

# NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM

## FRAMEWORK FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

### INTRODUCTION

The National Sea Grant College Program Act (33 U.S.C. 1121 et. seq.) and proposed amendments (H.R. 1175) are specific in requiring compliance with a merit review process for member institutions based on program evaluation. The Act also sets forth requirements for certification (qualification) for Sea Grant Colleges. There is, furthermore, a requirement within the Act for "open and healthy competition." The amendments to the Act as proposed in H.R. 1175 are based on and are consistent with the recommendations of the Ocean Studies Board of the National Research Council as presented in the report *A Review of the National Sea Grant College Program* (NAS Press, 1994). In addition, various elements of the Sea Grant Community have recently considered the subject of program evaluation and there is general acceptance of the notion that programs should be rewarded in part on the basis of "fair and considered" evaluations of program quality.

The purpose of this policy statement is to set forth the principles, objectives and basic procedural framework for the evaluation of individual Sea Grant Programs.

### EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The framework is presented below in six subsections that define the various elements and objectives of the evaluation process. The actual mechanics of the process, criteria for evaluating quality and the schedule for compliance remain to be defined. It is anticipated that a program evaluation plan for Sea Grant institutions will be implemented on a trial basis in FY 98 and be fully operational in FY 99.

- Rationale for Program Evaluation in Sea Grant
  - > The Sea Grant Act requires: competition among programs, compliance with a merit review process, program evaluation, and a procedure for the periodic review of designated Sea Grant institutions.
  - > With limited entry of new Sea Grant Colleges and scarce resources, greater emphasis must be placed on demonstrating accomplishment, relevance, impact, i.e., for justification for expenditure of public funds.
  - > Allocation of funds to individual programs based in part on program performance is a desirable mechanism for quality enhancement among programs.
  - > The advice developed through program review and evaluation will be useful in improving the quality of individual programs and the network.

- Objectives of the Evaluation Process
  - > Improve individual program performance through outcomes assessment.
  - > Provide clear demonstration that institutional programs are achieving the goals of the Sea Grant Act through compliance with high standards of excellence.
  - > Stimulate through identification of best practices improvements in performance of the Sea Grant Network as a whole.
  - > Encourage new and innovative approaches to issues and problems throughout the Sea Grant Network.
  - > Provide a basis for program identification of accomplishments to stakeholders and general public.
  - > Provide a basis for rewarding excellence through resource allocation.
- Criteria for Evaluation -- Individual Sea Grant institutions must, prior to formal program evaluation, have in place:
  - > A balanced program as defined in the eligibility requirements for Sea Grant Colleges as listed in the *Federal Register*.
  - > A commitment to promote Sea Grant and to fulfill the responsibilities of a Sea Grant Institution.
  - > Programmatic objectives consistent with the Sea Grant/NOAA mission, needs of the state, and goals of the institution.
  - > A planning process based on programmatic objectives that through which program priorities and resource investment objectives are determined and periodically evaluated.
  - > An advisory process with input from the stakeholder community, including state and federal agencies, whose responsibility is to help define program priorities and investment objectives.
  - > An implementation plan or process that assures achievement of program objectives. This includes a management infrastructure consistent with achieving a fully integrated, balanced program of research and outreach.
  - > A system of ongoing evaluation that demonstrates achievement of objectives and outcomes, and uses results to improve program effectiveness.

- > A reporting system that communicates program objectives, priorities, and achievements to the appropriate stakeholder constituencies.
- > The use of a fair and open proposal process that attracts the best available talent.
- **Program Review and Evaluation**
  - > Each program must maintain an ongoing assessment process with documented results that will be subject to evaluation on a three-year basis.
  - > Evidence must be given at least once every three years that the results of assessment and review are applied to the development and improvement of the Program and the use of program outcomes in furthering Sea Grant's mission.
  - > Each program must in the assessment process demonstrate that the outcomes important to the objectives of the Program and institution are being measured. Evidence should be as quantitative as possible and include but not be limited to a set of commonly accepted outcomes assessment measures and criteria.
- **The Review Process**
  - > The NSGO will conduct an evaluation of each individual program once every three years. Evaluations will focus on programmatic accomplishments and outcomes in the context of the resources invested.
  - > The program evaluation will consist of the following features:
    - >> a self evaluation conducted by the Sea Grant institution that:
      - \* defines program objectives
      - \* demonstrates that resource expenditure is aligned with objectives
      - \* evaluates program achievements in relation to objectives
      - \* that measures both qualitatively and quantitatively the outcomes, impact, improvements and accomplishments of the program over the reporting period
      - \* that evaluates the effectiveness of the program in communicating achievements to state leaders and other program sponsors
      - \* reports on corrective action taken in response to a previous program review
      - \* identifies problem areas or issues that need improvement to enhance performance

>> a visiting evaluation committee whose purpose is:

- \* to review program quality/achievements as reported by the self assessment
- \* to audit achievement/quality through independent assessment
- \* to be appraised of problems and issues of concern by the upper administration of the institution
- \* to provide constructive input on program management through recommendations
- \* to develop "best practices" concepts throughout the network
- \* to make value judgements about program quality in relation to criteria and evaluation standards
- \* to report results of evaluation to National Panel, Director, NSGO, and institutional officials

● Procedural Issues

> The NSGO in consultation with the SGA and NSGRP will develop:

>> criteria, and standards of performance

>> a system for determining program quality based on review criteria

>> reporting guidelines (forms, questionnaires)

>> audit requirements

>> schedule of reviews

>> a mechanism for resource allocation based on program evaluation.

> Concerning rewards for performance, the NSGO will set aside a fixed merit pool for each three-year period. Awards for exemplary performance will be made from this merit pool to qualifying programs in the fiscal year following program review. At the end of this three year period, these funds revert to the merit pool for reallocation. Adjustments to a program's resource base for performance will only be made through the merit pool. Therefore initially, programs can only increase (be rewarded) through program review.

> Continued unsatisfactory performance reviews of a Sea Grant Program could result in loss of certification and decreases in federal funding.