

National Sea Grant Advisory Board Futures Committee

Report to the Board

Submitted by Mayor Jeremy Harris - Chairman

August 27th, 2009

Committee Formation

The Futures Committee of the National Sea Grant Advisory Board was established by Board action at its November meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mayor Jeremy Harris was selected by the Board to serve as Chairman. The Committee was formed as a Committee of the Whole and, as such, all Board members are on the Committee. The first meeting of the Futures Committee was on January 20 & 21, 2009 at the Sea Grant Office at the University of Hawaii.

Statement of Task

The National Sea Grant College Program was established by Congress in 1966. Since that time the program has produced an admirable record of accomplishment in marine research, education and extension services. Despite this fact, the program has failed to grow to realize its full potential.

The task of the Futures Committee is to examine why this has occurred, to assess the successes and failures of the program and to help chart a new course of growth for the program at this time of transition for our country.

The Committee will examine Sea Grant's relationship with NOAA and the Department of Commerce and make recommendations to the Board about Sea Grant's future position and role in the Federal government.

The Futures Committee will also explore Sea Grant's image and brand and make recommendations to the Board on how these important assets can be enhanced.

Finally, the Committee will examine opportunities for Sea Grant to be immediately responsive to the severe environmental and economic challenges that confront our nation by developing initiatives that fully utilize its superb nationwide research and extension talents.

The Committee will also assume any other responsibilities assigned by the Board.

Tenure

The Futures Committee will complete all its work by January 2010.

Futures Committee Recommendations to the Board

Sea Grant Funding

The Committee believes that Sea Grant has faced funding stagnation because it lacks the support it deserves in Congress and within Commerce. The unique value of Sea Grant is not recognized. Sea Grant's clients perceive real benefit from the program but that has not translated into enhanced funding support. It's clear more effort needs to go into organizing Sea Grant clientele into a more vocal advocacy constituency. More effort also needs to go into helping NOAA appreciate the value of Sea Grant and the asset it represents to NOAA.

Recommendation to the Board

The National Sea Grant Office should pursue a renewed, vigorous, outreach effort to strengthen its relationships with the NOAA Administration and with other NOAA agencies. In this context, the NSGO should work to better define its role in the overall NOAA charter of responsibilities and to better articulate its potential as a NOAA asset. It should be noted that NSGO management is already aggressively pursuing these actions with the new NOAA administration.

The National Sea Grant Office, in coordination with the Sea Grant Association (SGA), should expand its efforts to identify its clientele and other public audiences who benefit from Sea Grant research, education, and extension services, and should develop expanded educational initiatives to inform these constituency groups about Sea Grant programs, funding, and resource needs.

Sea Grant's Image

In general, it appears that the Department of Commerce has little knowledge of the Sea Grant Program. The Committee believes that NOAA's view of Sea Grant is generally positive but that Sea Grant is viewed as largely irrelevant to the rest of NOAA. Many in NOAA view Sea Grant as a competitor for funding.

In Congress, Sea Grant is on the radar screen, especially of coastal community Congressional delegations. Despite this, Sea Grant has no real champions in Congress.

Recommendation to the Board

The committee recommends that Congressional champions be sought in both the Senate and House. Meetings should be initiated with selected Representatives and Senators who have been involved with the Sea Grant Program to seek their advice on strengthening the Congressional/Sea Grant relationship.

The Committee recommends that the SGA and the Board be approached for suggestions/contacts in the new Obama White House who should also be approached as potential Sea Grant supporters.

Sea Grant's Structure and Location

It has been suggested that the effectiveness of Sea Grant could be enhanced if it was located in a different federal department or agency. The organizational position of the Sea Grant Program within the Federal government has been reviewed in the past, but the committee believes it should be reviewed again.

Recommendation to the Board

The Committee's recommendation is for the National Sea Grant Office to determine its optimum position within the federal governmental framework and be ready to advocate for that proposal should a major restructuring of Federal research and scientific functions be undertaken by the Obama administration. The committee does not recommend that Sea Grant unilaterally attempt to reposition itself within the bureaucracy absent a major agency shake-up.

The Brand - The Sea Grant Name

While the Sea Grant Program has earned a respectable brand over the last 40 years, the word "grant" continues to cause confusion and a misunderstanding of the Program's mandate.

Recommendation to the Board

The Committee recommends that the name Sea Grant be "enhanced" by adding two or three descriptor words that help define the program's mission in relationship to the urgent challenges the nation faces. An example would be –"NOAA Sea Grant – Helping Build Sustainable Coastal Communities".

The committee recommends that a brochure be developed that highlights the existing capabilities and successes of Sea Grant to illustrate its track

record in tackling the issues highlighted by the new brand. This publication would be distributed primarily to elected policy makers at all levels.

Building Relevancy

The Committee believes that Sea Grant should seize the current period of opportunity to establish itself as an important asset to the nation in meeting some of the country's most urgent challenges.

While mitigation efforts to reduce the impacts of climate change are ramping up, it's clear that many impacts from climate change are unavoidable. With sea level rise and an increased intensity of coastal storms threatening coastal infrastructure and population centers, America's coastal cities are facing perhaps the greatest challenges as a result of this unfolding environmental disaster. These cities are in great need of assistance in planning for and adapting to these climate change impacts.

