



National Sea Grant Review Panel



Nathaniel E. Robinson
Chairman of the Board

Ensuring Environmental and Economic Prosperity for America's Coastal Communities

November 15, 2007

Dr. Leon M. Cammen, Director
National Sea Grant College Program
1315 East-West Highway
R/SG, Room 11876, SSMC-3
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910-6233

Dear Dr. Cammen:

On behalf of the National Sea Grant Review Panel (NSGRP), I am pleased to provide you with our recommendations for a sound, efficient and cost-effective program evaluation system. The proposed Comprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE) Model includes a detailed list of measurable and value-added benefits, and a white paper that shares our thoughts on a regional-wide evaluation concept.

Background: The National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002 (P.L. 107-299) directed NOAA to contract with the National Academies' National Research Council (NRC) to carry out a review of the Sea Grant evaluation process, and make appropriate recommendations to improve its overall effectiveness.

In anticipation of the NRC initiative to carry out the directive of the National Sea Grant College Program Act Amendments of 2002, the NSGRP established a Program Evaluation Committee to develop recommendations that would review the PAT process prior to the conclusion of the 2nd PAT cycle lop recommendations. This report served to inform and assist the NRC in fulfillment of the Congressional directive. The NRC considered the NSGRP Program Evaluation recommendations [See NRC Report Appendix J: "Review and Recommendations: Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process; Report of the Sea Grant Review Panel's Program Evaluation Committee" (November 17, 2005)].

The NRC Report "Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process," June 2006, suggested that the NSGCP conduct a review of the Sea Grant program evaluation process. The NRC Report provided several recommendations that could guide any initiative that the NSGCP may undertake to consider reasonable, relevant and necessary modifications to the current Program Assessment Team (PAT) Evaluation Process.

In response to the NRC Report, the NSGRP established a Review Committee to respond to both the NRC's findings and recommendations, and to ongoing questions repeatedly asked by Congress, OMB and the Administration regarding the appropriate stewardship of Federal tax dollars. Our COPE proposal addresses their concerns.

Executive Committee Members

Admiral Dick West Washington, DC	Dr. Bill Stubblefield West Virginia	Dr. Peter Bell Maryland	Dr. Judith S. Weis New Jersey	Dr. Frank Kudrna Illinois
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Working for Nobody but You!

The RIT Final Report: We acknowledge the effort that the Sea Grant Response Integration Team (RIT) put into developing its Final Report. During the final stage of preparation of the RIT Final Report and the COPE Proposal, it was desirable for both groups to join efforts with the objective of presenting a unified proposal. Our NRC Report Review Committee requested the opportunity for one or more of its members to meet with the RIT but regrettably, this request was not accepted.

Although the COPE and the RIT team members were not able to collaborate, we are pleased to recognize that the final RIT Report incorporates some of the key elements of the COPE recommendations, including:

- The incorporation of an onsite visit into the process for evaluating all Sea Grant programs;
- The elimination of the visit to Sea Grant programs by the NSGCP Director that is currently envisioned and proposed as occurring at a time that is distinctly separate from the on-site visits; and,
- Making Topical Assistance Teams (TATs) optional.

The COmprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE): Our recommended COPE Model includes detailed measurable and value-added benefits that are anticipated to result from the implementation and application of our recommended COPE. Note that:

1. The COPE proposal has been extensively vetted, considered, debated and adopted by the full NSGRP at several critical drafting and development stages, i.e., a subcommittee's report on the role of the NGSRP in program evaluations (August 27, 2007), and responses to the 24 NRC Recommendations (September 30, 2007).
2. We broadly solicited and carefully listened to, reviewed and considered recommendations, suggestions and comments provided by the Sea Grant community. For example, the NSGRP NRC Report Review Committee actively sought advice and comments from the Sea Grant Association (SGA), individual Sea Grant Program Directors, the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO), the Sea Grant network, and the membership of the NSGRP. Valuable and diverse input and comment has been provided in many forms and forums including the 2-hour session that addressed Sea Grant Program Evaluation during the Sea Grant Week Meeting in San Diego, CA, on October 3, 2007.
4. We are pleased to report wide-spread support for the COPE approach. The comments and input received from Sea Grant Directors and the broader Sea Grant community indicate two definitive and resounding messages:
 - A. That the Sea Grant community strongly support onsite visits as part of a Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process.
 - B. That the Sea Grant community does not support a paper review, as is envisioned in the Program Review Panel (PRP) element of the RIT Report, as the vehicle for implementing a Sea Grant Program Evaluation Process.
5. While the RIT Final Report now includes a recommendation for an onsite visit, it is important to note that the RIT-recommended onsite visit will provide limited input to a PRP paper review. It is noteworthy that these visits are envisioned to occur four or five years *prior to* the PRP paper review. Therefore, information gathered will be four or five years old at the time the PRP paper review is scheduled to occur. We understand that the

information to be gathered from the RIT recommended onsite visits is not anticipated to be utilized until 2013. This unusual long lag time concerns us.

