



November 26, 2008

To: Sea Grant Directors  
From: Leon Cammen  
Subject: Sea Grant Association Meeting Follow-up

Congratulations on a productive and informative meeting in New Orleans. I regret that I was not able to attend. I understand there were extensive and constructive discussions of a number of important topics, ranging from the Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (PIE) System to planning alignment to the National Information Management System (NIMS), and I want to follow up on a few items.

**PIE – National Plan and State Plan Alignment**

When the implementation plan is completed, it will be included as an appendix to the National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan 2009–2013: Meeting the Challenge, making these documents one national program plan.

Planning alignment, Phase I should be completed for all programs (due date was Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup>). This first step in the alignment process was to initiate discussion between the program officer and the program to help each program align with the national plan. The information you provided in Phase I will also help the NSGO understand where we are going as a national program and can help the NSGO better represent the Sea Grant program.

Phase II is the next step in the alignment process. Here, each program will determine which national performance measures it will support, and you will align your program's performance measures with the national measures (if they differ) and the targets relating to them. Since the National Implementation Plan is not yet complete, this phase of the alignment process will not be due until April 2009.

A small committee of the Sea Grant Advisory Board will meet in May 2009 to review all state planning documents. The committee will issue a finding that the alignment between the state and national plans is sufficient and recommend that the NSGCP Director approve the state plan. In addition, the committee will provide beneficial and useful observations and comments resulting from the alignment process review to the Programs through the NSGCP Director. Ideally, since programs will be working closely with their program officers, all plans will be aligned and ready for the approval process by April. If a plan is not approved by the NSGCP Director, the program will need to work very closely with the program officer to ensure they will have an approved and aligned plan. All state plans must be approved before the 2010 funding cycle in order to receive federal funds.

## **PIE – Basis for Evaluation**

Some of you expressed concern about the fairness of the Performance Review Panel (PRP) evaluation. And it's clear from some of the comments I've received on the potential evaluation criteria that there is still uncertainty regarding how the discrepancies in program size will be taken into account during the PRP review. The answer to that concern is that the size of your program should not affect your program evaluation – what will matter is how successful your program was in achieving what it set out to do. Program size will be taken into account during the planning process and your four-year state program plan should be designed to reflect the available resources. Each program will be evaluated based on its success in achieving the outcomes specified in its own state plan. A larger program would be expected to be able to accomplish more than a smaller program, all other things being equal, and the program plan would need to reflect that in order to be approved.

Others were concerned about what the PRP will evaluate—i.e., will programs be evaluated on just the impacts that come from the federal dollars, the federal and match dollars, or the federal, match and leveraged dollars. If this review were to be limited to what the program could accomplish with only Sea Grant's appropriated federal (and matching) funding, that would be selling the program very short. I would hope to see each program set forth an ambitious plan and then report on achievements relative to that plan whether they derived from federal, match, leveraged dollars, or all three.

Some Directors were concerned about which plan they will be evaluated against. Each program will be evaluated against its own four-year state program plan, which consists of the program's goals, strategies/objectives, outcomes, performance measures and targets. Whether you capture this information in your strategic plan or in both your strategic and implementation plan is up to the discretion of each program.

## **NIMS**

Many people were concerned with the ability of NIMS to provide a suitable progress report printout from the NIMS database, and I am pleased to tell you that this has now been fixed. I encourage you to go into the system and generate a report for your program, and if you have any suggestions for improvement, please send them to the NIMS Help/Suggestions - <http://www.seagrants.nims.noaa.gov/Support/Support.aspx>.

The context for these concerns was the reliance of the PRP evaluation process on annual reports generated from NIMS. While I think the revised reporting function will address some of the issues, we are open to making adjustments to the report function (and to the underlying NIMS database) to enhance the usefulness to the PRP. And each program will also have the ability to provide a brief update (emphasis on brief) to the PRP at the time of the evaluation to supplement the annual reports.

There was also discussion of having a section in NIMS to allow for summary input so programs can enter stories that are at a program level, rather than a project level. This is now scheduled to be added to NIMS. We are trying our best to be quite conservative in the demands we place on you, making sure there is an identified need and use for the information we require. However, NIMS is intended to be a Network resource and we are certainly open to including additional information if everyone agrees it would be useful and worth the effort.

### **Annual reporting**

Next year's 2008/09 annual reports will be submitted through NIMS and due in fall 2009. These annual reports are a critical element of the PIE system, providing a continual flow of up-to-date program accomplishments and impacts during the four-year implementation phase and allowing the Focus Teams to track progress in meeting our national goals and objectives and make adjustments if needed. If we do this right, there will be no need for programs to go through a herculean effort once every four years to provide the input for program evaluation; instead, the information will be input to NIMS throughout the year as it becomes available and will be summarized once a year in the form of an annual report. And when it is time for the four-year program evaluation, the annual reports will have most of the needed information already.

However, annual reports serve many functions, not the least of which is "marketing" your programs. The annual reports generated by NIMS were never intended to be a substitute for the user-friendly, magazine-style annual reports that most of you do so well. You need to be able to choose the format and quality that will best represent your accomplishments and will serve to communicate those accomplishments to your various stakeholders.

Some of you have wondered whether you couldn't just package your own annual reports for the evaluation process, but those reports normally are a series of highlights, not a complete summary of your program's accomplishments and the format varies quite a bit from program to program. Program evaluation is difficult enough, and having reports in a common format that has been designed to facilitate comparison with the programs' goals as originally set out in their own strategic plans will help a great deal. Handing the Performance Review Panel a stack of reports all differing in format, length, and quality and asking them to try to track back to a separate set of strategic plans would be truly a daunting task. And we are trying to keep the focus on the significance of the program impacts, not on the quality of the presentation.

### **PIE - Transitional Performance Review Panel Evaluation (2009-2011)**

2009 – Because of resource constraints in FY2009, there will not be a transitional PRP. Instead, during its annual program review, the NSGO will review the performance of all state programs and consider any appeals to ratings received during the previous Program Assessment cycle.

2010 – To transition into the new system, program site visits will begin in 2010 under the new criteria. A site visit team will review the management and stakeholder engagement aspects of the program.

2011 – The remaining site visits will take place in 2011 and then there will be a transitional PRP. This review will evaluate the performance of each program covering the dates of 2006-2009, but all information up until the 2011 PRP will be considered. Since the new evaluation criteria were not in place for most of the period being reviewed (2006-2009), the PRP review will draw from the "Producing Significant Results" section of the Program Assessment Team Manual to evaluate and rate the programs. The PRP review will be based on the information provided in the annual reports produced through NIMS as well as a small briefing book produced by the programs.