

## **A Plan for Strategic Planning**

### **Phase I Guidance on a Planning Framework for Conducting a National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Planning Process**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The National Research Council (NRC) identified strategic planning as one of the central elements for consideration in the redesign of the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) program assessment process. Effective plans commit programs to explicit outcome-oriented goals and objectives, and provide a tangible link between local and national priorities. For this reason guidance is required to enable the NSGCP to initiate strategic planning at the national level and to help local programs align their strategic plans — either existing or new — with national priorities. State programs need appropriate tools to strengthen their planning processes; in addition, local goals and objectives need to be able to not only connect to a national context but also aggregate up so that the whole becomes more than a sum of its parts. In addition, guidance detailing how state Sea Grant programs should use their plans and, in turn, how these plans will be assessed are important considerations. The Strategic Planning Sub-Team recognized the unique federal-state-university partnership of Sea Grant as a foundation of its strategic planning guidance for the NSGCP in this Phase I report. In Phase II the Strategic Planning Sub-Team will develop guidance on aspects of alignment of state plans with the NSGCP's Strategic Plan, and explore ideas on how best to evaluate state Sea Grant program strategic plans.

Developing an inclusive NSGCP Strategic Plan (Plan) will require development of a well-considered planning framework with wide support from the many stakeholders within and outside of the NSGCP. The Plan should have a clear and compelling mission, vision, goals, objectives, benchmarks, reporting, evaluation, and revision procedures that allow the NSGCP to show national accomplishments to constituents, NOAA, OAR, and the OMB. The Plan should also give sufficient guidance to local programs to undertake actions that are locally relevant but also fit into national priorities.

#### **FINDINGS**

In this Phase I report, we provide recommendations for a national process that will result in the development of a NSGCP Strategic Plan. This guidance was developed to address the following NRC recommendation to: “Strengthen strategic planning at both the national and individual program level. The strategic plans of the individual programs and the national program should represent a coordinated and collective effort to serve local, regional, and national needs.”

## **I. Recommended Principles for a National Planning Framework for Sea Grant**

In conducting strategic planning, it is recommended that the NSGCP utilize an inclusive framework (see framework diagram) which would:

- Include planning for both thematic (national ocean, coastal, Great Lake priorities) and functional (research, education, outreach) areas;
- Include input of stakeholders before the Plan is finalized;
- Capture the “strategic planning landscape” by conducting both top-down and bottom-up reviews of existing national and state plans and priorities before finalizing a Plan;
- Make connections to other ocean/coastal/Great Lake agencies and stakeholders, and articulate timelines for completion of a national plan;
- Explain how the national planning process was “strategic” by elaborating upon the specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and niches for Sea Grant;
- Conduct gap and risk analyses in order to identify those priorities and niches; and
- Include the recognition that the continuum of planning stems from a robust NSGCP Strategic Plan, to a solidly aligned state Strategic Plan, to a supportive and clear Implementation Plan with clearly articulated milestones and expected outcomes that can easily be tracked for annual reporting and evaluation, and incorporates a process for the regular evaluation and revisions of strategic plans.

## **II. The Value of Including Stakeholders in the NSGCP Strategic Planning Process**

It is recommended that the stakeholders of the NSGCP be included in the NSGCP strategic planning process, and that these be defined broadly. Stakeholders include the state Sea Grant programs, NOAA and NOAA line offices and programs, and the National Sea Grant Review Panel. In addition, other closely allied federal, non-federal offices, industry, and relevant partners with topically significant ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes research, education, and outreach portfolios, such as the NSF and the EPA should be engaged in a meaningful way.

## **III. Types of Planning**

It is recommended that the NSGCP strategic planning process include two types of strategic planning – thematic and functional planning – and that these planning processes include stakeholder inputs. Thematic planning captures the broad, national scientific priorities and needs in ocean/coastal and Great Lakes areas, while functional planning engages stakeholders to prioritize needs in Sea Grant’s research, education, outreach, legal, administrative, and communications areas. In the attached diagram, stakeholders are to be involved in national thematic and functional planning workshops in the summer of 2007. Processes are featured that will help to develop national thematic and functional priorities.

