

# **The National Sea Grant College Program Planning, Implementation and Evaluation System**

## **About Sea Grant**

A partnership between universities and the federal government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Sea Grant College Program directs federal resources to pressing problems in local communities. For more than 40 years, the National Sea Grant College program has worked to create and maintain a healthy coastal environment and economy. The Sea Grant network includes more than 30 programs based at top universities in every coastal and Great Lakes state, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The programs of the Sea Grant network work together to help citizens understand, conserve, and better utilize America's coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes resources. By drawing on the experience of more than 3,000 scientists, engineers, public outreach experts, educators, and students from more than 300 institutions, Sea Grant is able to make an impact at local and state levels, and serve as a powerful national force for change.

Sea Grant invests in high-priority research, addressing issues such as population growth and development in coastal communities; preparation and response to hurricanes, coastal storms, and tsunamis; understanding our interactions with the marine environment; fish and shellfish farming; seafood safety; and, fisheries management. The results of this research are shared with the public through Sea Grant's integrated outreach program, which brings together the collective expertise of on-the-ground extension agents, educators, and communications specialists. The goal is to ensure that vital research results are shared with those who need it most and in ways that are timely, relevant, and meaningful.

The National Sea Grant College Program has developed a new five-year strategic plan, which is attached, in conjunction with an enhanced Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation system, which is described below, by which the Sea Grant programs will be evaluated. Both the plan and the new evaluation model respond to recommendations made by the National Research Council (NRC). Background on the NRC report is detailed below.

## **Background**

In 1994, the NRC reviewed the NOAA National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP). In its *Review of the NOAA National Sea Grant College Program* report, the NRC recommended several actions, including systematic, periodic reviews of each Sea Grant program. In response to the NRC, NSGCP developed a program review and evaluation process to which the Sea Grant programs were reviewed by an external Program Assessment Team every four years since in 1998.

The National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 (P.L. 107–299) directed NOAA to contract with the NRC a second time to review the evaluation process and make recommendations to improve its effectiveness.

The resulting NRC report, *Evaluation of the Sea Grant Review Process* (2006), included 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.

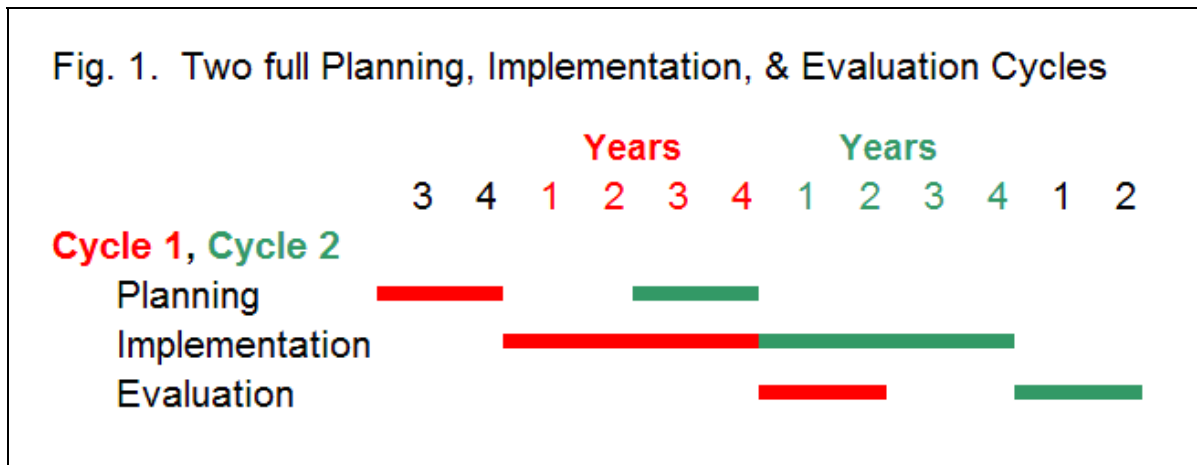
In order to address the NRC recommendations, the Director of the NSGCP sought advice from two sources: a Response Integration Team (RIT) and the National Sea Grant Review Panel (Review Panel). The RIT is comprised of representatives from the state Sea Grant programs and the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), and was formed specifically to address the NRC recommendations and to provide guidance to the Director. The Review Panel is a Federal Advisory Committee comprised of 15 individuals who advise the NSGCP Director on scientific and administrative policy. Following careful deliberation, each group produced a report; the RIT report was entitled, *An Enhanced and Integrated Strategic Planning and Program Assessment Strategy for the National Sea Grant College Program* and the Review Panels' report was entitled, *A Comprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE) Model for the National Sea Grant College Program*.

