

Procedures Manual for the National Sea Grant College Program's Focus Teams

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PREAMBLE

In response to the recommendations put forth by the National Research Council's "Evaluation of the Sea Grant Program Review Process" report, the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) developed a new national strategic plan, "NOAA National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan 2009-2013: Meeting the Challenge". Three cross-cutting goals and four specific focus areas emerged from the strategic planning process. These goals and focus areas reflect America's most urgent needs in the coastal, ocean and Great Lakes arenas, NOAA priorities, and Sea Grant's strengths and core values. For each focus area, subject matter experts from both within and outside of the Sea Grant network were recruited to serve on focus teams. These teams serve as a new mechanism to help Sea Grant plan, implement and evaluate the national plan in an effective, coordinated and collective manner. The team members' expertise and leadership will help guide Sea Grant and build the Program's capacity to thrive on a national scale in these focus areas. Focus teams are envisioned to exist for the entire life-cycle of a national plan, including planning, implementation and final evaluation.

This Procedures Manual is intended to provide general guidance to the teams. This guidance should be reviewed and, if necessary, updated at a minimum of every two years. All changes must be approved by the focus team chairs, vice-chairs and the NSGCP Director.

GOALS & RESPONSIBILITIES

The goals and responsibilities outlined below are intended to help highlight Sea Grant's work (hereby referred to as the NSGCP, meaning the entire network, or Program as a whole) on a national scale within each focus area. Each focus team has a set of standing responsibilities along with another set of discretionary responsibilities that are to be addressed as time and resources permit, or as requested by the NSGCP Director. Given the scope of standing and discretionary responsibilities listed below and the time constraints of volunteer membership, all focus team activities should be outlined and prioritized by each team in their yearly recommendations to the NSGCP Director. Focus team recommendations are intended to help guide and streamline the national or multi-regional activities of the Sea Grant network to address national gaps, emerging issues and/or new opportunities. Given the interrelated nature of each of the focus areas and emerging issues that cross multiple focus areas, focus teams are encouraged to collaborate with other teams in order to address cross-cutting topical issues.

Standing responsibilities

Facilitate national planning, implementation, synthesis and reporting of Sea Grant's activities and accomplishments.

(1) Assist in the development of the NSGCP plan (national plan).

Following focus area identification by the NSGCP at the start of a strategic planning cycle, focus teams will be established for each focus area. Once convened, each focus team will help develop focus area performance measure(s) along with strategies, objectives and outcomes for each focus area goal.

(2) Assess progress in achieving the outcomes identified in the national plan.

Utilizing annual reporting and other data as appropriate, each focus team will conduct an annual national-level evaluation of the collective NSGCP focus area activities to inform the NSGCP Director of progress in achieving the national plan. This evaluation includes: assessing progress towards each of the outcomes under the focus area goals; identifying national impacts; and pinpointing gaps in the focus area (both for the most recent year and for the duration of the plan). Each focus team will write up its findings as part of a national annual progress report. Focus team chairs and vice-chairs will work together to compile each team's findings into a coherent national annual progress report. A final assessment will review all activities under the national plan.

(3) Develop recommendations for NSGCP activities that will address national gaps, emerging issues and new opportunities.

Utilizing the results of the evaluation, focus teams will develop recommendations as a form of advice to the NSGCP on how to address national gaps, emerging issues and new opportunities. To ensure that recommendations are transparent, participatory and inclusive of ideas from the NSGCP and partners, they will be made available for public comment before submission to the NSGCP Director. In general, focus area recommendations should be consistent with the NSGCP mission and the goals and strategies outlined in the national plan and should address national and multi-regional issues of high political, economic and environmental priority. Recommendations may have an estimated budget as well as ideas for potential funding partners and costs associated with activities. The NSGCP Director will review the recommendations developed by each team, and may involve the NSGCP to accomplish the activities outlined by the focus teams. Focus teams or their members are free to participate, lead or fully implement such activities.

Discretionary Responsibilities

Identify new opportunities and directions for Sea Grant's national and multi-regional initiatives.

(1) Articulate and promote the need for national and multi-regional programming.