It's clear that NOAA, with its wide array of expertise in climate related issues, should and will play a major role in the Obama administration's comprehensive climate change strategy. There is a growing consensus within the many agencies within the federal government that are developing the climate change strategy that there is a critical need for a national extension network to work with cities on these pressing issues and other related sustainability challenges.

The Sea Grant Program has an invaluable asset at its disposal that can make an enormous contribution to this effort in its nation-wide extension network. Sea Grant Extension has been actively working with America's coastal communities for decades. Sea Grant Extension professionals have developed relationships with coastal community leaders and government officials, and they have a proven track-record of accomplishment.

While Sea Grant Extension alone probably cannot meet all of the nation's climate change mitigation and adaptation extension needs, Sea Grant can position itself to play a major role and make a major contribution to this staggering national challenge.

Recommendation to the Board

The committee recommends that Sea Grant establish a new pilot program focusing on coastal city sustainability and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and that it develop this program into a full-scale national initiative over the next three years.

Since it is unlikely that a second wide-ranging stimulus package will be sent to Congress this year that could provide the immediate full funding that

this initiative deserves, the committee recommends that this vital program be rapidly ramped-up over the next three years as the Obama administration forges its Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Initiative

Coastal cities all across the nation are just beginning to realize the scope of the challenge they face with climate change and rising sea levels. Currently, city leaders have nowhere to turn for an assessment of their vulnerabilities and for recommendations on what they need to begin doing to adapt to this challenge. Our proposal is for Sea Grant to develop a “Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Initiative” on a pilot basis using existing resources and to scale-up the initiative to a major national program over the next three years.

Under our proposal, Sea Grant would help local coastal community governments develop their plans for mitigating and adapting to climate change. The national office would hire a small cadre of specialists in the areas pertinent to this initiative (coastal land use planning, coastal urban infrastructure, etc) who would coordinate the pilot program from Washington. NOAA’s extensive expertise in climate related fields would be mobilized, and Sea Grant programs from around the country would identify expertise within their extension programs, as well as within their research and broader University communities in multi-disciplinary fields.

This national reservoir of experts would be available to advise local governments in the assessment of their climate change vulnerabilities and in planning to meet their adaptation challenges. (Preliminary discussions with the SGA suggest that this proposal or some variation thereof would have good support from the Sea Grant College Programs.)

In the current year, the National Sea Grant Office should utilize existing funds to develop a pilot project to demonstrate the proof of concept for this initiative. Following that, the second year funding should be in the \$5 million dollar range, allowing Sea Grant to develop a regional pilot project and begin the work of capacity buildings to broaden its extension expertise into the broad array of coastal climate change mitigation and adaptation issues that coastal communities are facing.

Over the first three years, funding for this initiative should grow to approximately \$50 million annually. This would allow Sea Grant Extension to staff-up to meet the demand for climate change extension services that will be demanded from the nation’s thousands of coastal communities.

This initiative, if developed, would take best advantage of Sea Grant’s unique and invaluable resource...its national network of extension agents and programs.

While organizing to enhance its ability to provide climate change adaptation informational services to decision makers, Sea Grant needs to consider how it will complement related extension and training assets contained within NOAA and in other federal agencies. Sea Grant will also need to develop new organizational mechanisms to harness NOAA research and technical services and connect these services to public need.

NOAA currently conducts a wide range of engagement activities in communications, education, extension and training, and regional collaboration. Based on recommendations made by the NOAA Science Advisory Board, NOAA has recently created a new organizational structure to coordinate and provide oversight for its engagement activities, the Executive Committee on Engagement (ECE). The ECE membership is composed of the Chair of the Education Council, the Director of Communications, the Chair of the Regional Collaboration Executive Oversight Group and the Chair of the Extension and Training Services Committee (NETS). The ECE provides corporate guidance and recommends actions to promote a strong dialog and two-way relationship with society that enables NOAA to identify, develop and improve products and services to meet society's needs.

NETS capabilities encompass a broad range of programmatic and geographic assets that, when employed in a coordinated manner, will assist NOAA in its efforts to fully engage its constituents. NETS provides an integrated national leadership and coordination function for NOAA's sizable and locally placed extension and training assets nation-wide. This function helps to underpin NOAA's Regional Collaboration structure, with a focus on bringing together NOAA assets on the ground in a coordinated manner. This new approach enables the full range of NOAA's extension and training assets to focus on thematic priorities identified by NOAA leadership or by local or regional stakeholders and constituent feedback. The principles underlying this new approach include; national guidance and coordination, regional planning and strategy development, flexible regional, state and local implementation and accountability through collection and analysis of national extension and training metrics. Engaging the public on climate issues is a current priority of ECE and NETS and a Sea Grant climate adaptation initiative should utilize the ECE and NETS structures to help lead, coordinate and enlist relevant NOAA programs to provide needed climate adaptation expertise and technical services.

In addition, other agencies, notably USDA's Land Grant system which employs more than 14,000 Cooperative Extension Service staff nationwide, have important expertise that can be utilized to support a Sea Grant led climate adaptation initiative. Under the auspices of the Association of Land Grant and Public Universities (APLU), recent high level meetings have been held between the NOAA and USDA leadership for the purpose of collaborating on climate extension issues. Adding USDA extension capabilities to those of NOAA's would significantly expand the breadth of technical expertise available to help communities adapt to climate change. NOAA should be encouraged to continue its work to strengthen and formalize its relationship with USDA's Land Grant community and to nurture the formation of a national climate extension service.