Both of these types of planning should be inclusive of the following elements:

- **Vision:** Defined as a description of the ideal future contribution/state of the organization. A consciously created image of what the organization would ideally like to be.
- **Goals:** Defined as broad strategic positions or conditions which the organization desires to reach. Goals close the gap between the organization's preferred vision and its current situation. An example are those thematically expressed in the Ocean Research Priorities Plan which represent national needs that may be appropriate to Sea Grant's strategic niche; which are sufficiently challenging; and where Sea Grant can have significant ownership.
- **Priorities:** Defined as the finite areas that will be addressed given consideration of vision, capabilities, finances, and competitive position.

Specific guidance for implementation planning has not yet been developed; however, it is recommended that implementation planning should be considered as a logical follow-on from Strategic Planning, and include the following:

- **Objectives:** Defined as specific implementation guidelines from goals decided in the strategic plan, each having a specific time frame. Implementation objectives are measurable statements of achievement that lead to the accomplishment of goals contained in a strategic plan. Objectives should be classified into time frames. By defining short and long-term objectives, they provide indicators of progress.
- **Activities or Milestones:** Defined as statements of how Sea Grant will use resources to accomplish specific objectives. It includes task accountabilities and specific actions for monitoring progress, and includes markers of success that can be quantified.

### **III. Process for NSGCP Strategic Planning**

The attached schematic diagram outlines a recommended process to be followed for developing the NSGCP Strategic Plan in 2007-2008. The recommended planning process has the following components:

#### **A. Identify NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee**

The RIT Strategic Planning Sub-Team, in conjunction with the RIT will provide the NSGCP Director with a list of nominations for the NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee (Steering Committee). We recommend that the Steering Committee members represent the following organizations: (1) the Sea Grant Association, (2) the National Sea Grant Review Panel, (3) a university representative with the ability to represent the ocean/coastal/Great Lake academic community, (4) the National Sea Grant Office, and (5) a NOAA representative having a good understanding of programs and priorities across NOAA line offices. One individual who will be responsible for the efficient operation of the committee should Chair the Steering Committee. This individual must have sufficient time to undertake this task and the commitment to carry it to its conclusion in 2007. The Chair may be appointed by the Director of the NSGCP, or at his discretion, voted in by the members of the Steering Committee. These five members of

the NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee will be responsible for all strategic planning tasks as recommended in this planning framework report. The Steering Committee should be provided with the services of an experienced strategic planner who will act in an advisory capacity to the Steering Committee and be charged with facilitating the refinement and implementation of the planning process. The “planner” will be responsible for carrying out the tasks as outlined in the NSGCP strategic planning framework guidance. This individual will be under the direction of the other five members of the Steering Committee and should report directly to the Steering Committee Chair. This individual may be an outside consultant or someone from the NOAA Coastal Services Center. In addition we recommend that 1-2 members of the RIT Strategic Planning Sub-Team serve on the Steering Committee as *ex-officio* members.

## **B. NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee Charge**

### **Task 1. Review Relevant NOAA, ORPP, Line Office, and other Federal Agency Plans (“Top-down synthesis”)**

The NSGCP Strategic Plan must conform to and integrate with the long-term plans and priorities articulated at the national level in several key documents. These include NOAA’s Strategic Vision (2003), the NOAA Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research Strategic Plan (2005), and most recently the ocean research priorities and implementation strategies presented in the Ocean Research Priorities Plan (2007). The NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee should be intimately familiar with these documents. In addition, while drafting the priorities for Sea Grant, the NSGCP Strategic Planning Steering Committee should also review and consider the long-term strategic plans of other federal agencies and national organizations. This will help promote coordinated overlap, mitigate against wasteful overlap, and identify gaps in priority areas. These plans include, but are not limited to: the NOAA Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management Plan; U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Final Report; An Ocean Blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (2004); Pew Oceans Commission Report; America’s Living Oceans: Charting a Course for Sea Change (2003); and relevant documents discussing ocean and coastal research and education priorities from the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Task 2. Review State Sea Grant Plans (“Bottom-up” synthesis)**

State Sea Grant programs conduct outstanding, nationally relevant programs of great importance to the NSGCP. The state Sea Grant strategic plans represent a great source of innovation and learning that is essential to the formulation of a new NSGCP Strategic Plan. Recognition that many if not most Sea Grant programs now utilize a diverse mix of funding sources to accomplish their missions is also key. A bottom up synthesis of the thematic and functional priorities of state Sea Grant plans is one of the most important background summaries needed to determine national Sea Grant priorities. This synthesis should include a summary of functional and thematic priorities as detailed in the state

strategic plans across the 32 state programs and report on common threads, dispersion, and diversity of the network's strategic programming.