New opportunities should be identified on a national or multi-regional scale. Focus teams are encouraged to work closely with other Sea Grant network components that function at the regional, multi-regional or national level (such as regional bodies and network groups).

(2) Assist in the development of national and multi-regional strategic investments.

Assistance may include advising the NSGCP Director on the following: purpose, objectives, topics, investment mechanisms, timelines and budget. To formulate their advice, focus teams may form subcommittees, cross-team committees and/or consult outside expertise as needed.

(3) Develop white papers or think pieces that address specific problems or convey new opportunities for Sea Grant.

At their discretion or by request, focus teams may choose to develop white papers or "think pieces" to explore or summarize a topic of interest. To meet their objectives, focus teams may choose to form subcommittees, cross-team committees or consult outside expertise.

(4) Assist in the development of new Sea Grant funding initiatives for the NOAA budget process.

Assistance may include providing technical advice on needs, gaps in current efforts or approaches, and the NSGCP's capacity and expertise to address an issue. Normal restrictions on non-Federal participation in budget development apply.

Catalyze cooperative efforts within and among the NSGCP, NOAA and other agencies and stakeholder organizations, including NGO's.

(1) Develop and prioritize strategies and action plans for developing partnerships.

Partnership building is a valuable tool that the focus teams can use strategically to help Sea Grant build capacity, fill gaps, address emerging issues or new opportunities and/or establish a national identity. Focus team members may choose to leverage existing contacts or pursue new opportunities at the national level on behalf of the Sea Grant network.

(2) Form partnerships on behalf of the NSGCP.

Focus team members may form impromptu or informal partnerships opportunistically. Focus team members have a responsibility to work with the focus team chair and vice-chair to communicate partnership goals, objectives and commitments to the NSGCP.

Provide a mechanism to further solidify Sea Grant's national identity.

(1) Organize or help to organize national and international level conferences, symposia and other educational initiatives.

Initiatives should be consistent with the national plan and address national or multi-regional issues of high political, economic and environmental priority. Initiatives should be transparent, participatory and inclusive of ideas from the NSGCP and partners.

(2) Work with Sea Grant communications staff to develop targeted products or efforts that highlight Sea Grant impacts in the focus area.

Strategic communications efforts, including products, materials or events designed to highlight Sea Grant's accomplishments are another effective approach focus teams can use to build Sea Grant's national identity to a given audience. Focus teams may assist communications staff by identifying and providing subject matter expertise on a high priority national impact or emerging issue. In addition, they may advise communicators on an appropriate audience or outline a specific objective to ensure the product fulfills a NSGCP need.

MEMBERSHIP

New focus team members are nominated following the national planning process, or the resignation of an individual from the focus team. All members require the approval of the President of the Sea Grant Association and the NSGCP Director. Members function on behalf of the entire NSGCP, and not the individual programs or organizations they represent. With the exception of the members listed below, membership is given to the individual and is not reserved

for a group or program they are affiliated with. In addition to the responsibilities listed above, each individual is also expected to serve as a liaison between the focus team and the NSGCP to ensure good communication and transparency and to avoid conflicts. All individuals should have experience or expertise in the subject matter of the focus area.

Members

Chair: NSGO, selected by the NSGCP Director

The focus team chair partners with the vice-chair to recommend focus team nominations, oversee and direct all focus team activities, make any necessary decisions, and bring important matters to the NSGCP Director. The chair is normally an employee of the NSGO. The chair also serves as liaison with the chairs of the other focus teams, the NSGO, NOAA, and other partners.

Vice-Chair: Sea Grant Association (SGA), nominated by the SGA President

The vice-chair assists the chair in recommending focus team nominations, overseeing and directing all focus team activities, making any necessary decisions and bringing important matters to the NSGCP Director. The vice-chair also serves as liaison between the focus team and NSGCP groups, via the SGA's Network Advisory Council.

Alternate Chair: NSGO, nominated by the focus team chair

The alternate chair is appointed to serve as the NSGO representative in any case where the chair might not be able to fulfill his or her responsibilities. The alternate chair stays up-to-date on all focus team matters and is able to assist at a moment's notice.

Sea Grant Advisory Board (SGAB) representative: nominated by the SGAB Chairman

Serves as liaison between the focus team and the SGAB.

