

# GUIDANCE FOR PREPARING SEA GRANT IMPACT STATEMENTS

(Reviewed April 2017)

Impact statements document the verifiable results of Sea Grant's work and how our efforts have made a difference in the lives of coastal residents, communities and environments. Impact reporting has become an increasingly important means of enhancing visibility, demonstrating accountability, generating support and building a reputation as a focused, productive and successful program. Impacts help decision makers and constituents understand how our programs are making a difference, and enable the Sea Grant network to reflect on and improve our work.

These statements are used for communication products and materials, partnership building and state and national program evaluation. Impacts are provided to national decision makers and partners, including NOAA and Department of Commerce leadership, Congress and the White House Office of Management & Budget. In addition, impacts are featured in national newsletters, national stories, social media, websites, and other communication products and materials. As of 2014, Impacts and accomplishments will be featured on the National Sea Grant website and searchable by the public.

Impacts and accomplishments are also used for the quadrennial performance review panels (PRPs). The panels found that the impact statements vary considerably in terms of relevance, detail and substance. As a result, the PRPs recommended additional guidance to help programs write stronger, more effective statements. Below, are key considerations for writing clear, cogent and succinct impact statements.

## LENGTH and PURPOSE

The statements should be brief (<250 words is the ideal length), use lay terms, and effectively describe the economic, societal and/or environmental benefits of our research, extension, education and communications work

## QUANTITY

Given that impacts may take years to realize, and that some projects will not ultimately yield impacts, programs are encouraged to submit a limited number of high quality impacts per year. Provisions have been made for programs to capture and track accomplishments (distinguished from impacts, below), enabling the reporting of outputs and outcomes that are not yet fully realized impacts. Up to five outstanding statements per focus area per program is advisable. However, there is no limit to the number of impact statements a program may submit.

## IMPACT vs. ACCOMPLISHMENT STATEMENT

**Impact statements** should effectively describe the significant economic, societal and/or environmental benefits of our research, extension, education and communications work.

**Accomplishment statements** effectively describe the key actions, activities or products resulting from Sea Grant research, extension, education and communications work. These are distinct from impact statements in that they reflect ongoing activities or key results that may not yet have had a significant economic, societal and/or environmental benefit, but that lay the foundation for such a benefit.

## UPDATES

When reporting a significant update on a previously reported impact, please note the year in which the update was realized. This will avoid the appearance that programs are reporting the same impact several years in a row.

## WRITING GUIDANCE

An impact statement should succinctly describe a program/project's **contributions** made to society. In considering this, two simple questions should be answered, "*Who cares? Or, So what?*" When writing an impact statement consider the "4 R's ...Relevance, Response, Results and Recap" (see below for details). These headings are to serve as guidelines when drafting impacts. Whether or not they are repeated in the actual text of an impact statement is up to you. The questions listed under the headings below are to help clarify the intent of each section and to provide structural guidance. There is no need to respond to every question listed.

Impacts and accomplishments need to be linked to at least one project(s) and connected to the program plan by selecting the appropriate state focus area(s) and goal(s).

STATE FOCUS AREA(S):

GOAL(S) (state program plan):

PARTNERS:

TITLE: (No more than 120 characters)

**1. RECAP** - A one sentence recapitulation that captures the essence of the preceding three points. The recap will be the first item viewable on the national website after the title, so make certain to spell out abbreviations and acronyms and state the name of your program in the recap. This should be no more than 500 characters.

**2. RELEVANCE** - Using lay terms, describe the issue or problem statement and the appropriate scale (local, state, regional, national, or international). For example, consider:

- Why did our Program conduct this effort?
- What needs were originally expressed for this work?
- What was the situation/problem, and why was it a problem?
- What aspects of your current Implementation Plan are addressed?

**3. RESPONSE** - Provide an action statement. Consider:

- What did our Program do?
- Who were the principal partners, collaborators, contributors?
- What were the key elements?
- Who was the target audience?

**4. RESULTS** Describe the impact by replying to the questions: Who cares? So what? Consider:

- What is the social, and/or economic, and/or environmental payoff of our work?
- Who benefited?
- How?
- What happened as a result of the work described?
  - What knowledge was gained?
  - What skills were increased?
  - Is the target audience doing anything differently? If so, who, what, and how?
  - How much money was saved? Is more money being made?
  - Were jobs created or retained?
  - Were policies changed as a result?
  - What were the end results (quantitative and qualitative)?
- How was information collected to verify the impacts (surveys, observation, etc.)?

- What was the scope of the impact (local, state, regional, national, or international)?

## BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

1. Write your impacts and accomplishments using the “4 Rs” format;
2. Limit your impacts and accomplishments to 250 words or less,
3. Clearly distinguish between true impacts to society, as opposed to Sea Grant outputs or activities (‘Accomplishments’),
4. Clearly define the role that Sea Grant played in the impact,
5. Create concise and descriptive titles that are no more than 120 characters,
6. Make sure your impacts and accomplishments work as stand-alone statements by including your state or program name and by writing in the third person (example: “Arizona Sea Grant developed a regional weather preparedness toolkit that resulted in 4,716 tsunami-ready communities in Sonoran Desert.” instead of “We developed a regional weather toolkit...”),
7. Define all abbreviations and acronyms, and
8. Provide data to independently authenticate and validate the stated impact.