Here, we present a new, integrated model for strategic planning, implementation and evaluation that was developed based on the recommendations of the NRC along with those outlined in the RIT and Panel reports. The integrated planning and evaluation system outlined here is consistent with needs articulated by Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and NOAA. As the implementation process begins, there will be a transition period which is discussed in the appendix of this document.

### **An Integrated Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (PIE) System**

The NSGCP places a premium on careful planning and rigorous evaluation at both the state program level and the national level to ensure that the program has both localized and broader impacts. Better integration of planning, implementation, and evaluation activities will maximize Sea Grant's efficiency and effectiveness at both levels and make the best use of limited resources.

The PIE system begins with rigorous strategic planning at both the national and state levels that lasts two years. The plans are then implemented with coordinated and collaborative research, outreach and education activities at the state level for four years. Once the activities are completed, there is an evaluation of the success of those efforts in meeting the objectives set forth in the strategic/implementation plans. The complete cycle, including planning, implementation, and evaluation will take eight years to complete (Fig. 1).



Sections I, II, and III, below, describe each component of the integrated PIE system—Planning, Implementation and Evaluation.

## I. Planning

**National Strategic/Implementation Plans (every four years):** Every four years, the NSGCP will develop a new national strategic plan (the 2009-2013 national plan accompanies this document). Sea Grant’s national plan will be done in concert with the development of strategic plans for the state programs in order to ensure that the state strategic plans reflect national priorities. Likewise, stakeholder input collected for state Sea Grant planning efforts will be included with other relevant local and regional plans to inform the national planning process. In addition, NOAA’s strategic plan, the Ocean Research Priorities Plan (and its successors), and NOAA’s 5-year Research Plan will provide national stakeholder input and help set a national context for the plan. Sea Grant’s national plan will identify a limited set of priorities that will serve as the foci for Sea Grant’s next four-year implementation cycle. Once the national strategic plan is completed, an implementation plan will be developed to provide more detail for each of the national priority areas.

**Individual Sea Grant Program Strategic/Implementation Plans (every four years):** The national strategic and implementation plans will serve as the basis for the states to complete the development of their four-year strategic plans. The state plans will include metrics and performance measures that align with and support national measures and metrics for the national priority areas. Since each state has its own unique set of local and regional stakeholders, partners and priorities, the individual program plans will not necessarily address all of the national priority areas; and, the plans may include additional emphases as appropriate. State plans will be developed with the federal program officer and reviewed and approved by the NSGO, in consultation with the Review Panel. Sea Grant programs will use their plans to guide and inform requests for proposals. In addition, these plans will be used as the basis for subsequent program evaluation. With the understanding that these plans are living documents, programs may make changes to their plans, subject to approval by the federal program officer, so the changes are documented for eventual evaluation purposes.

## II. Implementation

Sea Grant programs will consider the local, regional, and national priorities identified during the planning process as they implement their research, outreach and education activities. Each program will retain the authority to implement its program as it sees fit in order to achieve optimal results.

The PIE system and subsequent changes to program implementation will make it easier for programs to plan and act on a regional and national scale. For instance, project competitions, omnibus grant applications and awards will be synchronized to facilitate collaborative efforts among programs. There will be a common format for annual reports so that accomplishments of individual projects and state programs can more easily be synthesized into national impacts.

## III. Evaluation

**Goal:** Sea Grant's program evaluation process will show how its research, outreach and education capabilities have local, regional and national impacts. Program evaluation also provides the opportunity to discover means by which the state programs, and in turn the National Program, can improve. The performance of state programs will be evaluated according to the priorities set forth in the national plan and the individual state plans, and programs will be held accountable for meeting the metrics and performance measures established in those plans. Evaluation will be a continual process, both internal and external, and will involve all facets of the Sea Grant network. Programs will be evaluated in three general areas: 1) on their approach to management; 2) on the scope and success of their engagement with stakeholders; and, 3) on the impact their program has on society from both an environmental and a socio-economic perspective. Evaluation is based on the metrics and performance measures established in the national plan and reflected in their state plans, but the process is also intended to recognize that unplanned or rapid-response activities may also have significant impact.

The Office of Management and Budget, the Review Panel and other entities have recommended that the Sea Grant programs be recertified on a reasonable and regular schedule. The PIE system will serve as the recertification process for the programs.

**Annual Reports/Self-Evaluation:** Annual reports will be used by programs to evaluate progress against their strategic plans, national performance measures, and metrics over a one-year period. These reports will be used by the NSGO and programs to track and report progress. The individual programs' progress in meeting goals set forth in their plans and in producing accomplishments relative to those goals contributes to the Sea Grant network's progress toward meeting national goals set forth in the national strategic and implementation plan.

