

RIT OPS SUBTEAM REPORT –

INTRODUCTION

This draft report analyses the workforce necessary for the National Sea Grant Office to carry out functions for the continued success of the National Sea Grant College program.

This report was drafted in response to recommendations of the National Research Council in its review of the National Sea Grant College program's assessment processes. Analysis of workforce needs for strategic planning and assessment is based on the Operations Subteam's interpretation of the draft report of the Response Integration Team (RIT) on Strategic Planning and Assessment dated 8/8/2007.

BACKGROUND

The National Sea Grant Office and its core of Program Officers are central to the successful implementation of recommendations made in the NRC review. The integration of strategic planning, accountability, and assessment systems for the NOAA National Sea Grant College program relies on Program Officers to be:

- Well-versed in at least one of the focus areas of the National Sea Grant College program, in how local programs assemble their research, outreach, and education portfolios and central to the review of the final Omnibus proposal submitted by each program.
- Well-versed in how state programs are implementing their strategic plans.
- An active vital link between state program and the NSGO.
- A leader in assisting individual programs with self-assessment and improvement.
- Competent Federal Program Officers to administer grants.

Other functions of the NSGO critical to the successful operation of the National program include: facilitation, coordination, and integration of state extension/outreach and education efforts, national-level communication, running the fellowship and national strategic investment programs, supporting NOAA program development, and meeting the performance and accountability requirements expected of all NOAA and Federal programs.

To staff the NSGO so that it can properly emphasize strategic planning and management at national and state levels and monitor state programs for essential accountability and assessment processes, we recommend the office be organized to highlight the critical role that the Program Officers play in linking individual state programs with the National Sea Grant Program through the linked strategic planning/assessment model. The recommended staffing, outlined in detail below, is

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likely to require reconsideration of the administrative cap which is currently set at 5% of the appropriation.

CURRENT WORKFORCE STATUS AND RECENT HISTORY

The NSGO had 20 FTE's and three contractors as recently as 2005. The resulting budget cuts in the National program of the last two years has resulted in a corresponding loss in capacity of the NSGO. The NSGO has responded to this capacity loss 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 Program Officer support to State 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; (3) using contractors, detailees, or more junior Federal employees for tasks that had previously been performed by more senior Federal employees.

As of the end of FY 2007, the NSGO currently has 15 staff (11 FTEs, three contractors/IPAs, one detailee paid for by NMFS) dedicated to Sea Grant. In addition, there are three other individuals who spend about 20% of their time on Sea Grant activities, but whose salaries are largely supported elsewhere. With the current budget, NSGO cannot support a staff dedicated to the Sea Grant of more than 14 FTEs .

As outlined below, the current workforce level does not give the NSGO sufficient capacity to effectively carry out all tasks necessary for most successful running of the National program. What follows is a workforce analysis of the NSGO's Program Officer Capabilities, followed by an analysis of the other capabilities needed in the National Office.

I. PROGRAM OFFICER WORKFORCE CAPABILITIES (Green Boxes Organization Chart)

The National Sea Grant College Program is a partnership between NOAA and the academic community. The program is designed to make use of the best minds available to identify and address the highest priority local, regional and national issues of the oceans, Great Lakes, and coasts. The NSGO Program Officers (POs) are the Federal links between NOAA and the Sea Grant programs, and are vital to the success of the partnership. Sea Grant is also an important player in identification and development of NOAA programs, and the NSGO POs are also important participants in that process, both to bring the needs of coastal communities to the table and to articulate the roles of key segments of the academic community. To be effective in these critical roles, the POs should have education and/or experience in the focus areas relevant to Sea Grant.

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PO duties cover four main areas: 1) program oversight; 2) Grants management; 3) program planning; and, 4) program assistance. The duties and approximate workloads (in FTEs per program) for each of these areas are detailed below.

(1) program oversight duties (0.10 FTE).

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 (0.06 FTE).

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.

Take mandatory grants program Officer training.

