Site Review Visit Guidance
for the
National Sea Grant College Program

Addressing the Policy, Implementation, and Evaluation Process

(2018 – 2023 Cycle)

Preface

Changes to Site Review Visit Guidance
Site review visits play a central role in evaluation of Sea Grant programs and it is important to reflect on these to consider whether changes are needed for the future.

In 2020, the National Sea Grant Advisory Board (Advisory Board) Evaluation Committee (EC) conducted a thorough review of the previous site review visit process and provided feedback to the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO). To assist the Advisory Board with this analysis, they solicited comments from the main participants in the latest round of site review visits, including site review team (SRT) members, Sea Grant directors, NSGO Federal Program Officers, and Advisory Board members.

The overall conclusion was that the process has matured to a high state of excellence. While a considerable effort is required by the individuals involved, the process has matured, generates an impressive amount of useful information, and thus is beneficial, useful, and informative for the entire Sea Grant community and its various constituents. Nevertheless, as with any human endeavor, certain opportunities for improvement had been revealed. The NSGO has taken feedback and recommendations provided by the Advisory Board EC and has incorporated those into this Site Review Visit Guidance document. In addition, the NSGO will continue to work with others to determine further opportunities for continuous improvement and additional incorporation of administrative excellence in future site review processes.

Below are highlighted topics that are incorporated as updates and/or clarifications in this guidance document or into the planning and implementation of site review visits:
- Further training to be provided to SRT members, NSGO staff, and Sea Grant program staff to assure further coherence and execution consistency of the site review visit process.
- Changes to the format of the site review visits and the written materials provided for the reviews including, 1) time limits for each days' activities, 2) time for writing the report built into the agenda, 3) Sea Grant directors participating on SRTs are non-voting members, 4) avoiding the use of absolute statements in the site review reports, 5) updated structure and length of the PIER report, 6) agenda, PIER report, and briefing book tied together and pointing to one another to address review criteria, and 7) suggested new format for the focus area oral presentations.
- Clarification of the roles of the chair, co-chair, and the Sea Grant directors who participate as SRT members.
- Clarification of inclusion of the impacts of legacy work.
- Clarification of evaluation questions used for determining *Standards of Excellence.*
- Clarification for reviewing Sea Grant competitive research.
- Clarification of performance ratings measuring progress towards a particular focus area.

Overview

The National Sea Grant College Program's (Sea Grant) Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation (PIE) policy for the 2018-2023 cycle[1] provides the processes to address both statutory and regulatory requirements for strategic planning, program implementation, and evaluation of Sea Grant, including individual Sea Grant programs[2] and the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO). Evaluation for each Sea Grant program includes annual reporting reviews, a mid-cycle review, and a full cycle review. The full cycle evaluation consists of a site review visit for each Sea Grant program, an external evaluation, and an NSGO Review. The evaluation system supports continual feedback, advancement and improvement for Sea Grant, and determination of recertification and merit fund eligibility for each Sea Grant program. This document provides guidance particular to the site review visits for individual Sea Grant programs.

Summary of Evaluation Components

The evaluation components begin with annual reporting of progress through program Annual Reports and a mid-cycle NSGO Review. Information provided in Annual Reports serves as a basis for messaging impact and evaluation, including the site review visit. See the Sea Grant PIE policy for more details.

A site review visit is conducted once every four years (six years for the current cycle) to ensure each program meets the *Standards of Excellence* and includes an assessment of progress in relation to the individual Sea Grant program's strategic plan. Sections I-X of this document provide a more detailed look at what a site review visit entails.

After all site review visits have been completed, the Advisory Board will conduct an external evaluation. The Advisory Board will convene an Evaluation Committee (Advisory Board EC) to ensure that the programs' site review visits were conducted in a consistent and equitable manner.

A full cycle NSGO Review will serve as a complete program evaluation review that is based on the: (a) site review report and ratings that have been approved by the Advisory Board, (b) the Sea Grant program director's responses to the site review team (SRT) recommendations, and (c) review by the Advisory Board EC. Following the full cycle NSGO Review, the National Sea Grant College Program Director will determine whether or not each Sea Grant program meets the *Standards of Excellence* and thus, if programs are: 1) recertified; and 2) eligible for merit funding. Once a program has been determined to meet the Sea Grant *Standards of Excellence* per Sea Grants Federal Regulations (15 CFR 918.3 and 918.5) (Appendix A), the program will be recertified for the next Omnibus cycle.

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[1] The standard cycle is four years, with 2018-2023 being a temporary shift to six years.
[2] Sea Grant College Programs, Sea Grant Institutional Programs, Sea Grant Coherent Area Programs, and the National Sea Grant Law Center are collectively referred to as "Sea Grant programs" throughout this document.

Programs that meet the *Standards of Excellence* are then eligible for merit funding. The *relative* amount of merit funding a program may receive is determined by their overall site review visit rating and the size of the merit pool. The *actual* merit funding amount depends on the size of the merit pool.

Finally, in a parallel but separate process, the Advisory Board will convene an Independent Review Panel (IRP)[3] that uses the findings of the site review visits and additional information from the NSGO to evaluate the effectiveness of the NSGO and the Sea Grant overall.

A timeline for the site review visits, the external evaluation, and the full cycle NSGO Review is found in Appendix B.

The sections below describe in detail the site review visit goals and process, the roles, responsibilities, and composition of the SRT, and the evaluation criteria and materials used during the site review visit.

I.   Evaluation Process

The site review visit is the only in-person, on-site comprehensive program review. It gives the Federal Program Officer (FPO), members of the Advisory Board, and other reviewers the opportunity to meet with the Sea Grant program management and staff, the program's advisory board members, constituents, and university officials. This evaluation looks at the integrated impact of each Sea Grant program towards its strategic plan and assesses each program in meeting the Sea Grant *Standards of Excellence* (Appendix A).