**Site Visits (every four years, beginning in 2009):** Once every four years, a review team will visit each Sea Grant program. The review teams will be chaired by the NSGO program officer and co-chaired by a member of the Review Panel with a Sea Grant Director as a review team member. Additional members of the teams may be drawn from the Review Panel and/or outside experts as needed. The review team will meet with the program management team, advisory

committees, and university administration to review and discuss broad issues related to two of the three evaluation components: 1) program management and organization; and, 2) stakeholder engagement. The team will be provided with a limited and focused set of briefing materials. The team will prepare a site visit report with findings and recommendations to improve the Sea Grant program's performance but will not be responsible for rating the program.

**Performance Review Panel (every four years, beginning in 2011):** Every four years, following the completion of all Sea Grant program site visits, a Performance Review Panel (PRP) will conduct a retrospective evaluation of the impact of the programs relative to their four-year strategic plans. The PRP will evaluate the programs' overall impact on society from both an environmental and a socio-economic perspective. Annual reports, combined with a brief four-year summary document prepared by the programs, will provide the basis for the review. The PRP will be composed of 15 members with approximately half of the members drawn from the Review Panel and the remainder drawn from senior-level academia, government, and industry.

**State Program Response Memorandum (once every four years):** State programs will have the opportunity to submit a memorandum to the NSGO responding to findings in both the site visit and PRP reports. This information will be used as part of the NSGO fall review.

**Annual NSGO Fall Review (beginning in September 2008):** The NSGO will meet in the fall of each year to discuss the progress of each state program relative to its plan, and to identify potential areas for improvement.

Once every four years, starting in 2011, the fall review will be expanded to include a performance evaluation and rating of all programs based upon the PRP Reports, the site visit reports, and the state programs' response memoranda. Programs will have the opportunity to appeal their rating two years later during the NSGO fall review by submitting a report to the NSGO of actions taken to improve the program since the previous four-year review.

**Topical Assistance Team (TAT) Reviews (optional):** At any time, programs and the NSGO may agree to conduct a TAT, which is an ad hoc program review of limited scope. The purpose of TAT reviews is for program improvement, either to address issues identified by previous reviews or to help the program identify and respond to new opportunities.

**Recertification:** The four-year reviews will constitute a recertification process. A successful review will result in recertification of a state program. If a program receives an unsuccessful rating, the program will be placed on a probationary period for at least two years. During the fall review of the second probationary year, the NSGO will assess the program's progress in addressing the issues that led to the unsuccessful rating based on the appeal issued by the state Sea Grant program in question. If the program has made satisfactory progress, the program will be allowed to continue on probation for the remaining two years. If the program then receives a successful rating during the next four-year review, the program will be recertified. However, if progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory after two years, or if a program receives a second consecutive unsuccessful rating during the four-year review, the program will be referred to the Review Panel for possible decertification.

**National “State of Sea Grant Program” Review (once every four years, beginning in 2012):** Once every four years, the Review Panel will provide a review of the “State of the Sea Grant Program.” This review will assess the progress of the Sea Grant College Program in addressing the priority areas highlighted in the national plan, analogous to the manner in which state programs will be evaluated in addressing their respective plans. This review will rely extensively on information collected from state program reports and reviews, and will give an analysis that will help inform the subsequent national strategic planning process. This national program review is central to the PIE system and will provide an assessment of the overall performance of the entire Sea Grant College Program, including the National Sea Grant Office.

## Appendix: Transition

In order to function as a national program, the major aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation need to be coordinated across all state Sea Grant programs. Currently however, state programs are not all on the same four-year planning and award cycle. In addition, while most research projects are supported for two years, some programs hold competitions to select new projects in even years while others host competitions in odd years. As Sea Grant begins to implement its new integrated PIE system, there will be a transition period over the next two years in order to synchronize planning and implementation cycles throughout the network (see Fig. 2 – detailed timeline).

**Strategic/Implementation Planning:** Following the release of Sea Grant’s National Strategic and Implementation Plans, programs will have three months to align their state plans with the national plan. State programs are required to indicate how their plans support national priorities, and to ensure state performance measures and metrics will roll up into national performance measures and metrics. Each state program will submit an alignment memo that describes the process used to review its current plan and indicating how the plan supports the national priorities. The alignment memo, coupled with current state plans, will include enough detail, in terms of specific performance measures and metrics, to provide a sufficient basis for annual self-reporting and for external evaluation of success by the PRP in 2011. These plans will guide Sea Grant through 2013.

**Transitional Rating Process:** During the previous program assessment, one-quarter of the programs were evaluated each year between 2003 and 2006. Since the first full site visit and PRP evaluation under the PIE system are not scheduled until 2011, some programs would not be evaluated for eight years. As an interim measure, and to provide a common starting point for the new PIE system, there will be a one time transitional evaluation in 2009 based on the 2002-2006 Program Assessment Review criteria.

Fig. 2 Transition and first full Planning, Implementation, & Evaluation Cycle