## FEATURED IMPACTS

- Please select no more than 20 impacts to feature. You do not need to select the full 20, but you will not be able to select more than 20;
- You can un-select or select to feature an impact at any time in PIER. If you have a new impact to feature, but you have already selected 20, go in and un-select whichever you choose and then you will be able to select your new impact to feature;
- Only select impacts – not accomplishments;
- While we encourage you to select current impacts, you may select impacts from as far back as 2010;
- Please make sure to review them for typos/grammar;
- Only 120 characters of the title will be displayed. If your title is longer, it will be cut off and [...] will follow;
- Only 500 characters of the recap will be displayed. If your recap is longer it will be cut off and [...] will follow;
- In order to maximize your program’s visibility on the national website, select impacts that range across all four national focus areas as well as cross cutting areas such as Social Science, Climate, and Education. By selecting impacts from all focus areas and cross cutting goals you are optimizing the number of places where your program could be featured;
- Please enter impacts throughout the year as they happen. This will allow us to highlight the exceptional work that the Sea Grant Network is doing throughout the year. To help this process we have implemented a new procedure where program officers must make every effort to review impacts within two weeks of their entry.

\*\*Much of the information in this section has been adapted for Sea Grant purposes from several sources, notably Virginia Tech’s “Writing Effective Impact Statements: Who Cares? So What?”

<http://www.communications.cals.vt.edu/resources/impact-statements.html>

## SAMPLE IMPACTS

The following examples of well-written impact statements are provided for illustrative purposes.

### EXAMPLE 1

**TITLE:** Phones Offer Fast Data Collection and Transfer

**RECAP:** RecText was originally designed as an effective, electronic reporting method for recreational fishing data that traditionally has been difficult to collect via phone surveys. North Carolina Sea Grant (NCSG) designed a pilot project using cell phones for anglers to text fishing reports to an online database. Additional testing was funded by the N.C. Coastal Recreational Fishing License program. In 2011, Maryland state officials began gathering fisheries data through text messages, having adapted a concept developed and successfully tested by NCSG. In addition to the Maryland implementation, N.C. officials and NOAA continue to evaluate potential adaptations based on the NCSG proof-of-concept. The project continues to gain interest from news media and citizen scientist programs.

**RELEVANCE:** Recreational fishing data are often difficult to collect. Finding a method for anglers to easily submit data would augment existing survey techniques and help managers get a clearer picture about the health of important fisheries.

**RESPONSE:** With funding from an North Carolina Sea Grant (NCSG) minigrant, a fishery specialist and a programmer designed a pilot project called RecText, to test their idea. Initially, six Wilmington-area charter boat captains used cell phones to text their fishing reports to an online database using Twitter. Additional testing funded by the state's Coastal Recreational Fishing License program included offshore fishing tournaments in which the data was sent to a specially designated server.

**RESULTS:** Data collected through RecText may contribute valuable information to state and federal resource managers seeking to improve fish population assessments. System testing at several major offshore fishing tournaments attracted the attention of Maryland and federal fisheries managers, in addition to those in North Carolina. After meeting with the NCSG extension specialist about the project in 2010, Maryland state officials began offering a phone text-based reporting system for crabbers to report their catch. (MD Information: [http://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/news/story.asp?story\\_id=149](http://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/news/story.asp?story_id=149)) In addition, NOAA officials invited the NCSG extension specialist to participate on a team looking at new approaches to get reporting on recreational bluefin tuna catch. The text message process has been considered, but not yet implemented by NOAA. However, the approach was featured by the Coastal Services Center in 2011 (<http://www.csc.noaa.gov/magazine/2011/06/article4.html>).

### EXAMPLE 2

**TITLE:** Sea Grant Researcher Efforts Lead to Recovery of Native Lake Erie Watersnake Population

**RECAP:** After an intensive ten year effort, the Lake Erie Watersnake has been removed from the list of federally threatened species and an Ohio Sea Grant researcher is one of only twenty individuals in 2011 to be recognized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a National Endangered Species Recovery Champion Award winner.

**RELEVANCE:** The Lake Erie Watersnake (*Nerodia sipedon insularum*) is a unique species that is found only on and around the western basin islands of Lake Erie. Human and snake interactions too often resulted in the demise of the rare reptile. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the Lake Erie Watersnake as a federally threatened species when the population dropped to about 2,000 animals. (<http://ohioseagrant.osu.edu/documents/twinline/v33i1.pdf>)

**RESPONSE:** Using Ohio State's Stone Lab as her home base, Northern Illinois University graduate student and Ohio Sea Grant supported researcher Kristin Stanford spent three summers researching the habits of the rare snake. She

also developed an intensive outreach campaign to educate local residents and transient boaters about the need to protect the snake. The nation learned about the snake in 2006 when Stanford was featured on the Discovery Channel's "Dirty Jobs with Mike Row" program.