Purpose

The primary purpose of the site review visit is to help the NSGO determine whether the Sea Grant programs are meeting the legislative and statutory drivers for being part of the National Sea Grant College Program for program determination of recertification and merit funding (US Code 2020 Title 33 Chapter 22; Code of Federal Regulations - 917; Code of Federal Regulations - 918)

Goals

Sea Grant's evaluation processes are designed to ensure the greatest benefit for the federal and state/local investments, determine performance and progress, support continued advancements and improvements and meet mandates. In addition, the goals of annual reporting are to provide data on a routine basis to support evaluation.

Process

A process timeline for planning, conducting site review visits, the Advisory Board EC external evaluation, and the full cycle NSGO Review is found in Appendix B.

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[3] For more information on the IRP please refer to the PIE Policy.

All programs are evaluated to the extent possible in a similar manner and against common metric benchmarks and national performance measures. The SRT uses the site review materials and feedback during the site review visit to determine if the program meets the *Standards of Excellence* (see bullets below and information in section VI and Appendix A).

- Program Management and Organization (organization, programmed team approach, and support)
- Engagement (relevance, advisory services, and education and training)
- Collaborative Network Activities (relationships and collaboration)
- Performance (leadership and productivity)

The second element of the review is to determine performance ratings based on the evaluation of the program's progress towards national focus areas identified within its strategic plan and in the context of the program funding levels. During this review, common national performance measures and metrics, as well as impacts and accomplishments will be assessed. The national focus areas may include the following:

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

At the conclusion of each site review visit, the SRT produces a report (see section VIII).

II.   Site Review Team Composition

Each SRT is composed of the following members: A Chair from the NSGO, a co-Chair who is a member of the Advisory Board, a Sea Grant director from outside of the currently evaluated program, and three external non-Sea Grant members.

External non-Sea Grant members are ideally from the program's region (as long as there are no conflicts of interest) and may include:

- Leaders of city/county, state, and federal resource agencies and programs (including NOAA)
- Representatives of appropriate commercial and industry entities
- Directors of institutes, centers, and laboratories
- Senior officials of other academic institutions from the program being evaluated
- Directors of cooperative extension programs or experiment stations
- Other or former Advisory Board members
- Recognized practitioners in appropriate fields (research, extension, education, communications, etc.)

The Chair, co-Chair, and Sea Grant program director positions on the SRTs are selected by the NSGO Director and the NSGO Evaluation Lead in consultation with the Chair of the Advisory Board EC. The latter will send a survey seeking availability for scheduling purposes.

The SRT Chair and co-Chair will select the external members of the SRT. Prior to inviting the proposed external members to be part of the SRT, the list of potential external members will be reviewed by the Sea Grant program under review for conflicts of interest.

The site review visit may also include non-participating observers (such as other NSGO or Sea Grant program staff, etc.) at the discretion of the director of the Sea Grant program under review.

SRT Chair
The Federal Program Officer (FPO) for the Sea Grant program being reviewed, or their designee, chairs the SRT. The duties and responsibilities of the SRT Chair are as follows:
- The Chair is a non-voting reviewer who facilitates the SRT; serves as the primary spokesman, communicating on the SRT's behalf to the Sea Grant program, NSGO, university officials of Sea Grant institutions, constituent organizations, and the general public.
- Work with the SRT co-Chair (Advisory Board member) to select and recruit other SRT members.
- Work with the SRT co-Chair and the director of the Sea Grant program being reviewed to plan the site review visit with:
    - Assisting the Sea Grant program in formulating an agenda; and
    - Approving the public notice of the site review visit.
- Act as the Designated Federal Officer (DFO), ensuring that the review process conforms to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and this guidance, briefing the SRT concerning the expected conduct of the visit, and facilitating the conduct of the SRT during the review.
- Coordinate with the SRT co-Chair in drafting findings, suggestions, and recommendations during the site review visit with the SRT.
- Coordinate with the SRT co-Chair to conduct the exit interview with the program director and appropriate university officials.
    - Brief out findings, suggestions, and recommendations
    - Answer any questions
- Coordinate with the SRT co-Chair to complete the site review report with the SRT and issue the final draft report within 45 calendar days of the review to the program director.

SRT Co-Chair
An Advisory Board member will be appointed as the SRT co-Chair. No Advisory Board member who serves on a Sea Grant program's advisory board or steering committee may be involved in

that program's SRT. The duties and responsibilities of the SRT co-Chair are to:
- Serve as a voting reviewer work with the SRT Chair to select and recruit SRT members
- Work with the SRT Chair and the Sea Grant program director to plan the site review visit
- Coordinate with the SRT Chair in drafting findings, suggestions, and recommendations during the site review visit with the SRT
- Coordinate with the SRT Chair to conduct the exit interview with the program director and appropriate university officials
  - Brief out findings, suggestions, and recommendations
  - Answer any questions
- Coordinate with the SRT Chair to complete the draft site review report with the SRT within 45 calendar days

III.   Public Notice of the Site Review Visit

A minimum of 30 calendar days prior to the site review visit, the Sea Grant program director shall issue a public notice that the program will be visited by an SRT convened by the director of the National Sea Grant College Program on [X dates]. The notice invites any person to email comments on the program at least one week (ideally more) before the site review visit date to oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov. The notice will be sent to relevant partners and constituents, placed on the home page of the program's website, and included in relevant email newsletters, announcements, and/or constituents lists. An example of a public notice can be found in Appendix C.

IV.   Schedule

The site review visit is designed to be conducted over three days. The first two days (Tuesday and Wednesday) should be dedicated to discussing content, and the third day (Thursday) on drafting report findings and briefing the program management team and appropriate university officials. Appendix D contains a logistics planning schedule that may assist in planning site review visits. More information on agenda development can be found in Appendix E.

V.   Site Review Visit Materials

The Chair, co-Chair, and the program under review are responsible for creating the materials used during the site review visit and are expected to use Appendix E as guidance for preparing and organizing materials for use during the site review visit.

At least one month prior to the site review visit, the materials the program under review creates will be sent to the SRT Chair and co-Chair. The SRT Chair will collect and then distribute this information to the rest of the SRT reviewers. For more information on the timing of development and release of the materials, please refer to Appendix D.