Sea Grant's niche is in its connectedness to the public and such a bottom up synthesis would also be valuable to NOAA as the agency works to capture the priorities of stakeholders and to revise its priorities in the future. It is also recommended that regional syntheses of state strategic plans be conducted as well, given the new emphasis on regional planning by both Sea Grant and NOAA.

**We recommend that Tasks 1 and 2 be conducted simultaneously. The Steering Committee should determine the most efficient manner to develop these syntheses and detail both responsibilities within the committee as well as needs for additional support or collaborative input from the Sea Grant Network.**

### **Task 3. Engage Stakeholders**

The most effective programs will utilize a sound strategic planning framework that includes input advice from a broad array of stakeholders—including user, constituency, and advisory groups—throughout every level and phase of the planning process. Effective and ongoing collaboration with all stakeholders in the plan's development, approval, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation are required to ensure that the plan is based upon, and reflects priority needs at, the state, local, and/or regional level.

The Sub-Team recommends that a broad array of stakeholders be involved in the NSGCP strategic planning process, and recommends the following actions (see framework diagram).

- i.) Sharing top-down and bottom-up syntheses with stakeholders in preparation for stakeholder workshops;
- ii.) Developing a summary of stakeholder inputs that can be sent for comment electronically to many additional stakeholders in order to ensure an inclusive process and invite broad participation and include an opportunity to comment on synthesis documents, current Sea Grant efforts and draft plans, as well as invite comments from stakeholders on new and important efforts that Sea Grant does not now undertake;
- iii.) Convening stakeholder workshops in an open forum and/or focus groups to discuss results of synthesis documents, and develop thematic and functional priority areas, as well as, opening up the planning process to opportunities for possible areas of emphasis not addressed in the past; and
- iv.) Insuring that, with all the above procedures, existing formally-constituted advisory entities at the state program level (advisory boards, boards of governors, external advisory committees, etc.) are informed/represented, and are given opportunities to make meaningful input into the process (e.g., ensure "bottom-up" participation in the national process). These entities would hold greater in-depth knowledge about the mission, scope, and research/outreach efforts of state programs, which could benefit the planning process.

### **Task 4. Steering Committee to Compile Inputs**

The Steering Committee must undertake the task of compiling all information received from stakeholders without biasing the information or restating it in a way that changes the intent.

#### **Task 5. Steering Committee to Identify Focus Areas and Draft Plan**

Once the information is compiled, the Steering Committee will identify the top 3-5 thematic and functional focus areas that will shape the next Plan. It is critical in this step that the Steering Committee chooses the Focus Areas strategically. In the determination of the focus areas, the Steering Committee will provide a brief report that elaborates on the specific opportunities and niches available to Sea Grant and explains the process followed for conducting gap and risk analyses in order to identify those focus (niche) areas. When choosing the focus areas the Steering Committee will keep the following in mind: Sea Grant's strengths, societal goals articulated in the ORPP and other key documents, and needs articulated by relevant stakeholders.

#### **Task 6. Draft Plan to be Reviewed by Stakeholders and Endorsed by Management**

Once the draft Plan is developed, the Steering Committee will circulate the Plan for comment to all stakeholders who provided input. In addition, the Plan will be circulated to relevant stakeholders, including: the National Sea Grant Office, the National Sea Grant Review Panel, the state Sea Grant programs, OAR leadership, NOAA leadership, other NOAA offices (OCRM, CSC, etc.), other agencies with a complementary mission, and non-governmental organizations with a complementary mission. Comments and edits from those stakeholders will be incorporated or addressed as part of the development of the final NSGCP Strategic Plan.

#### **Task 7. Final Strategic Plan Submission**

Once the final Plan is complete, it will be submitted by the Steering Committee to the NSGCP Director for approval, acceptance, and adoption. In addition, the Plan will be submitted to OAR leadership, NOAA Goal team leadership, and NOAA Senior Management for endorsement. The NSGCP will be responsible for "publishing" the final draft and disseminating it widely. This should include a high quality printed version as well as a readily accessible electronic (pdf) version for web-based distribution.