

Formation of the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities:  
A Sea Grant Leadership Team to Determine National Priorities

Developed by the SGA Board, Program Mission (PMC), External Relations Committee  
(ERC), NSGO, and the Sea Grant Review Panel  
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Much of Sea Grant's strength lies with its local, grass roots approach. Each of the 30 participating programs addresses the needs of their communities and their associated ecosystems. Sea Grant's dedication to local service is supported by strong regional and national networks. In order to strengthen its National Network, Sea Grant must have a mechanism for regular, timely decision-making on its national priorities, and have complementary communications strategies. In this regard, it is our intention to form a **Committee on Sea Grant Priorities** to develop collaborative, national initiatives that will increase our abilities to work as a national network on strategic efforts that build upon the accomplishments of our local programs. One of the remarkable strengths of Sea Grant is that creative efforts developed in one community may be shared and modified for use in another community thousands of miles away, thereby achieving impacts on a national scale. In our vision, the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities will allow for the evolution of a more successful national Sea Grant network which will become a stronger "learning community" which will develop new and innovative partnerships and access a larger pool of resources—leading to a greater level of sharing and increased innovation.

To help develop its national priorities, the Sea Grant Network has formed ten national "theme teams" to address issues of national importance that have closely related manifestations at the state and local levels (see "Theme Teams" at <http://www.nsgo.seagrant.org>). Thematic focus areas gather the intellectual resources from throughout the national Sea Grant Network, create new mechanisms for the sharing information and ideas, and act as well-informed voices for the responsible stewardship of Sea Grant's outstanding University-based capabilities.

We recommend that we enlist our Sea Grant Network leaders and elected representatives and create a new entity, the **Committee on Sea Grant Priorities (CSGP)**. The CSGP will be entrusted to determine on a regular basis Sea Grant's national priorities by considering opportunities to partner with decision-makers and other organizations; by developing regular, inclusive processes for rapid communications with all partners in the Sea Grant Network; and by developing "marketing plans" for our specific, national initiatives.

In implementing the process that is described herein, the Sea Grant Network at large recognizes that the following concepts will provide the foundation for action by the CSGP:

- We believe that the formation of the CSGP will allow for more timely and informed turnaround decisions as a result of this priority-setting process;

however, the strategic approach and planning components described below are separate and distinct from the development of a rapid response capability;

- Primary emphasis in considering proposed initiatives will be given to developing strategic options in preference to ranking requests;
- Emphasis will be given to development of cross-theme team initiatives in those areas where there are natural affinities and/or timely opportunities for support;
- Recognizing that decisions will have to be made and priorities assigned, all ideas submitted through this process, to the maximum extent possible, will be considered intrinsically meritorious and worthy of further development, even though timing, opportunity, and funding will lead to different strategies and/or approaches; and
- The process described herein is considered an on-going experiment, subject to periodic review and refinement by the Sea Grant Network.

The Committee on Sea Grant Priorities will not trigger FACA concerns since it is not managed or controlled by the Executive Branch. In addition, since the Committee is established by a private organization, neither the Committee's agenda nor its membership is controlled by the government; in addition, the Committee will not use US government funds for its operations.

### **Processes for Determining Sea Grant Priorities**

The CSGP will be guided by some basic principles of service which will be used for selecting the priorities for the Network. These initial guidelines are “working principles” that will be added to and refined over time.

Our initial guidance to the CSGP is to choose priorities for the Sea Grant National Network that incorporate the following **Six Principles of Service**:

1. Make an impact where Sea Grant strengths and critical mass exist,
2. Are national in scope, but able to be implemented locally,
3. Are inclusive to as many Sea Grant programs as possible at the outset, and certainly over time,
4. Are able to be “franchised”, and comprise activities that can be easily and widely communicated.
5. Are developed strategically by Sea Grant, and are unique to Sea Grant, and are unlikely to be usurped by another Agency without Sea Grant engagement,
6. Are opportunistic activities, with minimal transaction costs, but are pragmatic, and do no harm to the existing Network.

In addition to incorporating these Principles of Service into the Terms of Reference for the CSGP, effective determination of Sea Grant’s programmatic priorities must always consider not only the diversity and context of the 30 partner programs, the NSGO and the NSRP, but also Sea Grant’s historic and uniquely integrated approach (e.g., are well-considered priorities that integrate research, education, outreach, legal, and program management aspects). In order to be as inclusive as possible of the 30 partner programs

of the Network, it is essential that the Committee have a strong commitment to developing and implementing transparent communications processes.

### **Terms of Reference for the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities**

***Membership*** The membership of the CSGP will reflect the tripartite structure of the Network as a whole, and will recognize the essential balance of University-based, locally relevant, place-based implementation; a federal, mission-based agency; and its FACA-authorized advisory body. The different roles and responsibilities of each component, while challenging, present great opportunities for developing substantive insights and leveraging new ideas for maximum benefit of the entire Network. The initial membership of the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities shall consist of the:

- SGA President
- SGA President-Elect
- SGA ERC Chair
- SGA PMC Chair
- Director NSGO
- Executive Director NSGO
- NSGRP Chair
- NSGRP Chair-elect
- SGA External Affairs Director (*ex officio*)

***Operations*** At its initial organizational meetings, the CSGP will determine a process for selecting a Chair and a Chair-Elect, plus work to clarify the Committee’s roles, responsibilities, and duties.

***Duties*** The initial duties of the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities shall be to:

- Make timely decisions on behalf of the Sea Grant National Network, and, to determine on a regular basis Network priorities by vetting of Theme Team and all other initiatives using the Program Priority Setting Process described below,
- Develop and refine the Program Priority Setting Process and obtain regular “buy-in” to this concept as a continual and on-going mechanism,
- Communicate regularly and inclusively in order to engage all of the entities comprising the Sea Grant Network,
- Investigate the best mechanisms to develop better advocacy and a stronger presence in Congress, NOAA, and other Agencies, and with new partners to increase the national profile of Sea Grant.

## **Program Priority Setting Process**

### **I. Identification of Priorities**

On a regular basis, and at least annually, the co-chairs of each Theme Team will be asked to identify one top priority from its priority areas. Theme Team co-chairs will be encouraged to develop cross-cutting priorities as well as within-Theme Team priorities.

- 1) Co-chairs will then develop a **Concept Letter** (2-3 pages for their top priority), which addresses the priority-setting Principles of Service (items 1-6 above) and provides:
  1. Background (justification for the issue/opportunity; potential societal/economic benefits; political/public interest in the issue)
  2. Work Plan (including research, education and outreach activities, and communications, legal and administrative structures/operations)
  3. Potential for the initiative to be funded, with possible funding sources and partners
  4. Anticipated results and outcomes
  5. Budget (including match)
  6. References and contacts
- 2) Concept Letters will be submitted to the CSGP for review, consideration, and determination of action.

### **II. Actions by the Committee on Sea Grant Priorities**

1. Receive and review Concept Letters from Theme Team co-chairs
2. Aggregate, where appropriate, Concept Letters into “Sea Grant National Initiatives”
3. Decide the most appropriate audience for funding the initiative (NOAA process; Hill; other agencies/entities)
4. Develop a communications and marketing plan
5. Communicating the Committee’s decisions with all units and organizations in the Network.