VI.   Site Review Visit Criteria

The SRT will be required to provide two levels of evaluation; to determine if the program has 'met' the *Standards of Excellence* (found in Appendix A), and provide a performance rating for each national focus area identified in the program strategic plan and in the context of the program funded levels. More information about the criteria used in the site review visit can be found below (and in Appendix F).

Standards of Excellence

According to the Federal Regulations on eligibility, qualifications, and responsibility of the National Sea Grant College Program (see Appendix A), a Sea Grant program must meet the criteria encompassed by these categories. The site review visits will focus on the four broad categories in the *Standards of Excellence*:

- Program Management and Organization (organization, programmed team approach, and support)
- Engagement (relevance, advisory services, and education and training)
- Collaborative Network Activities (relationships and collaboration)
- Performance (leadership and productivity)

Performance Ratings

The SRT is also responsible for providing a rating for each relevant national focus area (identified in the individual Sea Grant program strategic plan and in the context of the program funded levels). The SRT uses the following rating scale:

- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)
- Performance below that expected in <u>some</u> areas/aspects (4)
- Performance below that expected in <u>most</u> areas/aspects (5)

At the end of the site review visit, SRTs draft preliminary information on the above will be shared during the exit interview and captured in the draft site review report.

VII.   Exit Interview

Prior to leaving the site review visit, the SRT conducts an exit interview with the program director and appropriate university officials to summarize the preliminary findings, recommendations, suggestions, and performance ratings for each national focus area the program participates in. If there is enough time, the SRT may choose first to brief the program director and other staff members, and then brief the university officials.

VIII. Site Review Report

Within 45 calendar days after the site review visit, the SRT will produce a final report draft determining if the program meets the *Standards of Excellence*. The report will describe findings and make recommendations and suggestions to advance the Sea Grant program's management and organization, engagement, networking activities, and performance, and provide numerical ratings based on performance of the program's national focus areas. The site review report will also highlight best management practices.

The site review report must state whether the Sea Grant program meets the *Standards of Excellence* (based on the Sea Grant Federal Regulations, see Appendix A) and ratings per relevant national focus area. The initial draft report, written on-site and before the end of the visit, will be used during the exit interview and form the basis for the site review report. An outline of what is included in a site review report is located in Appendix G.

The final draft of the report, completed by the SRT, will include a fact check with the director of the Sea Grant program. Once a fact check is complete, the SRT Chair will send the final draft report to the National Sea Grant College Program Director and the program director within 45 calendar days of the review. For more information on the timing of these milestones refer to Appendix D.

IX. Program Response

Within 15 calendar days of receiving its site review report, the program must respond to all recommendations via written response to the National Sea Grant College Program Director. The response should explain how the program has already implemented, intends to implement, or declines to implement each recommendation. The Sea Grant program is not required to respond to suggestions, but program leadership is encouraged to consider implementing those deemed useful and appropriate. For more information, refer to Appendix D.

X. After the Site Review Visit

External Evaluation

Per the PIE policy, after site review visits are complete, the Advisory Board EC will provide an external review of all the site review visit reports and responses from the Sea Grant program directors to ensure that all site review visits were conducted in a consistent and equitable manner. The Advisory Board EC will also make recommendations for recertification of the Sea Grant programs. This information will be provided during a public Advisory Board meeting. Once approved by the Advisory Board, it will be provided to the National Sea Grant College Program's Director in advance of the full cycle NSGO Review.

Full Cycle NSGO Review

The evaluation process wraps up with a full cycle NSGO Review, which includes a complete program evaluation based on: (a) SRT reports and ratings, (b) the Sea Grant program director's responses to the SRT recommendations, and (c) the Advisory Board EC recommendations. At the conclusion, the National Sea Grant College Program Director will make the final determination on whether or not a Sea Grant program meets the *Standards of Excellence* and thus if a program is: 1) recertified and 2) eligible for merit funding, including the determination of final merit score. The National Sea Grant College Program Director will require a program that doesn't meet the *Standards of Excellence* or if the program's performance rates poorly, to submit a corrective action plan for a particular area that is not meeting standards.

The National Sea Grant College Program Director will submit to each Sea Grant program a final evaluation and recommendation letter that summarizes the site review visit and the full cycle NSGO Review. The letter will include recertification status and whether the program is eligible for merit funding. If the program is eligible for merit funding, the letter will include an overall merit score and the projected amount of merit funding the program will receive over the next four-year cycle pending annual appropriations.

More information on recertification of and allocation of merit funding can be found in Appendix H (and taken from the [Sea Grant PIE policy](#)).

Appendix A: Sea Grant Program *Standards of Excellence*

This section lists the *Standards of Excellence* that are expected of every Sea Grant program. This information can also be found in [Sea Grants Federal Regulations (15 CFR 918)](#). The site review teams are responsible for reviewing all qualifying areas plus "collaboration" (collaboration was added based on the 2006 National Research Council Report, Evaluation of the Sea Grant Review Process). The Federal Regulations state that Sea Grant programs "must rate highly in all of the following qualifying areas." Further information on how the SRT evaluates these standards provided in Appendix F.

Site Review Criteria
- **Program Management and Organization**
  - **Organization.** Must have created the management organization to carry on a viable and productive Sea Grant program and must have the backing of its administration at a sufficiently high level to fulfill its multidisciplinary and multifaceted mandate.
  - **Programmed team approach.** Must have a programmed team approach to the solution of ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes problems which includes relevant, high-quality, multidisciplinary research with associated educational and advisory services capable of producing identifiable results.
  - **Support.** Must have the ability to obtain matching funds from non-Federal sources, such as state legislatures, university management, state agencies, business, and industry. A diversity of non-federal matching fund sources is encouraged as a sign of program vitality and the ability to meet the Sea Grant requirement that funds for the general programs be matched with at least one non-Federal dollar for every two Federal dollars.

