

Guidance for Developing the 2024-2027 Sea Grant Program Strategic Plans

Introduction: This guidance sets out the criteria and timeline for the development, review and approval of the Sea Grant Program Strategic Plans for 2024-2027.

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Overview and Background

Approximately every four years, the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) develops the National Sea Grant College Program Strategic Plan (the national strategic plan), and each Sea Grant program develops a program-based strategic plan, both building on past plans.

The process to develop the national strategic plan is iterative and integrative with the development of individual plans for each of the 34 Sea Grant programs. Although the focus of this guidance is on the requirements and milestones for development of individual program plans, it contains critical information on the national planning process for context and because the development processes are interdependent. The national strategic plan is intended to serve an umbrella framework to guide the direction of Sea Grant at a national level. The national process will be led by National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) staff, who will collect and review relevant information from a range of resources, including draft program plans, listening sessions, and topical experts. It will include consideration of national priorities identified in documents such as DOC, NOAA, and OAR strategic plans, NOAA's Five-Year Research Plan, the Sea Grant network visioning documents, and other relevant national plans.

The process and general timeline is outlined in this document (as well as Appendix A) and includes an Initial Engagement and Development phase, a Review phase, and a Refinement and Finalization phase for both the national strategic plan and the individual Sea Grant program plans.

Initial Engagement and Development Phase

Initial development of the national strategic plan will be based on recommendations from four focus area-based efforts led by NSGO personnel. The leads will undertake engagement with appropriate stakeholders over approximately two months, at the conclusion of which a report will be provided to the NSGO Strategic Planning Lead with recommended draft plan text. The Strategic Planning Lead will assemble these pieces into a draft for the NSGCP Director to review and approve for release for the network's review and use in ongoing individual program strategic planning.

Individual program strategic plans are expected to be developed through an inclusive stakeholder process, and during this phase, Sea Grant programs are expected to undertake the bulk of their

planned stakeholder engagement. A critical aspect of the strategic planning process is to ensure that Sea Grant is addressing the most important issues facing individual states and the nation in areas consistent with Sea Grant's legislative mandates. Ultimately, the strategic plans for individual programs are expected to align significantly with the national strategic plan, the national focus areas and national performance measures associated with those national focus areas, while providing the flexibility for programs to address state-specific priorities that might not be explicitly included in the national plan. Although the process in this cycle is concurrent at the national and program levels, it is still an iterative and integrative process, and it is intended to allow for planning and execution at all levels; local, regional, and national. The strategic plans of the individual programs guide and inform the requests for proposals (RFPs) and other research, extension, outreach and education activities. In addition, the strategic plans of individual programs are used as the basis for evaluation.

The NSGO has agreed to retain the current four national focus areas as a starting point for this national strategic plan, which are:

- Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Healthy Coastal Ecosystems
- Resilient Communities and Economies
- Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development

There will be an opportunity for the national and individual program efforts to exchange information gathered during this period before the release of the first draft national strategic plan, **targeted for late June**. Prior to this, a high-level summary of the findings of the national Initial Engagement and Development phase will be shared with the individual Sea Grant programs in **late May/early June**. We will also provide an opportunity and further guidance for programs to provide feedback from their stakeholder engagement process in the same **late May/early June** timeframe.

As stakeholder engagement progresses, modification of these national focus areas remains a possibility. For instance, the titling may be tweaked, topics currently thought to fall within a current national focus area may be teased out, and important emerging topics may be incorporated either as part of the existing national focus areas or in some other fashion. However, any changes will be proposed while keeping in mind benefits articulated regarding the current national focus areas: chiefly, that they have served the network well in capturing the breadth of work that reflects the programs' priorities as well as the NSGCP's legislative mandates.

Sea Grant programs are asked to submit an initial draft of their individual program strategic plans to their NSGO program officers by **Monday, August 8**. All Sea Grant programs are expected to advance and support some or all of the national focus areas and associated national performance measures in their strategic plan.

The programs' initial draft (in Word document format) should include the following:

- Outline of the program's planning process
- Program's Vision
- Program's Mission
- Core Values

- Cross cutting principles
- National Focus Areas and associated [performance measures and metrics](#) that the program intends to support
 - Note: Targets for national performance measures and metrics are not required with the initial draft
- Goals for each of the National Focus Areas
- At their own discretion, the Sea Grant programs may include goals and performance measures that are outside the scope of the national strategic plan and other elements, such as desired outcomes.

Review Phase

The initial draft national strategic plan will be expected for release for program review at the **end of June** and the Sea Grant programs will be provided an opportunity for feedback. Taking this input into account, a second draft national strategic plan is planned for release **prior to Sea Grant Week in September** to allow for further reflection and feedback.

The first draft of each individual program plan submitted in **August** will be reviewed by the relevant program officer. Program officers will be expected to provide their written comments to the program directors within approximately two weeks from receipt. These draft plans will also be made available to the Strategic Planning Lead and the NSGCP Director for awareness on alignment.