6. The RIT Report calls for either the NSGCP Director or the Deputy Director to participate in onsite visits to individual Sea Grant programs. Participation by the NSGRP Director in all onsite visits is critically important. Note however, that the NSGO Director would not be part of the formal data-gathering Program Evaluation process. Rather, the NSGCP Director would attend only the first day in order to meet with senior university officials, introduce the COPE Program Evaluation Team, and describe the Program Evaluation process. The NSGCP Director's presence and introduction of the evaluation procedures would provide an elevated level of awareness and bring greater attention and stature to the Sea Grant program, and to the Program Evaluation process on campus.
7. In order to ensure consistency, we believe that a senior NSGO staff member must be assigned to participate in all onsite visits.
8. With respect to the NRC Report's recommendation for incorporating annual reviews into the Sea Grant evaluation process, we believe that our recommendation for an annual adjustment opportunity most reasonably, practically and efficaciously addresses the intent of the NRC Report recommendation.

Recommendation: The COPE Model is an uncomplicated, straightforward, efficient and cost-effective system that responds to the intent and spirit of recommendations addressed in the NRC Report, and addresses concerns repeatedly expressed by the Administration, OMB and the Congress, as well as those shared by the Sea Grant Network community. As such, we recommend and advise accordingly.

We urge you to expeditiously finalize a plan of action that reasonably and realistically responds to these issues in a manner that does not continue to give mixed and fractured messages that have been so devastating in the past to the image of Sea Grant as especially perceived by Congressional Authorizing and Appropriating Committees.

Thank you for your consideration of our advice and recommendations. Should you require a discussion, additional information or assistance, just let me know. We are only too happy to help in any way that we can.

Sincerely,



NATHANIEL E. ROBINSON
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
NATIONAL SEA GRANT REVIEW PANEL

cc: Members, National Sea Grant Review Panel
Dr. James D. Murray, NSGCP Deputy Director
Members, Sea Grant Program Directors



National Sea Grant Review Panel



Nathaniel E. Robinson
Chairman of the Board

Ensuring Environmental and Economic Prosperity for America's Coastal Communities

Final Report of the National Sea Grant Review Panel

regarding

A Comprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE) Model For the National Sea Grant College Program

Approved for distribution by the NSGRP on
Wednesday, November 14, 2007

A Comprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE) Model For the National Sea Grant College Program

The National Research Council Report “Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process,” June 2006, (NRC Report) includes the basic premise that the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) should undergo an initiative to review the process that is utilized to perform Sea Grant Program Evaluation. In addressing this initiative, the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) should consider the specific recommendations that are provided in the NRC Report, suggestions and observations that are provided by the Administration and Congress, and the needs of individual state Sea Grant programs.

Some of these considerations include:

- **National Research Council** report suggests that among others, the evaluation process should:
 - Strengthen strategic planning at national and individual program levels;
 - Prepare benchmarks and indicators to ensure objective program evaluation;
 - Provide continuity between program evaluations;
 - Shorten the duration of, and standardize site visits;
 - Reduce the costs associated with site visits;
 - Provide credible and transparent annual assessments of each program;
 - Enhance the coordination among individual programs;
 - Emphasize each program’s ability to integrate research, education, and extension,
 - Conduct annual assessments;
 - Provide information for the NSGRP as it prepares the *State of Sea Grant Program* review; and,
 - Rate and rank every Sea Grant program annually.
- **The Administration and Congress** have frequently stressed the need to:
 - Validate appropriate investment of public funds by maintaining an evaluation system that measures program performance and is cost effective;
 - Insure competition, both rating and ranking, during the program review cycle; and,
 - Achieve rigorous evaluation and program improvement goals within fiscal limitations.
- **State Sea Grant Programs** should:
 - Continue to improve;
 - Benefit through frequent visits by the NSGCP Director and Program Officers;
 - Increase the visibility of Sea Grant to the senior levels of its University system, users and constituents, local political leaders, and related organizations; and,
 - Provide the opportunity to demonstrate program accomplishments and benefits, and explain the intricacies and subtleties of the program to the reviewers, the Panel, and the NSGO.
- **Cost efficiency** of the evaluation process is an important consideration for the National Sea Grant College Program. We recommend that costs for the development of program materials by local Sea Grant Programs in preparation for an onsite evaluation, need not exceed \$25,000.