- **Engagement**
  - **Relevance.** Must be relevant to local, state, regional, or national opportunities and problems in the ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes environment. Important factors in evaluating relevance are the need for ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes resource emphasis and the extent to which capabilities have been developed to be responsive to that need.
  - **Extension/Advisory services.** Must have a strong program through which information, techniques, and research results from any reliable source, domestic or international, may be communicated to and utilized by user communities. In addition to the educational and information dissemination role, the advisory service program

- ○ must aid in identifying and communicating user communities' research and educational needs.
  - ○ **Education and training.** Must be clearly relevant to national, regional, state, and local needs in fields related to ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes resources. As appropriate, education may include pre-college, college, post-graduate, public and adult levels.

- ● **Collaborative Network Activities**
  - ○ **Relationships.** Must have close ties with Federal agencies, State agencies and administrations, local authorities, business and industry, and other educational institutions. These ties are to: (i) ensure the relevance of its programs, (ii) give assistance to the broadest possible audience, (iii) involve a broad pool of talent in providing this assistance (including universities and other administrative entities outside the Sea Grant program), and (iv) assist others in developing research and management competence. The extent and quality of an institution's relationships are critical factors in evaluating the institutional program.
  - ○ **Collaboration.** Must provide leadership in ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes activities, including coordinated planning and cooperative work with local, state, regional, and Federal agencies, other Sea Grant programs, and non-Sea Grant universities.

- ● **Performance**
  - ○ **Leadership.** Must have achieved recognition as an intellectual and practical leader in marine science, engineering, education, and advisory service in its state and region.
  - ○ **Productivity.** Must have demonstrated a degree of productivity (of research results, reports, employed students, service to State agencies and industry, etc.) commensurate with the length of its Sea Grant operations and the level of funding under which it has worked.

Appendix B: Site Review Visit Timeline

Tentative Timeline of Activities for the 2018-2023 Site Review Visits	Calendar Year																											
	2023				2024												2025											
	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Board Fall Meeting standing up the Evaluation Committee	■																											
Site Visit Webinar Provided by the NSGO		■	■																									
Sea Grant Program Site Visits Scheduled				■	■																							
Selection of directors and Board members on SRTs				■	■																							
Board Spring Meeting Presentation							■																					
Programs Prepare for Site Visits									■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■							
Site Visits Conducted at Programs														■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						
SRT Chair Send Final Draft Site Review Report to Program															■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
Program Responses to Site Review Reports																■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
Evaluation Committee Convene																									■			
Board Meeting																										■		
Full Cycle NSGO Review																											■	
Letters to Programs																												■
Site Visit information available to Board biennial report to Congress																												■

Appendix C: Public Notice Example

A minimum of 30 days prior to the site review visit, the Sea Grant program under review shall issue a public notice that the program will be visited by an SRT convened by the National Sea Grant College Program Director on [X dates].

The notice invites any person to email comments on the program at least one week (ideally more) before the site review visit date to oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov. The notice will be sent to relevant partners and constituents, placed on the home page of the program's website, and included in relevant email newsletters or announcements, and/or constituent lists.

An example of a public notice is below.

_____*Public Notice Example*_____

Public comments sought for XX Sea Grant Review

Deadline is [*Month/Day/Year - at least one week (ideally more) before the Site Review Visit date*]

XX Sea Grant will be reviewed on [*Site Review Visit dates*] by a team convened by the National Sea Grant College Program. The review will be conducted at XX location and will consider all aspects of XXSG's program including management and organization, performance, engagement, and collaborative activities, including those with various offices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

This notice invites you to participate in our review by emailing your comments about XXSG to oar.sg-feedback@noaa.gov.

Kindly send your comments at your earliest convenience--the comment period will end on [*see above*]. Please put "XX Sea Grant site review" in the email subject line.

Thank you for assisting us by letting the review team hear from you!

Appendix D: Site Review Visits Logistics Planning Schedule

The logistics planning schedule below provides overall information for programs and detailed information for SRTs to prepare for the site review visit. Please keep in mind that site review visits may have specialized needs and this checklist was created to assist SRT Chair, co-Chair, and Sea Grant programs in planning. Please alter the timeline to fit your individualized site review visit needs, as appropriate. If you have any questions regarding the topics below, please refer to the corresponding sections in the guidance for more information.

Before the Site Review Visit

High-Level Planning: 7-8 Months Ahead of Site Review Visit
- NSGO will work with the Advisory Board EC Chair to (see section II):
  - Solicit NSGO staff, Sea Grant directors, and Advisory Board Members' availability for site review visits,
  - Select SRT Chairs, co-Chairs, and Sea Grant program directors SRT membership,
  - Schedule site review visits, and
  - Provide a webinar about site review visits.

Around 3-5+ Months Ahead of Site Review Visit
- SRT Chair and co-Chair coordinate with the Sea Grant program being reviewed.
- SRT Chair and co-Chair select and recruit other SRT reviewers (see section II):
  - Work with SRT members to begin scheduling travel and lodging.
  - Provide information for reviewers to contact NSGO to make flight reservations.
  - The NSGO will provide a budget code for expenses to the reviewer's office.
- The Sea Grant program will work with the SRT Chair to create a site review visit agenda (see Section V and Appendix E).
- The Sea Grant Program should begin to create a briefing book (no longer than 25 pages) (see Section V and Appendix E).

Around 2+ months before Site Review Visit:
- The SRT Chair, in coordination with the co-Chair, will hold a conference call with all SRT members. Suggested topics to cover during the call include:
  - Introductions
  - Site Review Visit Overview
    - Can use the PowerPoint presentation provided by the NSGO.
    - Provide background on the site review visit (purpose/goals and member roles/responsibilities).
    - Discuss the type of information that members will be reviewing (SRT members must understand what they are doing and their role prior to the start of the review.)

