

GUIDANCE FOR PREPARING SEA GRANT IMPACT STATEMENTS (03/03/2011)

Impact statements document the verifiable results of Sea Grant's work and how our efforts have made a difference in the lives of coastal residents, communities and environments. Impact reporting has become an increasingly important means of enhancing visibility, demonstrating accountability, generating support and building a reputation as a focused, productive and successful program. Impacts help decision makers and constituents understand how our programs are making a difference, and enable the Sea Grant network to reflect on and improve our work.

These statements are used for state and national program evaluation, communication products and materials and partnership building. Impacts are provided to national decision makers and partners, including NOAA and Department of Commerce leadership, Congress and the White House Office of Management & Budget. In addition, impacts are featured in national newsletters, national stories, social media, websites, and other communication products and materials.

Sea Grant's four focus teams meet each year, in part, to review and categorize impact statements submitted by the 32 programs. The focus teams have concluded that the impact statements vary considerably in terms of relevance, detail and substance. As a result, the focus teams recommended additional guidance to help programs write stronger, more effective statements.

Below, are key considerations for writing clear, cogent and succinct impact statements.

LENGTH and PURPOSE

The statements should be brief (<250 words), use lay terms, and effectively describe the economic, societal and/or environmental benefits of our research, extension, education and communications work.

QUANTITY

Given that impacts may take years to realize, and that some projects will not ultimately yield impacts, programs are encouraged to submit a limited number of high quality impacts per year. Provisions have been made for programs to capture and track accomplishments (distinguished from impacts, below), enabling the reporting of outputs and outcomes that are not yet fully realized impacts. **While there is no limit to the number of impact statements a program may submit, up to five outstanding statements per focus area is advisable.**

IMPACT vs. ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENT

Impact statements should effectively describe the significant economic, societal and/or environmental benefits of our research, extension, education and communications work.

Accomplishment statements effectively describe the key actions, activities or products resulting from Sea Grant research, extension, education and communications work. These are distinct from impact statements in that they reflect ongoing activities or key results that may not yet have had a significant economic, societal and/or environmental benefit, but that lay the foundation for such a benefit.

UPDATES

When reporting a significant update on a previously reported impact, please note the year in which the update was realized. This will avoid the appearance that programs are reporting the same impact several years in a row.

WRITING GUIDANCE

An impact statement should succinctly describe a program/project's **contributions** made to society. In considering this, two simple questions should be answered: *Who cares?* And, *So what?*

When writing an impact statement consider the “4 R’s ...Relevance, Response, Results and Recap.” These headings are to serve as guidelines when drafting impacts; Whether or not they are repeated in the actual text of an impact statement is up to you. The questions listed under the headings below are to help clarify the intent of each section and to provide structural guidance; there is no need to respond to every question listed.

You will be able to select your state program’s focus area(s), goal(s) and partners for each impact.

STATE FOCUS AREA(S):

GOAL(S) (state program plan):

PARTNERS:

TITLE:

1. **RELEVANCE**- Using lay terms, describe the issue or problem statement and the appropriate scale (local, state, regional, national, or international). For example, consider:

- o Why did our Program conduct this effort?
- o What needs were originally expressed for this work?
- o What was the situation/problem, and why was it a problem?
- o What aspects of your current Implementation Plan are addressed?

2. **RESPONSE**-Provide an action statement. Consider:

- o What did our Program do?
- o Who were the principal partners, collaborators, contributors?
- o What were the key elements?
- o Who was the target audience?

3. **RESULTS**-Describe the impact by replying to the questions: *Who cares? So what?* Consider:

- o What is the social, and/or economic, and/or environmental payoff of our work?
- o Who benefitted?
- o How?
- o What happened as a result of the work described?
 - What knowledge was gained?
 - What skills were increased?
 - Is the target audience doing anything differently? If so, who, what, or how?
 - How much money was saved? Is more money being made?
 - Were jobs created or retained?
 - Were policies changed as a result?
 - What were the end results (quantitative and qualitative)?
- o How was information collected to verify the impacts (surveys, observation, etc.)?
- o What was the scope of the impact (local, state, regional, national, or international)?

4. **RECAP**-a one sentence recapitulation that captures the essence of the preceding three points. (Note: There will also be the possibility of featuring this recap live on the National Sea Grant website).

