

## 2021 PIER-Related Business Rule Updates

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. What are the upcoming changes to PIER for 2021?

There are several overarching changes to requirements and workflow that are inherently tied to PIER, but not necessarily the software itself. These changes may have independent origins, but are all tied to one another as you will read from the following Q/As. Below is a shortlist of changes:

- The 90-2 form will be modified from an Excel-based form to a webform and implemented for awards starting with the 2022-2023 omnibus.
- With the 2022-2023 omnibus and all awards thereafter, the 90-2 form will no longer be a requirement for a Grants.gov application submission. The form will still be a requirement of any awarded application.
- PIER project records have typically described a program's overarching omnibus extension and education efforts and will now be required to describe work at the project-level resolution to the best of a program's ability.
- The NSGO is reviewing potential options to clarify RPPR guidance and create efficiencies between the RPPR and annual reports into PIER. These activities have already begun and will continue to mature throughout 2021 and beyond.
- The Department of Commerce has identified a new grants management system that is planned for implementation in 2023. This will affect the possible mechanisms and timing to streamline the NSGCP's reporting requirements.

*For any questions or comments, please email [oar.sg.info-admin@noaa.gov](mailto:oar.sg.info-admin@noaa.gov)*

### The 90-2 Form

#### 2. What are the upcoming changes to the 90-2 form?

The NSGO is updating the 90-2 Project Summary Form, from an Excel version, to an online webform that is integrated with PIER. The information requested in the 90-2 form is not changing significantly, although several fields are being slightly restructured (see Question 5). Because of the need to maintain flexibility in preparing and submitting a web-based form, the 90-2 form will no longer be required at the time of application submission to Grants.gov. Instead, the 90-2 form will be requested to be submitted within 45-days after the applicant has been notified via email that their application has been recommended for funding and forwarded to NOAA's Grants Management Division.

#### 3. When will the 90-2 Webform be implemented?

Programs will be required to use the 90-2 webform for their 2022-2023 omnibus application, and all awarded applications thereafter. Given the decoupling from Grants.gov application, programs will be allowed to submit the 90-2 webform following the application deadline of

October 27th, 2021. We are projecting to go live for submittal by approximately October 29th. After this time, 90-2 forms will also be able to be submitted at the time of future applications, if programs would like to submit earlier than the deadline (but again, not through Grants.gov). Several opportunities for network feedback and dissemination will be provided this spring/summer (see Question 6). Guidance on the overall process will be “finalized” in early September, acknowledging that debugging should be anticipated with a new software roll-out.

#### **4. How will the Webform be accessed and submitted?**

The 90-2 form will be accessed from a web portal that is decoupled from PIER user accounts. This approach allows a range of users to submit a 90-2 form, without a PIER login. To comply with NOAA security requirements, access to the web portal must be “pre-approved.” Pre-approval will be given to all PIER users or user access can be requested via [oar.sg.admin@noaa.gov](mailto:oar.sg.admin@noaa.gov).

Email addresses will serve as the log-in for the webform portal. Users will have the capability to save and complete multiple 90-2 forms. If multiple-users want to access the same 90-2 form, a shared email account is suggested. When complete, the form will be submitted directly to PIER’s database and will be validated by your federal program officer for budget accuracy and accounting details.

The NSGO acknowledges potential disruption in a program’s workflow in preparation and review of a 90-2 form, if initiated by an external PI. To mitigate this issue, the NSGO will be glad to consult and prepare any materials that could be useful (see Question 5).

#### **5. Are there any changes between the Excel form and the webform?**

The information requested in the 90-2 form is not changing significantly, although several fields are being slightly restructured:

- Classification codes will be reduced to improve their utility in network communication and analysis. A requirement of the classification codes is that they align across all functional areas. The SG Network will be consulted on the revised set of codes and their definitions.
- With the reduction of classification codes, several, more granular topics/initiatives will be eliminated that are still necessary to track due to administrative communication and planning (NOAA, OAR, Sea Grant authorization, and/or related Congressional Acts). Therefore, another short list of subject areas will be tracked and will exist in a similar manner as classification codes (e.g., ocean acidification, invasive species, harmful algal blooms). SG Network consultation performed with the classification codes will inform these subject areas (i.e., “administrative priorities”).