- - - Discuss writing assignments for each section of the site review report
        - Four sections of the *Standards of Excellence* assigned to four reviewers
        - Each national focus area assigned to a reviewer
      - Address questions that SRT members have
    - Go over all travel/logistical information. Suggested travel logistics to discuss below:
      - Site review visit will take place Tuesday – Thursday (*fill in dates*)
      - Travel dates are Monday (*date*) and Friday (*date*)
      - Clarify logistics on meeting days, times, and locations per day for the review.
      - These can include meeting for dinner on the first day (Monday evening) as well as all events/dinners during the following days.
      - An appropriate time to leave on the last day (Friday) so that no one leaves the site review visit before it is concluded.
      - Hotel location of where SRT reviewers are staying (contact information) and any logistics associated with stay at the hotel.
      - If hotel group reservations were made, make sure reviewers' credit cards are provided at hotel check-in.
      - If reviewers are arriving/departing at similar times, coordinate taxi/ride-share company travel to/from the airport and hotel.
      - Address any questions about reservations booked by the NSGO.
- The Sea Grant program will complete their briefing book and provide the briefing book, final agenda, and program strategic plan to the SRT Chair (see section V and Appendix E).
- The Sea Grant program should begin to plan for releasing public comment solicitation notices. A minimum of 30 days prior to the site review visit, the Sea Grant program under review shall issue public notices (see section III and Appendix C).

1 Month before (30 days)
- The Sea Grant program shall issue public notices (see section III and Appendix C).
- SRT Chair to ensure the program has posted/sent out the public notification.
- SRT Chair will send reviewers the SRT material package (see section V and Appendix E).
  - Agenda
  - Briefing book
  - PIER report
  - Program strategic plan
  - Mid-Cycle NSGO Review Letter
  - Previous cycle site review report
  - Sea Grant program's response to the previous site review report
- SRT Chair in coordination with the co-Chair, to hold one last conference call with SRT. Suggested topics to discuss:
  - Revisit roles, responsibilities, expectations, and writing assignments for each section of the site review report (four sections of the *Standards of Excellence*

assigned to a reviewer and each national focus area assigned to a reviewer)
- ○ Make sure everyone understands the agenda and suggested schedule changes may be made
- ○ Address questions on the materials
- ○ Address travel questions
- ○ Who is bringing a laptop?
- ○ Exchange cell numbers
- ○ Go over any last-minute details/changes
- ○ Ensure SRT Chair has all flight information of travelers

During the Site Review Visit
- ● SRT Chair (see sections VI, VII and Appendices F, G):
  - ○ The evening before the review kicks off, review writing assignments for each section of the site review report during the Monday evening dinner (four sections of the *Standards of Excellence* assigned to a reviewer and each national focus area assigned to a reviewer).
  - ○ As an introduction to the review on the first morning, sets the stage of the review (e.g., outlining the site review visit and providing an overview of the establishment of the PIE system).
  - ○ Sometime during the first day or so, discuss with the program director who is being reviewed if the program management team should be briefed before university officials (if the agenda allows). Programs are strongly urged to include their university officials when the SRT reports back to the program. If there is a scheduling conflict with the university officials, then the SRT will only debrief the program on the review.
  - ○ Ensures sufficient time for the SRT to meet and begin drafting the report during the site review visit. There should be time set aside during lunch and at 4 pm each day when the SRT can meet, discuss what they heard, and draft a report.
  - ○ Along with the co-Chair, coordinate drafting report findings, suggestions, recommendations, and best management practices:
    - ■ All recommendations and national focus area ratings language should be finalized during the site review visit prior to the exit interview. The report doesn't need to be complete, but all recommendations and ratings per national focus area should be finalized. If there are best management practices identified, those should also be shared during the exit interview.
  - ○ Thank the program director and staff for their effort in hosting the review, and university leadership for support of the program.

After the Site Review Visit
- ● The SRT Chair (see section VIII):
  - ○ Has **45 calendar days** to send the final draft report to the Sea Grant director. In this

45-day window, the below should happen (see section:
- ■ Complete the report draft and send it out to the SRT for comments/ corrections. If necessary, hold one additional conference call with the SRT to complete the report and ensure all issues are addressed.
- ■ Send a final draft to the Sea Grant program director for fact checking purposes only (i.e. only factual errors will be accepted) prior to completing the report.
- ● Sea Grant program (see section IX):
  - ○ Once the program receives a final draft report, the program has **15 calendar days** to send a response letter to the National Sea Grant College Program Director addressing all recommendations (please cc your Federal Program Officer).

Appendix E: Site Review Visit Materials

Materials Provided by the National Sea Grant Office
The SRT Chair is responsible for the following materials:
- The previous cycle site review report
- The Sea Grant program's response to the previous site review report
- Mid-Cycle NSGO Review Letter
- PIER report: Information gathered from the program's last six Annual Report submissions into the PIER database

Materials Provided by the Sea Grant Program
The Sea Grant program is responsible for the following materials:
- Agenda
- Program's strategic plan (downloaded from the PIER database)
- Briefing Book (no longer than 25 pages)

The agenda, PIER report, and briefing book should all tie together, point to each other, and address the criteria in the *Standards of Excellence* and the program's progress toward the national focus areas identified within its strategic plan (see Appendix F). Please see section V in this guidance for more information on site review visit materials.

Site Review Visit Agenda
The Sea Grant program will work with the SRT Chair to create a site review visit agenda. The site review visit is designed to be conducted over three days. The first two days (Tuesday and Wednesday) should be dedicated to discussing content, and the third day (Thursday) on drafting the report and briefing the program management team and appropriate university officials.
- Each day should start no earlier than 8-9 am and end by 4 pm.
- There should be at least an hour of site review report prep/writing time during the daily lunch break.
- There should be SRT writing time at the end of each day from 4-6 pm before dinner.
- The suggested timeline for the agenda is below:
  - Tuesday: the first day discusses the *Standards of Excellence* (1 day),
  - Wednesday: discusses performance progress towards program strategic plan (1 day),
  - Thursday morning: SRT writing time to draft a report (0.5 days).
  - Thursday afternoon: briefing the program management team and appropriate university officials (0.5 days).
- As a suggested standard operating procedure at a site review visit, each session for a focus area presentation should include an introductory presentation about the major thrust of the focus area and how it has been implemented. Introductory comments should also indicate how each presentation relates to one another, the overall goal of the session, and performance measures. The sessions should then be wrapped up with constituent feedback (if appropriate)

and summarized by tying the presentations to the program's impacts.
- An evening poster session may be scheduled during the week if a program chooses to host a poster session.
- Please do not include field trips to help ensure SRTs have enough time for the evaluation discussion needs outlined in this guidance and report drafting.

