completed.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 11: We agree with the intent of this recommendation. However, in our proposed system, Sea Grant programs will be rated once every five years, and this rating will be reviewed midway during the rating period at what is called the mid-course review.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 12: A key component of our proposed system is the introduction of the Program Review Panel, an independent body of experts appointed for the purpose of carrying out periodic (five-year) and mid-course reviews, which will result in individual state program ratings. Although we believe the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program should consult with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, we believe that the Director, and not the Panel, should supervise the implementation of periodic assessments and the management of the Program Review Panel.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 13: The RIT's proposed integrated planning and assessment system does not utilize PAT site visits. PAT visits are replaced by on-site visits by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program and TATs. These Sea Grant program visits will be more focused, and will reduce the time and costs required to host visits by the programs.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 14: See response to recommendation Number 13.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 15: The NRC emphasized the need for annual assessments, in part to recognize and reward programs for improvements made on a more regular basis, and in part to de-emphasize the event nature of the previous program assessment system. The RIT concluded that wholesale rating reviews of the programs on an annual basis would be burdensome to all parts of the network. In our system, accountability and outcomes will be tracked annually through annual reports. We have proposed a mid-course review system through which a program's rating can be adjusted either up or down for demonstrated cause.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 16: We agree with this recommendation.

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 under-take 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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 17: The National Sea Grant Office Operations Sub-Team addressed the issue of the need for additional resources that would be necessary to implement the RIT proposal. Once a new system is endorsed by the Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, we agree that the Secretary of Commerce should look at new work force capabilities, with an emphasis on what other NSGO administrative duties could be modified or eliminated.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 18: We agree with this recommendation.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 19: We agree, but recommend the “State of the Sea Grant Report” be developed every two years.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 20: We agree 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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 21: This recommendation is central to the approach the RIT undertook in developing the planning and assessment system outlined in our report. Evaluation has been redirected away from PAT-related site visits to a Program Review Panel comprised of independent experts. Visits to the programs will include on-site visits by the NSGCP Director, and mandatory TATs, both of which will be conducted for the purpose of individual Sea Grant program self-improvement.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 22: This recommendation is not applicable in our proposed system.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 23: We agree with this recommendation.

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)

RIT Response to Recommendation 24: We agree. However, we propose a mid-course review that will provide the opportunity for a program to have a rating adjusted once during the five-year rating cycle. See response to recommendation Number 15.

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