**RESULTS:** In 2011, the snake population rebounded to almost 12,000 individuals. Surveys say public opinion about the snake is friendlier towards the reptile and human-caused deaths are decreasing. Working with private landowners and the Lake Erie chapter of the Black Swamp Conservancy, Stanford helped to permanently protected almost 11 miles of shoreline and 300 acres of snake habitat.

### EXAMPLE 3

**TITLE:** Where schooling really counts: Oregon Sea Grant partners with Oregon Coast Community College to develop the nation's first training program for professional aquarists

**RECAP:** Oregon Sea Grant's collaboration in developing the permanent aquarium science program at Oregon Coast Community College creates new job opportunities that annually impact the economy, and fills a significant national and international need for professionally trained aquatic husbandry professionals.

**RELEVANCE:** Multiple industry surveys have indicated that there is a lack of adequately trained aquatic animal husbandry professionals for ornamental fish enterprises, public aquaria, and research laboratories using aquatic animals, and recirculating aquaculture facilities.

**RESPONSE:** Oregon Sea Grant's Aquatic Animal Health Program partnered with Oregon Coast Community College to develop a professional technical program in aquarium science. This unique, hands-on training program is the only one of its kind in the country and is designed to train entry-level professional aquarists. The program offers two options: an Associate of Applied Science in Aquarium Science; and a Certificate in Aquarium Science, for individuals possessing an undergraduate degree in the biological sciences.

**RESULTS:** Since the program's first cohort in 2003, 55 students have graduated from the program. Over 50 percent of entering students already possess an undergraduate degree in the biological sciences. Ninety-eight percent of the program's graduates have jobs in this profession within six months of graduation whose employment contributes \$1.62 million annually. The program has raised \$6.5 million from federal, state, local, and private funds, including a local bond issue. In August 2011, the program will open a standalone, state-of-the-art aquarium science teaching facility on the Oregon Coast Community College campus.

### EXAMPLE 4

**TITLE:** Water Quality Improves at Gooch's Beach, Kennebunk, Maine

**RECAP:** Maine Sea Grant efforts improved beach water quality, enhanced recreational beach use and boosted the local tourism economy.

**RELEVANCE:** Tourism is Maine's largest industry. Beach-related spending by tourists is estimated to be over \$500 million per year, supporting the employment of more than 8,000 people. High bacteria levels impair water quality, threaten public health and lead to advisories/closures of valued beaches.

**RESPONSE:** Routine monitoring of Gooch's Beach has resulted in over 40 exceedances of bacteria safety standards since the town joined the Maine Healthy Beaches (MHB) program in 2003. Maine Sea Grant (MESG)/Cooperative Extension coordinates MHB, and the program has supported studies and intensified monitoring to help pinpoint pollution sources and transport pathways affecting beach water quality. MHB and Maine Geological Survey conducted a circulation study of the Kennebunk River, which influences water quality on Gooch's Beach, and examined the relationship between bacteria and other parameters to define the "worst-case scenario" for beach

water quality. Environmental Protection Agency scientists helped locate pollution sources, and a task force of MHB, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and municipal staff surveyed 31 priority properties. A 2009 workshop then built local capacity to find, fix and prevent sources of fecal pollution that degrade beach water quality.

**RESULTS:** MHB data and technical assistance have supported the town's effort to improve the nearby stormwater drainage system, and to increase the number of properties serviced by the municipal sewer system. These and other actions taken throughout the watershed have resulted in measurable improvements in water quality.

## EXAMPLE 5

**TITLE:** Shrimp Industry Profitability Boosted by Fuel-Saving Shrimp Trawler Technology

**RECAP:** Texas Sea Grant sponsored experimental trawl gear resulted in 20-39 percent fuel savings for Texas shrimp fishermen.

**RELEVANCE:** Individual gulf shrimp trawlers consume between 50,000-80,000 gallons of diesel per year. Reducing operating expenses through reductions in fuel consumption will improve vessel profitability, thus buoying an industry that is struggling to compete with imports and high fuel prices.

**RESPONSE:** Since 2008, Texas Sea Grant specialists have been working with elite shrimp fishermen in the Gulf to evaluate new, fuel-conserving vessel-based technology for use by the shrimp fleet. Simultaneously, Texas Sea Grant is working with other Sea Grant programs to transfer these new technologies to shrimp fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regions.

**RESULTS:** Reported fuel savings range from 20 to 39 percent. For the median trawler, expected annual fuel savings amount to roughly 19,000 gallons per season. Introduction of the new trawl gear to the Texas fleet has allowed fishermen to save approximately 2.4 million gallons of fuel valued at \$5.7 million in 2010 alone. Since 2008, the Texas shrimp fleet's fuel savings were estimated to be 7.3 million gallons or \$17.7 million. An estimated 200 jobs were saved each year, since without these major fuels savings many of the boats would have remained idle.