PIER Report
Information gathered from the program's last six Annual Report submissions to the PIER database will be provided in a downloadable report accessible in the database. The PIER report is structured to capture the program's annual report information into the *Standards of Excellence* categories.

A. **Program Management and Organization** (organization, programmed team approach, and support)
    a) Sea Grant Staffing (individuals, FTEs; SG funded/non-SG funded; by functional area)
    f) Total Number of Proposals (pre-, full, and funded)
    h) Research Projects (titles and PIs) - Core Funded Research Projects
    i) Research Projects (titles and PIS) - NSI, Pass-through and Enhancements Funds
    i) Total Funding (Sea Grant federally appropriated funds + non-federal match + pass-through)
    i) Distribution of Total Funds (Sea Grant federal appropriated funds + non-federal match + pass-through)
    i) Distribution of Core Funds (base + merit + non-federal match) by Functional Area
    i) Sea Grant Core Competitive Funds (base + meri t+ non-federal match)

B. **Engagement** (relevance, advisory services, and education and training)
    a) Number of SG-Sponsored/Organized Meetings, Workshops, Conferences and Attendees
    b) Volunteer Hours
    c) Students Supported
    d) K-12 Students Reached

C. **Collaborative Network Activities** (relationships and collaboration)
    a) Counts of Program Partners (identified in projects, accomplishments, and impacts)
    b) Sources and Amounts of Leveraged Funds (Managed and Influenced)

D. **Performance** (leadership and productivity)
    b) Leadership (Level of Effort by National Focus Area)
    c) Productivity (National Performance Measures by Focus Area & Publication)
    d) Productivity (Impacts and Accomplishments)

Briefing Book
The briefing book should include a brief written program synthesis (retrospective and prospective) and must be no longer than 25 pages, inclusive of references and addendums, any excess pages will be excised. It should include descriptions addressing the four categories of the Sea Grant *Standards of Excellence* noted below (and in Appendix A) and address any program advancements or changes directly resulting from the previous site review visit (if applicable). The data shared with the SRT

should cover the time period under review. Programs may also want to highlight any legacy work that came to completion or produced a significant impact during the time period under review and can note as such. Where appropriate, reference the PIER report (page numbers, tables, and graphics in the briefing book to save on space.)

A. **Program Management and Organization** (organization, programmed team approach, and support)
   a. Management Team composition and a brief description of their responsibilities
   b. Advisory Board membership and function (expertise, meeting schedule, recommendations)
   c. Program setting within the university or consortium organization and reporting structure (organizational chart)
   d. Brief description of the process used to develop Request for Proposals (RFP) priorities
   e. Brief description of the review process, including the composition of review panels
   f. Number of institutions represented throughout RFP process (number of institutions in pre-proposal, full proposal, and funded)
   g. New vs. continuing projects and Principle Investigators

B. **Engagement** (relevance, advisory services, and education and training)
   a. List of key partnerships and how the program involves its partners (show examples)
   b. List of important partners/constituents and how the program involves its partners/constituents (show examples)

C. **Collaborative Network** (relationships and collaboration)
   a. Short description of the activities/projects the program is collaborating on with other Sea Grant, NOAA, and additional agency partners
   b. Number of and types of regional/multi-program projects
   c. Success in Sea Grant National Competitions

D. **Performance** (leadership and productivity)
   a. Leadership by staff on boards and committees
   b. Short description of how the program achieved recognition as an intellectual and practical leader in marine science, engineering, education, and advisory service in the state/region.
   c. A summary of the program's progress towards the national performance measures and metrics
   d. In PIER, selected impact and accomplishment statements that are linked to the program's strategic plan goals and objectives
   e. The narrative of the briefing book provides an opportunity to integrate impacts and accomplishments over time to make for stronger stories
   f. Program objectives and any associated comments

E. **Program Advancements**
   g. Highlight any program advancements or changes directly resulting from the previous site review visit (if applicable)

Appendix F: Site Review Visit Criteria

This section lists the criteria that will be used to evaluate the Sea Grant programs during the site review visit. The SRT is expected to use this section along with Appendix G, the site review report template, during the review.

The SRT will be required to provide two levels of evaluation at the completion of the site review visit:
1. determine if the program has 'met' the *Standards of Excellence* (found in Appendix A), and
2. provide a performance rating for each national focus area identified in the program strategic plan and in the context of the program funded levels.

At the end of the site review visit, SRTs will also highlight findings and provide recommendations and suggestions to advance the Sea Grant program's management and organization, engagement, networking activities, and performance, as well as highlight any "best management practices."
- A *finding* is a conclusion based on the site review visit
- A *recommendation* is a formally prescribed course of action for which the Sea Grant program is accountable
- A *suggestion* is an idea that is presented for consideration
- A *best management practice* is a method or technique that has shown results superior to those achieved with other means. The best management practices identified are shared with other Sea Grant programs.

For more information on the site review report template, please see section VIII and Appendix G. For more information on the Exit Interview, please see section VII. For more information on how the ratings will be used after the site review visit please see section X and Appendix H.

1) *Standards of Excellence* Determination

The program will be evaluated to determine if they have 'met' the Sea Grant standards. The *Standards of Excellence include* four areas:
- Program Management and Organization (organization, programmed team approach, and support),
- Engagement (relevance, advisory services, and education and training),
- Collaborative Network Activities (relationships and collaboration), and
- Performance (leadership and productivity).

Each member of the SRT should determine if the program (1) "*meets standards* in all of the following qualifying areas" or, (2) is "*below expectation* in <u>some</u> areas/aspects," or (3) is considered "*unsuccessful* in <u>most</u> areas/aspects" for each category. The following table should be used by each SRT member to capture feedback.