(3) program planning (0.04 FTE)

Participate in program strategic and annual planning process.

Bring the program perspective into the NSGO strategic and annual planning process.

Find and help implement program improvement.

(4) program assistance and facilitation (0.16 FTE)

Facilitate external improvement reviews (the assumption is made that the workload for a PO is about the same as facilitating PAT reviews, about 0.06 FTE);

Facilitate communication and collaboration between Sea Grant programs and NOAA programs.

Participate in NOAA programs whose missions make them logical partners with SG programs.

When appropriate, represent NOAA at Sea Grant program events.

The above PO duties require 0.36 FTE per program. If an individual is a PO for more than one Program, some economies of scale are possible, for example in the areas of

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training and participating in NOAA programs. It is estimated that if an individual were a PO for three SG Programs, PO duties might average about 0.25 FTE per Program. No individual should be PO of more than three programs to allow them the time to represent Sea Grant in NOAA and interagency program development and reporting efforts. There are 32 Sea Grant programs or program precursors. To adequately provide PO services for these programs, about 11 POs are required.

As mentioned above, it is recommended that POs have education and/or expertise in Sea Grant focus areas. While not strictly speaking a PO duty, it is important that POs retain and refine their expertise, for example by continued participation in technical conferences. This professional development activity could take one or two weeks of effort (about 0.04 FTE) from each individual in the NSGO.

NOAA's Strategic Plan and the Ocean Research Priorities Plan reflect the growing awareness of the need to address problems of the oceans, coasts and Great Lakes regionally. Sea Grant needs the capability to respond to regional issues. The NSGO workforce supports this regional focus as part of regular PO duties: by participation in programs' strategic planning exercises, POs can point out where a program's strategic priorities complement or coincide with priorities of other programs, or with national or NOAA priorities. It is recommended strongly that the programs under the same POs be geographically contiguous to enable efficiencies in regional coordination.

We recommend that POs that represent programs in each of the six regions (New England, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast/Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific and Great Lakes) form working teams with leadership drawn from among the POs. The individual with that responsibility will work with the POs for all the programs in that region to assure that communication among programs, and between the programs and NOAA, is sufficient to address regional issues effectively. It is estimated that regional coordination will take about 0.10 FTE per region.

II National Leadership (Grey Box on Organization Chart)

(1) Extension and Communications Coordinator(1.0 FTE)

The position is responsible for setting extension policy maintaining all aspects and permutations of communications between SG programs, NOAA, the NSGO and constituents. The individual would also be responsible for developing and coordinating any extension centric NSI's

(2) Research Coordinator

The holder of this position will be responsible for setting research policy, developing, coordinating and administering research themed NSI's.

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(3) Education and Fellowship Coordinator (1.0 FTE)

This position would be responsible for coordinating, administer and set policy for the Knauss fellowship program. It is responsible for developing, coordinating and administering education NSI's.

(4) Program Planning and Assessment Coordinator (1.0 FTE)

To implement the planning and assessment activities in the RIT draft report, we recommend that the NSGO workforce include an individual charged with overall responsibility for planning and assessment activities;) an additional workforce equivalent of up to 1 FTE will be needed periodically to carryout assessments (see below)

The draft RIT Planning and Assessment report does not recommend assignment of significant duties to the NSGO in the area of program assessment. If this recommendation is followed, there will be no significant burden on NSGO staff to conduct assessment (other than those assessment functions inherent in Federal grant oversight, which has already been counted in section I).

There is, however, a significant fiscal burden. As the assessment process requires a significant commitment of time and effort over five years, it is unlikely that it can be filled by volunteers. Presumably this role will be assumed by contractors or temporary Federal employees. The workload burden is estimated at 51.5 work-weeks (two and a half weeks of work by fifteen individual reviewers and one support person) once every five years. Assuming the hourly cost for these highly skilled individuals is about the same as for a skilled Federal employee; this is equivalent to about 1 FTE In the year of the review. In addition in one other year during the 5 year assessment cycle a smaller assessment would take place. As proposed this secondary assessment is expected to utilize a smaller review team and would require about .35 FTE.