HELPFUL TIPS

1. Double check the **accomplishment guidance** above to ensure the impact is actually an impact.
2. Impacts should be **verifiable**; do not speculate on the potential impact or assume an impact has occurred.
3. Ensure the impact occurred **during the requested reporting period**.
4. Explicitly **state Sea Grant's role** in realizing the impact.
5. Clearly **describe the impact** for a **lay audience**. Spell out all acronyms and avoid scientific jargon.
6. Ensure the **impact stands alone** and can be understood without additional information.
7. Keep the impact statement short and concise, preferably to **250 words or less**.
8. Ensure the impact is **categorized into the correct focus area(s) and goal(s)**.

***Much of the information in this section has been adapted for Sea Grant purposes from several sources, notably Virginia Tech's "Writing Effective Impact Statements: Who Cares? So What?"*

<http://www.cals.vt.edu/communications/writingimpactstatements.html>

EXAMPLES

The following examples of well-written impact statements are provided for illustrative purposes.

Example #1

FOCUS AREAS: HCE AND SCD

GOALS : Restored function and productivity of degraded ecosystems, and
Healthy coastal economies that include working waterfronts, an abundance of recreation and
tourism opportunities, and coastal access for all citizens

PARTNERS:

TITLE: Water Quality Improves at Gooch’s Beach, Kennebunk, Maine

RELEVANCE- Tourism is Maine’s largest industry. Beach-related spending by tourists is estimated to be over \$500 million per year, supporting the employment of more than 8,000 people. High bacteria levels impair water quality, threaten public health and lead to advisories/closures of valued beaches.

RESPONSE- Routine monitoring of Gooch’s Beach has resulted in over 40 exceedances of bacteria safety standards since the town joined the Maine Healthy Beaches (MHB) program in 2003. Maine Sea Grant (MESG)/Cooperative Extension coordinates MHB, and the program has supported studies and intensified monitoring to help pinpoint pollution sources and transport pathways affecting beach water quality. MHB and Maine Geological Survey conducted a circulation study of the Kennebunk River, which influences water quality on Gooch’s Beach, and examined the relationship between bacteria and other parameters to define the “worst-case scenario” for beach water quality. EPA scientists helped locate pollution sources, and a task force of MHB, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and municipal staff surveyed 31 priority properties. A 2009 workshop then built local capacity to find, fix and prevent sources of fecal pollution that degrade beach water quality.

RESULTS- MHB data and technical assistance have supported the town’s effort to improve the nearby stormwater drainage system, and to increase the number of properties serviced by the municipal sewer system. These and other actions taken throughout the watershed have resulted in measureable improvements in water quality.

RECAP- MESG efforts improved beach water quality, enhanced recreational beach use and boosted the local tourism economy.

For additional information contact: xxx

Example 2

FOCUS AREAS: SSSS

GOALS: A sustainable supply of safe seafood to meet the public demand
A healthy domestic seafood industry that harvests, produces, processes, and markets seafood
responsibly and efficiently

PARTNERS:

TITLE: Shrimp Industry Profitability Boosted by Fuel-Saving Shrimp Trawler Technology

RELEVANCE- Individual gulf shrimp trawlers consume between 50,000-80,000 gallons of diesel per year.

Reducing operating expenses through reductions in fuel consumption will improve vessel profitability, thus buoying an industry that is struggling to compete with imports and high fuel prices.

RESPONSE- Since 2008, Texas Sea Grant specialists have been working with elite shrimp fishermen in the Gulf to evaluate new, fuel-conserving vessel-based technology for use by the shrimp fleet. Simultaneously, Texas Sea Grant is working with other Sea Grant programs to transfer these new technologies to shrimp fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regions.

RESULTS- Reported fuel savings range from 20 to 39 percent. For the median trawler, expected annual fuel savings amount to roughly 19,000 gallons per season. Introduction of the new trawl gear to the Texas fleet has allowed fishermen to save approximately 2.4 million gallons of fuel valued at \$5.7 million in 2010 alone. Since 2008, the Texas shrimp fleet's fuel savings were estimated to be 7.3 million gallons or \$17.7 million. An estimated 200 jobs were saved each year, since without these major fuels savings many of the boats would have remained idle.

RECAP- Texas Sea Grant sponsored experimental trawl gear resulted in 20-39 percent fuel savings for Texas shrimp fishermen.

For additional information contact: xxx