The aforementioned considerations expressed in the NRC Report, by the Congress, the Administration, Sea Grant Program Directors and the NSGRP can best be addressed through an evaluation process that consists of the following core components:

- A revised national and local **Strategic Planning Process** currently being developed and implemented by the NSGCP;
- An on-site **CO**mprehensive **P**rogram **E**valuation (**COPE**) visit conducted on a **5-Year Cycle** (4 years of Program Evaluation, plus a 5th year to review the success of the most recent Program Evaluation cycle);
- A Topical Assistance Team (**TAT**) visit conducted on an as-needed basis;
- **Annual Program Monitoring** through **Annual Reports**; and,
- The opportunity for a **Program Rating Adjustment**.

A discussion of these five core COPE elements follows:

1. **The Strategic Planning Process**

The individual Sea Grant program strategic plans will align with the National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan. The benchmarks adopted in individual Sea Grant programs' strategic plans will be used to assist in assessing the achievements of programs. Additionally, requiring local programs to tie-in and link with the National Plan will ensure integration of the Network's core Program elements. Effective integration is necessary for achieving major results/impacts in research, extension/outreach services and education.

2. **COmprehensive Program Evaluation (COPE)**

- A. **Advantages and Benefits**: The COPE approach will retain a major strength of the previously successful PAT system by providing an onsite National Sea Grant presence to the local programs. During the debriefing following onsite evaluations, the review team will have the opportunity to highlight accomplishments of the local Sea Grant program to the leadership of the University. Similarly, the team will have the opportunity to talk with local, community and state leaders, users and constituents as well as leaders of complementary programs.

Both Congress and the Administration have repeatedly required meaningful and effective evaluations of local Sea Grant programs. Therefore, a second advantage of the COPE on-site visit is the opportunity to more fully understand all aspects of a Sea Grant program. The COPE visit will afford participating NSGRP members with insights into the strengths of the individual programs and the overall contributions of the Sea Grant Program to research, education and extension. Such direct and hands-on acquired knowledge is important as the Review Panel prepares its "State of Sea Grant Program" Report to the U. S. Congress. The "State of Sea Grant" Report will enhance the visibility of Sea Grant to the Administration and to Congress.

Another benefit of COPE is that frequently, the strength or weakness of a program is not easily or conveniently captured in written documents, but rather through portrayal of illustrations and demonstrations to onsite experts. It is important that Sea Grant programs be afforded the opportunity to portray their achievements and challenges to a Team of onsite reviewers. The on-site visit of an independent, experienced team ensures a fair and objective appraisal to verify a proper investment of public money.

(For a detailed list of advantages and benefits of the COPE model, please refer to Page 6.)

- B. Reduced COPE Time: The COPE Program Evaluation Process will include an on-site visit to review, on a five-year cycle, all aspects of the program with the exception of the Strategic Plan. The COPE visit will be conducted in three full days. Reducing the length of on-site visits to three days will help to economize Program Evaluations for individual Sea Grant programs and the NSGO.
- C. COPE Evaluation Team: The COPE Evaluation Team is expected to include at least one member of the National Sea Grant Review Panel, and a Sea Grant Director, and topical experts. Having a Sea Grant Director as part of the review team provides an important means of promoting transparency, awareness and cooperation among Sea Grant programs. All Program Evaluation visits that occur during an evaluation cycle will include the same senior staff person from the NSGO, and the NSGO Program Officer for the Sea Grant program being evaluated. Both NSGO staff will serve as non-voting members of the evaluation team.

(For a related discussion, please refer to the section below, “**Related and Companion COPE Provisions**,” on the “NSGCP Director’s Program Visit,” “Consistency,” and “An Option for the Review of Sea Grant Research.”)