Standards of Excellence Determination			
Standards of Excellence Qualifying Areas	Meets Standards in all of the following qualifying areas	Below Expectation in some areas/aspects	Unsuccessful in most areas/aspects
Program Management and Organization			
Organization			
Programmed Team Approach			
Support			
Engagement			
Relevance			
Extension/Advisory Services			
Education and Training			
Collaborative Network Activities			
Relationships			
Collaboration			
Performance			
Leadership			
Productivity			

The team should discuss their individual findings and concerns, and collectively provide a final determination. If a program is found to be in the categories of *below expectations* or *unsuccessful*, the SRT is required to provide recommendations for improvements. Recommendations provided are formally prescribed courses of action for which the Sea Grant program is accountable. The program is also accountable for responding to all recommended changes in their response letters. A program is not accountable for suggestions. For more information on this topic, please refer to sections VIII and IX.

To facilitate discussion in each of the four areas of the *Standards of Excellence* (Program Management and Organization, Engagement, Collaborative Network Activities and Performance), the *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions have been provided below to

guide the SRT's discussion. The programs are expected to address the below key evaluation questions to show that the program is meeting the *Standards of Excellence*. Additional discussion point questions are also listed below the definitions and key evaluation questions. The additional discussion point questions may be used as potential indicators for assessing progress and may be used to frame discussions on how the program is meeting the four areas of the *Standards of Excellence*.

Program Management and Organization

Listed below are *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions to assess if the program 'met' the Sea Grant standards for Program Management and Organization.

- **Organization Definition**. Must have created the management organization to carry on a viable and productive Sea Grant program and must have the backing of its administration at a sufficiently high level to fulfill its multidisciplinary and multifaceted mandate.
  - *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - Has the program created the necessary management organization to carry on a viable and productive Sea Grant program?
    - To what extent does the program have the backing of its administration at a sufficiently high level to fulfill its multidisciplinary and multifaceted mandate?
- **Programmed Team Approach Definition**. Must have a programmed team approach to the solution of ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes problems which includes relevant, high-quality, multidisciplinary research with associated educational and advisory services capable of producing identifiable results.
  - *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - What is the program's team approach to solving ocean/ coast/ watershed/ Great Lakes problems, which includes relevant, high-quality, multidisciplinary research with associated educational and advisory services capable of producing identifiable results?
    - How does the program implement high-quality grant administration practices that ensure timely and accurate submissions and reporting compliant with guidance?
- **Support Definition**. Must have the ability to obtain matching funds from non-Federal sources, such as state legislatures, university management, state agencies, business, and industry. A diversity of non-federal matching fund sources is encouraged as a sign of program vitality and the ability to meet the Sea Grant requirement that funds for the general programs be matched with at least one non-Federal dollar for every two Federal dollars.
  - *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - How well was the program able to obtain matching funds from non-Federal sources, such as state legislatures, university management, state agencies,

business, and industry?

- ▪ How does the program ensure adequate and stable matching financial support for the program from non-Federal sources?
- ▪ How does the program demonstrate the ability to continue the high performance in marine research, education, training, and advisory services?
- ▪ How does the program demonstrate the ability to provide leadership in ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes activities, including coordinated planning and cooperative work with local, state, regional, and Federal agencies, other Sea Grant programs, and non-Sea Grant universities?
- ▪ How does the program demonstrate an effective management framework and application of institutional resources to the achievement of Sea Grant objectives?
- ▪ How does the program develop and implement long-term plans for research, education, training, and advisory services consistent with Sea Grant goals and objectives?
- ▪ How does the program demonstrate the ability to further the Sea Grant concept and fully develop its potential within the institution and the state?
- ▪ Is there an effective system in place to control the program's quality?

- **Additional Discussion Points.** The questions listed below may be used to support the above *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions for Program Management and Organization. The questions listed below may be useful as potential indicators for assessing program progress toward meeting Sea Grant standards.
  - o How did the program implement or consider the recommendations from the previous SRT?
  - o To what extent is the director sufficiently engaged with the program?
  - o To what extent is the host university sufficiently engaged with the program?
  - o How active is the program's advisory board, and to what extent did the advisory board contribute to the program's strategic plan?
  - o How much contact do advisory board members have with constituents of the program?
  - o How often does the advisory board meet?
  - o How much opportunity exists for new advisory board membership (turnover)?
  - o How well did the program use its strategic plan to guide management and decision-making?
  - o How well do RFPs reflect the objectives in the strategic plan?
  - o What steps did the program take to effectively circulate RFPs to units of other institutions with relevant expertise?
  - o How does the program currently stand with regard to the Sea Grant Competitive Research Allocation Policy, which expects 30-50% of the omnibus budget to be directed to supporting competitive research? (Refer to data in PIER report. This is

not evaluative for the 2018-2023 cycle, but teams should discuss the Policy with the programs and only provide 'suggestions' that will help the program move towards compliance with the Policy for the next PIE cycle as necessary.)

- o Does the program devote 30-50% of the sum of its omnibus funding (base + merit + non-federal match) to competitive research?
  - ▪ Overall, is the program running a balanced portfolio (by functional area)?
- o How productive are the ongoing interactions between the Sea Grant program and representatives of other relevant research and education institutions within the state?
- o To what extent is the program transparent (as to what gets funded)?
- o Have peer reviews been adequate and well-designed with clearly identified criteria?
- o How well are the program's results of funded projects appropriately measured and assessed?
- o To what extent are the program's practices or projects promising and worth sharing?
- o How has the program integrated diverse perspectives to advance cultural understanding and enable the pursuit of the Sea Grant vision and mission for all audiences?

Engagement

Listed below are *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions to assess if the program 'met' the Sea Grant standards for Engagement.