III. Program Leadership and Administration (Yellow and Orange Boxes on organization chart)

The NSGO needs additional capacity to run the National Sea Grant College Program. Some of this capacity is written into law. For example, the position of Director is specified in the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and the Federal Advisory Committee Act specifies the need for a Designated Federal FACA Officer to work with the Sea Grant Review Panel. Other capacity is needed to perform standard functions of any NOAA program, including supervision of employees, financial management, maintenance of office records and infrastructure, and responding to actions assigned by NOAA command.

Personnel to perform the following duties are needed in the NSGO.

(1) Director (1.0 FTE)

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(2) Assistant to the Director (1.0 FTE)

(3) Deputy Director programs (1.0 FTE)

Responsible for proper execution of all NSGO activities. Duties include supervision of NSGO program staff, oversee program planning, participating on OAR Deputies Council

(4) Deputy Director for Administration (1 FTE)

Duties include supervision of administrative and support staff. Office management, designated FACA Officer for Sea Grant Review Panel

(5) Chief Financial Officer (1.0 FTE)

Responsible for financial planning, execution, and reporting for NSGO, including grants, contracts and salaries.

(6) Information Management Coordinator and staff (1.5)

Responsible for setting and implementing policy for information management, including data management and reporting, Internet presence, records retention

(7) Clerical support staff (2.0 FTE)

(8) Financial support staff (1.0 FTE)

(9) Grants support staff (1.0 FTE)

VI. TOTAL WORKFORCE REQUIREMENT

The above duties will require a combination of Federal, contractor and detailee staff. The Director, Deputy Directors, and Assistant to the Director need to be separate individuals. Other duties may be combined or assigned as collateral duties but it is certainly preferable that they be separated

Total workforce requirements for the NSGO are about 25.5 FTE (or non-Federal equivalents). Table 1 shows the recommended functions and workforce needs:

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Report Section	FUNCTION	workload	per unit	# of units	TOTAL		
1	PO - duties listed in section 1	0.25	program	32	8.00	work- years	
1	PO - other duties (eg, PPBES)	0.18	PO	11	1.98		
1	PO - professional development	0.04	PO	11	0.44		
2	PO - regional coordination Planning and Assessment	0.10	region	6	0.60		
3	Coordinator	1.00			1.00		
4	Director	1.00			1.00		
4	Assistant to the Director	1.00			1.00		
4	Deputy Director for programs	1.00			1.00		
4	Deputy Director for Administration	1.00			1.00		
4	Chief Financial Officer and staff	2.00			2.00		
4	Clerical staff	2.00			2.00		
4	Grants staff	1.00			1.00		
4	Info Management Coordinator and staff	1.50			1.50		
3	Coordinator Education and Fellowships	1.00			1.00		
3	Coordinator	1.00			1.00		
3	Research Coordinator	1.00			1.00		
					TOTAL	25.52	work- years

TABLE 1. WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

Figure 1 shows a staffing plan that meets these workforce requirements.

VII. TRANSITION WORKFORCE PLANS

The above NSGO workforce requirements cannot be met with current staffing levels. Below is a list of suggested priorities.

The top priorities are to staff the office to meet its current statutory and regulatory requirements—i.e., having a National Sea Grant Director, FACA official and certified grants program officers sufficient to provide oversight and grants management; fiscal officer, and staff to do planning assessment and reporting (e.g. PPBES). These duties are covered with current staff.

The next priority is sufficient staff to provide all of the program Officer functions we describe. This would include POs, but also support staff to support the POs, if not already present.

The final priorities are delineated in this report. Note this prioritization would argue, for example, for hiring POs with collateral Extension coordinator responsibilities before hiring an Extension coordinator with or without collateral PO duties.

National Sea Grant Office Organization - optimal

