

# **Report of Panel's NRC Review Subcommittee**

on Panel's Future Overall Role, Role in Future Program Evaluations  
and Sea Grant Program Competition

Adopted as Amended by the NSGRP in a Special Teleconference Call Meeting  
on Monday, August 27, 2007 (Amendments in Italics)

The subcommittee addressed the three aforementioned elements included in the Charge letter. Additionally, a set of critical principles was developed for guiding the structure and implementation of any future program/performance evaluation process.

## **1. The Panel's Future Overall Role**

- A. The NSGRP is a formal committee established by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). The NSGRP will operate within the authority under the enabling legislation and the guidelines of the FACA to provide frequent, useful and beneficial advice, ideas and diverse opinions to the NSGO, the Administration (NOAA, Commerce and OMB) and Congress on matters relating to the National Sea Grant College Program.
- B. Solicit input from the NSGO, the Administration and Panel members, and develop an annual work plan of Panel activities.
- C. *Consistent with our FACA authority*, promote the National Sea Grant College Program by developing *and implementing* a Sea Grant promotion strategy.
- D. Participate in the development of the Program Evaluation Process, and participate in and support individual program and network wide evaluations.

## **2. The Panel's Role in Future Program Evaluations**

- A. NRC Recommendation 12: This recommendation states: "The Director of the National Sea Grant College Program, in consultation with the National Sea Grant Review Panel, should work to establish an independent body to carry out periodic assessments under the supervision of the National SeaGrant Review Panel."

The following response to NRC Recommendation 12 was unanimously adopted by the full Panel at its February 2007 Meeting:

"We do not concur with this recommendation. We believe that the premise of this recommendation is invalid and based on an inaccurate argument. We believe that the direct involvement *of members* the National Sea Grant Review Panel in the review process enhances the evaluation of the Sea Grant Programs and provides valuable understanding. Further, *Panel members'* knowledge and understanding is essential for the Panel to fulfill *its* statutory responsibility to advise the Secretary of Commerce, the NOAA Administrator, and the Director of the NSGCP. Additionally,

we recommend that the NSGRP work with the NSGO to involve the NSGRP in addressing issues that have broad significance to the overall NSGCP.”

- B. The NSGRP provides high level program assessment objectivity and in a most cost effective manner: The NSGO has severe resource limitations under its present 5% administrative cap. Therefore, the NSGRP and the NSGO must consider the cost effectiveness of various forms of evaluation models while not compromising the integrity or basic purpose of the evaluation. The NSGRP offers a cost effective method of providing excellent program reviews.
- C. Guiding Evaluation Principles: It is premature to comment on the RIT draft program assessment process until it moves from a subcommittee through the full RIT Committee level and/or SGA-approval process. However, it is appropriate to suggest the following principles that should guide and govern, and be included in any future evaluation process.
- Insure that Federal Sea Grant funds are a good investment of public funds, including an evaluation system that measures program performance and is cost effective.
  - Insure competition (rating and ranking\*) during the program review cycle.
  - Achieve *vigorous evaluation and program improvement* goals within current fiscal limitations.
  - In addition to Technical Evaluations Panels, onsite by program evaluations should be included in any overall evaluation process and for consistency, should include an NSGRP member, and the same NSGO representative for each onsite visit.
- \* *as currently required by Congress.*
- D. Rationale: The evaluation process must ensure fair and objective appraisals and ensure the validation of the public money invested. The investment of public money cannot be validated through a paper review. It is critical to make on-site visits to validate reported accomplishments. This recommendation is consistent with NRC Recommendation 14, which states, “... limit the site visit to no more than 3 days.”

The NRC clearly envisioned onsite evaluation reviews. The 3-day limit can be achieved and possibly be reduced to 2 days with the elimination of the Strategic Planning element and limiting or removing field trips. Further, onsite visits are necessary *for meaningful and effective evaluations* as required by Congress, and to allow discussions with Advisory Committees, stakeholders, and University leadership.

Additionally, the consistency envisioned by the NRC Report could be enhanced by having one senior individual from NOAA or the NSGO participate in all reviews (Technical Review Panels and onsite visits) along with at least one member of the NSGRP. Reducing the length of onsite visits combined with the other NSGRP recommendations, should enable the net Program expenditures for an on-site visit to

be limited to \$25,000 or less. This will dramatically reduce the effort of local programs to prepare for onsite reviews.

### **3. Competition Within the National Sea Grant College Program**

The NSGRP also considered the recommendation concerning Recompensation, Recertification, Decertification and Redesignation during the Panel's February 2007 meeting.

- A. Issue: OMB and other entities have previously recommended that Sea Grant Programs be recertified or redesignated on a reasonable and regular schedule based on a rigorous evaluation process. NOAA has recently moved in the direction of such a concept by requiring a review, recompetition of joint institutes and laboratories.
- B. Discussion: Recertification and redesignation of Sea Grant Programs are outstanding issues with OMB, Congress, the Department of Commerce and other entities. These concerns should be taken seriously in that these entities affect the funding for the Sea Grant Program. This includes Congressional authorization and appropriation, agency-level budgetary allocation, intra-and-inter-agency standing, overall perception and awareness, and ultimate sustainability of the National Sea Grant College Program.

This is particularly important if Sea Grant is to remain a separate, distinct and valuable conduit for the investment of public funds vis-à-vis other federally appropriated entities within and outside of NOAA that claim to pursue similar goals and objectives.

- C. Recommended Action: The National Sea Grant Office, in consultation with the NSGRP and SGA, should review its procedures for Recompensation, Recertification, Decertification and Redesignation of Sea Grant Programs.