3. Topical Assistance Team (TAT)

The TAT is envisioned as providing an optional tool for the NSGO or a state program director to review a specific topic of interest in a program. Similar to the existing TAT, this process will be invoked as needed at the request of a state Sea Grant Director, or as a result of an onsite visit. The TAT is not part of the formal Evaluation, but rather a complementary process to on-site visits and the Annual Reports. It is a fact-finding tool that can be used by either a Sea Grant Director or the NSGCP Director to improve the performance of a specific Sea Grant program.

4. Annual Program Monitoring through Annual Reports

Annual Reports will be used to more closely link an individual state Sea Grant programs and the strategic planning process at both the state and national levels. Each program will examine its own progress toward its stated goals and benchmarks, and collate this information. The annual report will describe each state program’s progress toward implementing and achieving its strategic plan goals and objectives. These Annual Reports should demonstrate how actively Sea Grant program management is engaged, and show that outcomes and impacts are being tracked. The Annual Report is viewed as an essential point of intersection between planning and assessment.

5. Annual Program Rating/Adjustment Opportunity

The annual NSGO Final Review would continue and would normalize Program Evaluations that are conducted in a given year. The NSGCP Director should develop procedures to promote transparency for the NSGO Final Review process. In doing so, the NSGCP Director should solicit advice from the NSGRP in developing procedures that govern the NSGO Final Review.

During the NSGO Final Review, Sea Grant programs that are not within the current year's review cycle will be provided with an opportunity to petition for an adjustment to their prior Program Evaluation rating. A petition for an adjustment to a prior Program Evaluation rating would be at the request of a state Sea Grant Director who has corrected a previously identified deficiency. The NSGCP Director should solicit advice from the NSGRP in developing procedures that govern the process that considers adjustments to prior Program Evaluation ratings. We believe this is a practical and economical response to the NRC recommendation for annual reviews.

Related and Companion COPE Provisions

- **NSGCP Director's Program Visit.** An NSGCP Director's visit should be incorporated into and run concurrently with the Program Evaluation onsite visit. Note however, that the NSGCP Director would not be part of the formal data-gathering Program Evaluation process. Rather, the NSGCP Director would attend only the first day in order to meet with senior university officials, introduce the COPE Program Evaluation Team and describe the Program Evaluation process. The NSGCP Director's presence and introduction of the evaluation procedure would provide an elevated level of awareness and bring greater attention and stature to the Sea Grant program, and the Program Evaluation process on campus.
- **Consistency (level playing field).** Consistency, continuity and coordination will be greatly improved by:
 - Adding an NSGO senior staff person to participate in all Program Evaluation on-site visits for the program evaluation cycle;
 - Developing and implementing a mandatory training requirement for all Program Evaluation Team members (this can be cost-effectively accomplished through teleconference calls, "Webinars," or via in-person training or other methods); and,
 - Improving and standardizing the guidance for Program Evaluation.
- **An Option for the Review of Sea Grant Research.** As an option for providing consistency, a separate team of individuals could conduct a separate paper evaluation of research for those Sea Grant programs that are scheduled to be evaluated during an individual year. Such paper evaluation of research would be utilized by the on-site Program Evaluation Team during their on-site visit.

ACTIVITY	COPE
Evaluation	On-Site
Rating	Provide numerical rating to NSGO
Interval	5 year Program Evaluation Cycle. 4 years of evaluations plus a 5th year to review the success of the most recent Program Evaluation cycle (i.e., a 5-year cycle)
Program Evaluation Team	3-4 members, including a senior NSGO staff member; at least 1 Panel member (Chair); 1 SG Program Director; and Topical Experts

NSGCP Director's Program Visits	NSGCP Director attends the first day of the Program Evaluation on-site visit primarily to meet with senior university officials, introduce the COPE Program Evaluation Team and describe the Program Evaluation process. Otherwise, the NSGCP Director is not part of the Program Evaluation.
Consistency/Continuity/Coordination	Same NSGO senior staff member as Evaluation Team
NSGO Final Review	Normalizes reviews conducted in current year and consider SG Program appeals for grade adjustment (annual assessment)
TAT (Topical Assistance Team)	As requested by NSGCP Director or the Sea Grant Program Director
Strategic Plan Review	Through Annual review of benchmarks
Annual Program Rating Adjustment Opportunity	Allows Sea Grant programs that are not within the current year's review cycle to petition for an adjustment to their prior Program Evaluation rating
Costs to Sea Grant Programs	Preparation of program materials not to exceed \$25,000

This COPE Evaluation Model addresses the intent and spirit of the National Research Council's Report and recommendations as well as concerns that have been repeatedly expressed by the Administration and Congress.