Coordinator: NSGO, nominated by the focus team chair. The NSGO will compete for Knauss fellows on an annual basis to perform this role.

The coordinator staffs the focus team and provides overall support for focus team activities.

Members-at-large:

Nominations for members-at-large are solicited from the NSGCP and its partners. The focus team chair and vice-chair will review the nominations based on the selection criteria and put forth suggestions to the President of the SGA and Director for approval. The overarching objective is to appoint individuals who have a "big picture" perspective, are creative and innovative, and are recognized by peers as highly reputable experts within their focus area.

In addition, members will be selected to ensure effective: (1) interaction with Sea Grant's research, extension, education and communication communities with respect to their focus area; (2) assessment of and attention to focus area issues and interests from a regional perspective; (3) discussion of and attention to the broad range of topics covered by each focus area; and (4) interaction with organizations outside of Sea Grant with common interests in the focus area, especially other NOAA programs or federal organizations.

Members will be selected based on the following criteria:

1. Specific area of expertise.
2. Professional and educational credentials.
3. Demonstrated leadership capabilities.

Subcommittees

Given the multitude and complexity of issues associated with each focus team, outside expertise may sometimes be needed to address new or emerging issues. At any time, teams may form subcommittees or working groups that include external participants to address these issues. Several focus teams may join to create a single subcommittee to address an issue of common interest. Subcommittees will be appointed by the chair and vice-chair in consultation with the members.

Annual Meetings

All members (and not designees) are expected to attend an annual meeting. Each focus team will meet at least once per year for a minimum of one full day. Every other year, focus teams are encouraged to organize a joint annual meeting. The meeting location or venue should be selected based on its ability to accommodate the most members.

Term

Focus teams are appointed for the entire life-cycle of a national plan, from the planning phase to the final evaluation of activities under the plan. Members are asked to commit approximately two weeks of time each year.

Member replacement

If a focus team member resigns, he/she may be replaced. The selection of a new individual should follow the same process as outlined in the nomination section above. Incoming individuals will be appointed for the remainder of the term.

Conflicts of Interest

Members are responsible for identifying and addressing conflicts of interest (COI), if a COI exists or is perceived.

COMMUNICATION

Focus teams were established to help the NSGCP identify, coordinate and accomplish Sea Grant's national goals in the four focus areas. Clear, effective communication, including collaboration and transparency within and among teams, with the NSGCP and with external partners, is essential to this mission. Teams that communicate well should operate more effectively. For cross-cutting issues, effective communication among teams can lead to more holistic thinking and planning, potentially inspiring the NSGCP to pursue powerful new directions or initiatives. Good communication between the focus teams and the network will enable the teams to gauge the needs of and to be responsive to the collective NSGCP. Finally, effective communication with external parties may lead to new opportunities such as partnerships, capacity building, and increased or leveraged funding for the NSGCP. To help the focus teams accomplish their mission, communication guidance is outlined below.

General

All focus team meetings, conference calls and activities are public, unless otherwise directed by the NSGCP Director. Notices of upcoming activities will be posted on the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) focus team webpages, as well as notes following the meetings.

Within teams

To collaborate effectively throughout the year, team members participate in quarterly conference calls and exchange periodic e-mails. Each focus team should meet in person at least once per year. The teams may choose to hold additional in-person meetings as needed if travel funds are available. The focus team coordinators will help maintain clear and regular team communications.

Among teams

Focus teams may need to collaborate on crosscutting issues. Cross-team committees are encouraged and may be formed as necessary. Crosscutting activities may be initiated by a focus team, a chair or vice-chair, or the NSGCP Director. To enable discussions about such issues, all focus teams should coordinate to host a joint annual meeting every other year.

To increase coordination and consistency across teams, the chairs and vice-chairs of all the focus teams will meet together on a regular basis to share information on team operations, activities and plans.

With the NSGCP

The NSGCP is composed of individuals, groups and programs with different knowledge, experience, roles and needs. This diverse skill set should be viewed as an asset as the teams solicit new ideas and receive feedback to help ensure that activities and recommendations are aligned with the NSGCP's collective national needs. Hence, the focus teams must communicate their activities and ideas to the NSGCP, solicit input from the network, and collaborate with other NSGCP groups.