Refinement and Finalization Phase

The national strategic plan will undergo final review and revisions by the NSGO with the aim of completing and approving the final plan by **Friday, September 30**. The final national strategic plan will include national focus areas, goals, performance measures and metrics that each Sea Grant program is expected to align with in their respective individual strategic plans to the greatest degree appropriate. The strategic plans of each Sea Grant program are expected to include goals and performance measures and metrics that align with and support national goals and performance measures and metrics for the national focus areas. As noted above, since each Sea Grant program has a unique set of local and regional stakeholders, partners and priorities, the individual Sea Grant program strategic plans are not required to address all of the national focus areas and may include elements that fall outside of the national focus areas.

The final drafts of the individual program strategic plans are to be submitted to your NSGO program officer by **Wednesday, October 26**. The final drafts are expected to include performance measures and metrics, as well as changes responsive to the program officer's comments. The final review and approval will be completed in a timely manner with the aim of approving the individual Sea Grant program plans by **Wednesday, December 7**.

It is not necessary for the final draft to be fully formatted prior to review and approval; the plan can be submitted for review in Word format. The 2024-2027 summary (four-year) targets for the national performance measures and metrics are expected to be submitted in a separate document accompanying the final program strategic plan.

The final Sea Grant program plans are expected to include the following:

- Outline of the program's planning process
- Program's Vision
- Program's Mission
- Core Values
- Cross cutting principles
- National Focus Areas the program intends to support
- Goals for each of the National Focus Areas the program intends to support
- National performance measures and metrics that the program intends to support
 - Programs are expected to submit their national performance measure and metric targets in an Excel template to be provided by NSGO.
 - In the event a program determines that there is no state need to align to a particular national focus area and/or performance measure, the program is expected to provide a brief justification to their program officer.
- At their own discretion, the Sea Grant programs may include goals and performance measures that are outside the scope of the national strategic plan and other elements, such as desired outcomes. (Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation Resources (PIER) will continue to provide a platform to track additional performance measures.)

Each individual Sea Grant program strategic plan will be reviewed by your program officer to ensure the plan includes the elements listed above and that it:

- Aligns clearly with the national strategic plan where appropriate, supporting national focus areas and associated performance measures.
- Is forward looking.
- Builds off of the current Sea Grant program strategic plan.

Program officers will submit their recommendation to the NSGCP Director regarding approval of the Sea Grant program strategic plan. The NSGCP Director will provide final approval of each plan. Instructions will be provided for plan upload into PIER and posting on the national website.

Keep in mind that the Sea Grant program strategic plans are living documents; programs may make changes to their plans to address significant emerging or unexpected issues that occur during the implementation period (e.g., major storm events, oil spills, pandemics). Changes should not be routine and must be approved by the NSGCP Director with input from the program officer.

After Planning: Evaluation and Reporting

Sea Grant's program evaluation and annual reporting processes are designed to promote the greatest benefit for the federal and state investment. Sea Grant programs are required to report on national performance measures. The National Sea Grant website contains more resources on evaluation and reporting requirements and will be revised and updated through time. Information concerning the evaluation and reporting processes can be found [here](#).

Note: *In the event of an unforeseen event and/or obstacle preventing a program from meeting the deadlines stated above, the program director should contact their program officer in writing outlining the challenges and provide a plan of action for completing the plan in a timely manner. In each case the cause and plan of action will require the NSGCP Director's review and approval.*

If you have any questions about the 2024-2027 strategic planning process, please contact your program officer and/or oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov (for best results, please indicate in the subject line that your email concerns strategic planning).

Appendix A

The milestones described above are summarized in the timeline below. Deadlines are aspirational and subject to slight shifts as the planning effort matures. Additionally, programs should refer to the note above in case they need special accommodation at some point along the way.

February 2022

- NSGO releases strategic plan guidance

March 2022

- NSGO hosts network webinar

May 2022

- Late May/early June:
 - NSGO shares summary from national Initial Engagement and Development phase
 - Programs share feedback from their stakeholder engagement process; and continue to engage with program officers on the status of plans, etc. through June and July

June 2022

- Late June: NSGO releases first draft National Strategic Plan

July 2022

- Programs provide feedback on first draft National Strategic Plan

August 2022

- Monday, August 8th: Programs submit initial draft strategic plans to program officers
 - Within approximately two weeks subsequent: Program officers provide feedback on draft program strategic plans
- Late August/early September: NSGO releases second draft National Strategic Plan

September 2022

- Programs provide feedback on second draft National Strategic Plan
- Sunday, September 11-Thursday, September 15: Sea Grant Week
- Friday, September 30: NSGO releases final National Strategic Plan

October 2022

- Wednesday, October 26: Programs submit final draft strategic plans to program officers

December 2022

- Wednesday, December 7: NSGO target for program strategic plan approval by NSGCP Director. (Guidance will be provided in advance for plan formatting as well as PIER upload.)

January 2023

- NSGO and programs finalize website posting and PIER updates