**Measurable and Value-added Benefits of the
COmprehensive Program Evaluations (COPE) Model
for the National Sea Grant College Program**

The COPE Model:

- Meets the intent and spirit of the NRC Report recommendations, as well as those of OMB, the Administration and Congress; and,
- Results in an enhanced visibility of Sea Grant to both the Administration and Congress.

- Promotes a fair and objective appraisal to verify a proper investment of public funds by an independent and experienced team;
- Designed to focus on program results and impacts;
- Measures and provides for improvement of Sea Grant programs performance;
- Significantly increases Sea Grant programs' efficiency and effectiveness;
- Reduces time needed for planning and implementing program assessments and associated expenditures; and,
- Reduces resources required for the evaluation process.

- Requires and assesses the effectiveness of integration among Sea Grant core program elements, i.e. research, education and extension;
- Enhances consistency, continuity and coordination among Sea Grant Programs through formal annual training of program assessment team members; by increasing standardization of evaluation tools; and, by requiring that the same senior NSGO staff person participates in all programs assessed; and,
- Encourages transparency, awareness and cooperation among Sea Grant programs.

- Continues to elevate stature of and brings credibility to Sea Grant programs to senior university officials;
- Continues to include and involve Sea Grant Program Directors and Panel Members; and,
- Affords NSGRP Members hands-on insight into Sea Grant programs and provides a definitive basis for preparing the "State of the Sea Grant Program Report" to the Administration and Congress.

- Continues the NSGO Final Review Process for normalizing evaluation results;
- Advises the NSGCP Director to develop procedures to increase transparency (and seek advice from the Panel) during the NSGO Final Review Process;
- Continues Topical Assistance Teams (TATs) on an as-needed basis, requested by the Sea Grant Program Director and/or the NSGCP Director;
- Utilizes Annual Reports to a significantly greater extent. Annual Reports would be used to more closely link Sea Grant programs to the strategic plan process, and would demonstrate how program outcomes (results) and impacts are tracked to state and national strategic plans; and
- Allows for Sea Grant programs to petition for adjustment in ratings on an annual basis.

ATTACHMENT

An Optional Regional Evaluation Concept

The NSGRP is pleased to submit a white paper that considers the incorporation of a regional concept for the NSGCP, into the methodology for program evaluation.

The NRC Report Review Committee conducted a series of deliberations and meetings as part of their study and evaluation of the NRC Report, and of Sea Grant evaluation. The committee considered the issue of regionalization in general, and, specifically, how regionalization might be incorporated into the Sea Grant evaluation process.

We believe that the NSGO should consider realigning the Sea Grant program evaluation process, and the associated individual Sea Grant program reviews, to provide for the evaluation and review of an entire region in one year. We believe that this change would not only address regional coordination as a policy issue, but more specifically, would improve the actual coordination of regional activities.

During the RIT retreat in Providence, RI, the two RIT subcommittee chairs (Moll and Costa Pierce) suggested that NSGO Program Officers should be based in the regions. We believe this is an idea that is worthy of and merits serious consideration. We believe this initiative would address and satisfy the NRC concern of providing greater and closer involvement and collaboration, and improved understanding, between NSGO Program Officers and the individual Sea Grant programs. We further believe that movement in this direction would provide more cost savings, and greater economic and programmatic efficiencies.

Acknowledgements

This report was adopted by the full National Sea Grant Review Panel (Panel) on November 14, 2007, and was based on recommendations that were developed by the Panel's NRC Report Review Committee.

DR. FRANK L. KUDRNA, CHAIRMAN

Former Panel Chair; Chair, Panel Program Evaluation Committee; member, National Sea Grant Extension Review Panel; Co-Chair, National Ports and Harbors Extension Program Review Panel; and, member of Panel's Sea Grant Reauthorization Committee.

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Chair, "Duce Committee" ("The National Sea Grant Office Review Committee of the National Sea Grant Review Panel," June 2002).

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Panel's Immediate Past Vice Chair, Member-at-Large of the Executive Committee; and, member, "Duce Committee" and Panel's Sea Grant Reauthorization Committee.

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Panel's Vice Chair; Author, "A Report to the National Sea Grant Review Panel" (July 2007).