

First Draft National Strategic Plan Q&As

The following questions were submitted to the feedback inbox prior to or asked during the webinar for the network on 07/07/2022. (Note that *comments* received to date are not included here.)

How do we distinguish between strategic and implementation plans?

The individual program plans demonstrate a diversity of styles and detail across the network, but generally you want your strategic plan to strike a balance between not being so general that a reader (such as your Site Review Team) would not have a sense of your program's purpose, direction, and ambitions, but not being so detailed that it is inflexible or that frequent changes might become necessary during the years of implementing the plan. With regard to your program's core Sea Grant funding, your omnibus narrative plays a significant role in functioning as an implementation plan for the corresponding period's strategic plan.

Should we be supplying actions along with our goals when we submit our draft strategic plans?

Make sure you are dusting off the [Guidance](#) document (pages 2-3) as you prepare to submit your draft plan to your PO by August 8. You need to indicate the National Focus Areas your program intends to support and your goals for these, but actions are not strictly required. When we get to the finalization phase and plans are uploaded to PIER, Focus Areas, Goals, and National Performance Measures are the required elements; there is the availability of an Outcomes field, but this is optional. You may wish to visit PIER and refresh your memory on this.

These elements are a floor and not a ceiling, however, and you may want to consider the benefits of having something like Actions/Objectives/Outcomes to help guide your program's course and provide more insight to your plan's readers. You may wish to visit a resource like [Digital Coast's](#) for more guidance on building a strong strategic plan.

When we submit draft strategic plans, are we required to provide an explanation of our strategic planning process, or will that be done through discussions with our POs?

Note that the [Guidance](#) indicates your draft should include an "outline of the program's planning process." However, the level of detail is not prescribed, so it is our hope that you are keeping your PO informed enough to understand the context of your plan and the decisions you have made within so as to not require extensive catch-up during the relatively short turnaround period we have planned for review and comment on your drafts.

With regard to the changes indicated in the table for Appendix B, do we switch to these metrics for our upcoming strategic plans?

Appendix B in the first draft is primarily intended as a status update. Individual program draft plans should indicate which of the existing PMMs (labeled 1-26 in the table) it intends on participating in

based on its intended activities. Most programs will be reporting on all PMMs labeled 1-26. The only time that it is appropriate for a program to not report on a PMM is if it is not working on the topic that PMM is targeting (e.g., HACCP). For instance, if the program is aligning with the Healthy Coastal Ecosystems Focus Area, accordingly it should indicate that it will be participating in PMMs #1 and #15. If the program will be engaging volunteers in its work, it should be participating in PMM #19. There is a strong presumption that all programs will be participating in all of these PMMs, with only a few exceptions. Indicating this in the first draft of program plans ensures we are on the same page.

For PMM #27 in the table and the New Required PMMs for Tracking and Reporting on IJA Marine Debris Projects (#28-35), no information is needed in the individual program first drafts. We will have programs update as new PMMs finalize and become applicable to the program.

There are a lot of PMMs for marine debris. I know this is because of the funding available, but some programs are already involved in marine debris and others are not. I'm concerned that this could hurt the programs that are just ramping up on marine debris. What happens if a program doesn't get funded in the new NOFOs?

Several points to make here:

- Number of PMMs has no direct mathematical correlation to importance or determining an individual program's priorities.
- Programs' strategic direction and the national focus areas they participate in should be driven by local stakeholder needs. Programs' participation in specific PMMs follows these choices and their resulting activities.
- Programs that have been already involved in marine debris activities and that plan to continue in 2024-2027 will also continue to report on these activities as they have been (using existing PMMs and Impact and Accomplishment statements).
- Targets for any PMM should be set taking into account program-specific circumstances (such as the scale of the program's investment in the related activity). We encourage programs to not include actual targets within their strategic plan documents specifically so they can more freely adjust them during the implementation period based on changed circumstances (such as securing a new award from a competition).
- Targets are not meant to be a competition between programs. Evaluation is a complex exercise, but it should be based on the program's specific goals and whether it was successful in meeting them. Targets are only one of the tools we use for understanding that.

Since there are so many marine debris PMMs, should marine debris be more prevalent in the focus areas?

With regard to the national plan, we always have to debate where the balance is between recognizing priorities for a particular period and not being overly specific for a strategic document that provides an umbrella for 34 individual programs meeting different local needs. Feel free to comment on this if you feel we missed the mark.

With regard to your own program's plan, see the prior answer above. Strategic direction for your programming decisions should be driven by your stakeholder needs more than whether and how many PMMs might exist related to a particular topic or activity. (However, you should also feel free to comment on whether PMMs are tracking priority network effort well, or whether additions, deletions, or tweaking would make them more appropriate.)

How are the cross-cutting principles different from the two Core Values that address partners (i.e., Collaboration) and DEIJA?

There is not an exact point where one leaves off and another picks up, but I (Kelly) think of the core values as expressing foundational characteristics that influence the approach to our work, whereas principles are concepts that we are mindful of putting into action in order to advance our priorities. There is overlap, and I think that underscores the importance of those elements.

The following text raised a few questions, "Research. The generation of new knowledge is a core part of Sea Grant, providing answers to key questions about our ocean, coasts, watersheds and Great Lakes. Research may be conducted by Sea Grant staff or through extramural research that has been reviewed for merit and that is often competitively selected." A) Related to the Percentage Research Policy: May research be conducted by SG staff and, if so, does it need to be competitively vetted to qualify as research under SG rules? For example, if a SG staff identifies a pressing research need and carries out the research, should we call this research? B) What is meant by extramural research? Is this research conducted by SG direct/cost share or also research conducted with leveraged funds?

The strategic plan use of the term "research" is used broadly and is not limited to what counts for purposes of the competitive research policy. In this vein, we recognize staff research as part of that.

Extramural research would generally refer to research not conducted by the funder. Typically we would think of this as being Sea Grant core funds, but there may be instances where a program would be administering research funds from other sources. For the purpose of describing the functional area of "research," it is not meant to be exclusionary.

Are the definitions in Appendix A final?

No, none of the text is considered final yet.

Why was the order of the Focus Areas changed in the draft plan?

The way the Focus Area leads have conceptualized it, environmental literacy underpins being able to achieve healthy coastal ecosystems and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, which in turn contribute to having resilient communities and economies. We are discussing a graphic that describes this concept to be added in the future draft. Feel free to comment on this logic. We recognize that individual programs may have reasons to present them in another order in their own plans.

SFA Goal 2 and HCE Goal 1 both seek sustainably managed resources. How will these be distinguished?

As the National Focus Areas have not substantially changed, their boundaries remain somewhat fluid. Since the majority of the National Sea Grant College Program's frontline implementation is carried out through the 34 individual programs, characterizing projects by Focus Area primarily falls to them as they craft their omnibus and build upon it with supplemental awards and leveraged activities. One program's HCE project could reasonably be another's SFA, RCE, or ELWD project, depending on the approach, objectives, program role, personnel expertise, and other factors. You may wish to consult with your PO or NSGO staff who work in these portfolios if you have questions as you make these decisions.

Our advisory group would like to make comments. How can they do so?

Anyone is welcome to send comments via email to oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov or via the virtual comment card at <https://forms.gle/pUayE3P3uxoXGLKq7>.

Will the second draft that we see in early September have graphics? Will you be accepting comments regarding photos and graphics?

We are aiming to provide graphics with the second draft. Yes, you are welcome to send any comments and suggestions regarding graphics at this time.

When is the best time to send comments regarding word choice or copy edits– now or after the second draft?

Definitely send *any* comments you have now. We hope to be able to limit changes made after the second draft is issued.