1. **Updates to the NSGCP:** The focus team coordinators, in consultation with the focus team chair and vice-chair, will provide regular updates to the focus area websites and the NSGO newsletter to provide the network with information about current and upcoming focus team activities.
2. **Solicitation of input from the NSGCP:** The focus teams should routinely solicit input from the NSGCP. The NSGCP, or the appropriate NSGCP group or individuals, are to be notified of solicitations for input via the focus team website, the NSGO newsletter, or direct contact with the various Sea Grant network groups. Focus team chairs welcome input from the NSGCP at all times.
3. **Communication with NSGCP groups:** The focus teams should engage appropriate network groups. In general, the focus team chair is responsible for keeping NOAA, the NSGO and relevant federal and national NGO partners informed of activities, while the vice-chair is responsible for maintaining focus team communications with NSGCP groups, via the SGA's Network Advisory Council. SGAB representatives serve as liaisons between the focus teams and the SGAB.

With external audiences

Focus team communication with outside groups is orchestrated on behalf of the NSGCP, rather than a particular focus team or individual. The focus team coordinators will provide information about external communications and other activities on the public focus area websites.

With NSGCP Director

Regular communication between the focus teams and the NSGCP Director is essential in order to ensure the focus teams are fulfilling NSGCP needs and to reassure teams that their contributions are valued and being utilized. In most instances, the focus team chair can serve as the liaison between the NSGCP Director and the focus teams. Conference calls between the NSGCP Director and the focus teams should be considered to maintain information flow.

FUNDING

Each year, focus teams will develop a set of proposed activities in each focus area that address national gaps, emerging issues and new opportunities. Cost estimates associated with activities that fulfill focus team responsibilities may also be included in these recommendations. The NSGCP Director will review the recommendations with input from the SGA and, based on available funds, will work with the focus team to advance priority activities. Focus teams or individual members may choose to participate in these activities, with attention to conflicts of interest. In addition, the NSGCP Director may request advice from the focus teams on the development or review of other initiatives that are relevant to the focus area. The guidelines below outline how costs of various focus area activities may be incurred.

Focus team responsibilities

Focus team membership is a volunteer activity and salaries are not provided to focus team members. However, focus team responsibilities include a number of activities that may require a budget. Based on available budgets, the NSGO will cover the costs of focus team travel to focus team annual meetings. Such costs should be approved by the chair and vice-chair in advance. The NSGO may allocate additional focus area funds to be used for other activities related to carrying out the teams' responsibilities or funding projects that help to further the goals of the focus area.

Focus area funding

The NSGCP Director may request the focus teams' advice on the development or review of initiatives that further the goals of the focus areas. For additional guidance on focus team National Strategic Investment advice, please refer to "Assisting in the development and/or review of national and multi-regional strategic investments," under *Discretionary Responsibilities* on page 3. All final decisions regarding funding are the responsibility of the NSGCP Director based on the solicited advice of the focus teams. The NSGCP Director will provide feedback to the teams about how their advice has been used.

The NSGCP Director may choose to involve focus teams or individual focus team members more directly in the development and implementation of focus area initiatives. If so, the following principles apply:

Focus teams may be asked to solicit ideas for priority activities on a specific topic. The process used to solicit ideas should be transparent, participatory and inclusive of ideas from focus team membership and the NSGCP. All focus team members, especially the chairs and vice-chairs, should emphasize the teams' receptivity to suggestions for new activities and initiatives that would further the goals of the focus area.

Focus teams may be asked to assist in the solicitation of proposals to address priority focus area activities. Focus teams may be asked to help draft the request for proposals (RFP), identify target audiences for the RFP, and publicize the solicitation. In general, solicitations would be announced to as broad an audience as possible.

Focus team members may be asked to assist in the selection of proposals to address priority focus area activities, by acting as peer reviewers or evaluation panelists. Normal grant selection rules apply, including the anonymity of proposal reviewers and the fact that non-Federal panels will not make consensus decisions or recommendations. The final decisions on submitted proposals will be made by the NSGCP Director.