- Partner(s) and Affiliation data fields (and any other PIER data that utilizes Program Partners and the underlying database) will have a 3-tiered hierarchy. The three-tier hierarchy is to match the format of other standard grant forms and to increase the utility of Sea Grant's immense partnership and stakeholder data. Existing Partner and Affiliation records, for which there are over 18,000, suffer from limited quality control and hide organizational connections at multiple levels of resolution. "Actively" used Program Partners (current strategic plan; 2018-present) are being reformatted for immediate integration with this revised structure. Programs should expect improved look-up functionality and data quality.
- The abstract components (objective, methodology, rationale) of a PIER project record and data sharing plan (required for research projects) will now receive a character limit. This will be enforced by the webform at each component entry field (e.g., objective). To create a simplified set of guidance and pursue a moderate improvement to excessive length, a 150 word count limit is recommended for the objectives, methodology, and rationale 90-2 component, as well as a 150 word count limit for the data sharing plan. Using a 7 character per word ratio (based on existing PIER records) imposes a 1050 character limit for each field. Please recognize that longer objectives, methodology, rationale, and data sharing plan in a project narrative can still exist for competitive review purposes - it would just require condensing before submission through the webform. **Following Network Feedback, this change will be reviewed and poised for implementation with the 2024 Omnibus. There will be no limit to the Abstract's word or character limit.**

## 6. Will the Sea Grant Network have opportunities to provide feedback?

Yes. The NSGO is very interested in dissemination, feedback, and consultation with the described changes. Considering the multiple threads of change and the NSGO's desire to not overwhelm programs, consolidated engagement and feedback opportunities are being considered with the following schedule (subject to changes in the realm +/- week(s)):

- **Early April:** Small group feedback on webform (NSGO and participants from SGA's Networks Advisory Committee) (completed)
- **Early June:** Several targeted listening sessions conducted by the NSGO with the following goals:
  - Showcase webform and draft guidance/instructions for feedback through verbal discussion and written comments.
  - Disseminate classification codes and administrative priorities for feedback through written comments.
  - Disseminate Guidance for Resolving Extension and Education Project Records for feedback through written comments.
- **Week of July 12:** Webform will be briefly active on PIER for network-wide user testing.
- **September:** We may have opportunities to allow early 90-2 webform use for omnibus submissions for debugging purposes. If and when available, program officers will coordinate with 1-2 programs that are prepared and interested.
- **October 29:** Go live with 90-2 webform.

## **Resolving Extension/Education Project Records in PIER**

### **7. Why is the NSGO requesting increased resolution of the network's extension and education activities?**

The NSGO is extremely limited in its ability to effectively communicate the details of its extension and education investments and efforts in real time when requested by entities in the legislative and executive branches. For FY19, approximately \$11M in extension investments could not be clearly articulated. This hinders the National Sea Grant College Program's ability to address questions of implementation (e.g., funding and/or scope of work) and/or maximize the program's participation in strategic discussions and planning and messaging around national coastal issues and organizational impacts.

### **8. Will the Sea Grant Network have opportunities to provide feedback?**

Yes. The NSGO plans to gather targeted feedback from several programs (7-8) to represent many different strategies for extension and education planning. One on one engagement is anticipated to begin at the start of May, which will inform draft guidance to be disseminated as soon as possible, ideally, before the spring/summer listening sessions. Guidance will be finalized after listening session feedback and we anticipate sharing in July.

### **9. What are the major requirements for resolving the overarching omnibus extension and education efforts.**

While these requirements may be fine-tuned, programs will be requested, to the best of their ability, to provide project-level resolution of their overarching omnibus extension and education efforts with the following guidance:

- **Resolution** - The NSGO believes each program is most adept at defining or framing their cumulative efforts or activities into a "project," so there are no quantitative thresholds for triggering a project. **It will not be required to fully resolve all extension and education funding, as portions of these funds are dedicated to general coordination and broader program activities.**
- **Information Collection** - Programs will complete a 90-2 form with the same level of required information as all other PIER projects, so that communication and analysis can be adequately conducted. Project budgets can report estimated federal funding (with or without match), or if programs fund extension activities predominantly through match funds, then match should be reported instead. **Match is only required for an overarching omnibus extension and education PIER project record.**
- **Submission and Timing** - There is no submission deadline for resolving extension and education projects. Programs are encouraged to continue submitting projects as they are identified over the omnibus grant period.