- ● **Relevance Definition**. Must be relevant to local, state, regional, or national opportunities and problems in the ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes environment. Important factors in evaluating relevance are the need for ocean/ coast/ watershed/ Great Lakes resource emphasis and the extent to which capabilities have been developed to be responsive to that need.
  - o *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - ▪ To what extent is the program relevant to local, state, regional, or national opportunities and problems in the ocean/ coast/ watershed/ Great Lakes environment?
    - ▪ To what extent have capabilities been developed to be responsive to that need?
- ● **Extension/Advisory Services Definition**. Must have a strong program through which information, techniques, and research results from any reliable source, domestic or international, may be communicated to and utilized by user communities. In addition to the educational and information dissemination role, the advisory service program must aid in the identification and communication of user communities' research and educational needs.
  - o *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - ▪ What system does the program have in place by which information, techniques, and research results from any reliable source, domestic or international, are communicated to, and utilized by, user communities?

- In addition to the educational and information dissemination role, how does extension help in the identification and communication of user communities' research and educational needs?

- **Education and Training Definition**. Education and training must be clearly relevant to national, regional, state, and local needs in fields related to ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes resources. As appropriate, education may include pre-college, college, post-graduate, public and adult levels.
  - *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - To what extent is education and training provided by the program relevant to national, regional, state, and local needs in fields related to ocean, Great Lakes, and coastal resources?
    - To what extent are pre-college, college, post-graduate, public, and adult levels included in the education and training provided by the program?

- **Additional Discussion Points.** The questions listed below may be used to support the above *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions Program Engagement. The questions listed below may be useful as potential indicators for assessing program progress toward meeting Sea Grant standards.
  - How are partners and constituents informed of program results?
  - How do partners and constituents support the program?
  - Is the program a trusted and immediate point of contact for information on ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes issues?
  - How are education support and program accomplishments relevant to national, regional, state, and local needs in fields related to ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes resources?
  - How well does the program support students and/or informal learning opportunities?

Collaborative Network Activities

Listed below are *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions to assess if the program 'met' the Sea Grant standards for Collaboration Network Activities.

- **Relationships Definition**. Must have close ties with Federal agencies, state agencies and administrations, local authorities, business and industry, and other educational institutions. These ties are: (i) To ensure the relevance of its programs, (ii) to give assistance to the broadest possible audience, (iii) to involve a broad pool of talent in providing this assistance (including universities and other administrative entities outside the Sea Grant program), and (iv) to assist others in developing research and management competence. The extent and quality of an institution's relationships are critical factors in evaluating the institutional program.
  - *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - Evaluate the program's partnerships with Federal agencies, State agencies and administrations, local authorities, business and industry, and other

educational institutions? Do these ties:

- ensure the relevance of its programmed activities,
- give assistance to the broadest possible audience,
- involve a broad pool of talent in providing assistance, and assist others in developing research and management competence?

- **Collaboration Definition**. Must provide leadership in ocean/coast/watershed/Great Lakes activities, including coordinated planning and cooperative work with local, state, regional, and Federal agencies, other Sea Grant programs, and non- Sea Grant universities.
  - o *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - ▪ How does the program lead or participate in regional activities? National?
    - ▪ To what extent does this participation make effective use of Sea Grant network capabilities?
- **Additional Discussion Points.** The questions listed below may be used to support the above *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions Program Collaborative Network Activities. The questions listed below may be useful as potential indicators for assessing program progress toward meeting Sea Grant standards.
  - o How has the program chosen and developed partnerships?
    - ▪ How many and what quality of partnerships exist (including those with other NOAA programs)?
    - ▪ How many, if any, new partnerships have been formed?
  - o To what extent has the program successfully leveraged additional funding sources (managed or influenced) to meet collaborative goals?
    - ▪ How did the program utilize leveraged funding to carry out their missions in addition to Sea Grant federal and non-federal match funds?
    - ▪ How many, if any, new partnerships have been formed through leveraged funding?
  - o How does the program contribute to the cohesiveness of the Sea Grant network?
  - o Evaluate if there is effective communication and collaboration between the program and other Sea Grant programs and with the National Sea Grant Office.
  - o Does the program demonstrate an understanding of partnership policies, including deadlines?
  - o How does the program participate in or lead activities that support the overall network?

Performance

Listed below are *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions to assess if the program 'met' the Sea Grant standards for Performance.
- **Leadership Definition**. Must have achieved recognition as an intellectual and practical

leader in marine science, engineering, education, and advisory service in its state and region.

- o *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
  - ▪ How is the program recognized as an intellectual and practical leader in marine science, engineering, education, and advisory service in its state and region?
- **Productivity Definition**. Must have demonstrated a degree of productivity (of research results, reports, employed students, service to State agencies and industry, etc.) commensurate with the length of its Sea Grant operations and the level of funding under which it has worked.
  - o *Key Evaluation Question(s):*
    - ▪ To what extent has the program demonstrated a degree of productivity commensurate with the program's operations and level of funding under which it has worked?
    - ▪ What are the significant contributions to society through advancements in science and technology in their focus areas (e.g., seminal publications or patents): new understanding, products, processes, and technology?
- **Additional Discussion Points.** The questions listed below may be used to support the above *Standards of Excellence* definitions and key evaluation questions Program Performance. The questions listed below may be useful as potential indicators for assessing program progress toward meeting Sea Grant standards.
  - o How have priority needs identified in the program's strategic plan been addressed as a result of the program's efforts?
    - ▪ What is the area of impact: local/state/regional/national?
    - ▪ What has been Sea Grant's role in producing this impact or benefit?
  - o To what extent are the science and technology contributions commensurate with the size of the program?
  - o How is the program making a significant contribution to society through advancements in science and technology in their focus areas?
    - ▪ What is the area of impact: local/state/regional/national?
    - ▪ What has been Sea Grant's role in producing this contribution?
  - o What awards has the program received, or what affiliations can the program's management team claim leadership in (e.g., Director participates on regional planning commissions, etc.)?
  - o To what extent does the program demonstrate entrepreneurship in pursuing competitive opportunities and exhibiting high-level skills by obtaining competitive resources?
  - o Is there an appropriate balance of research, extension, and education within the program, and are the program's focus areas integrated?
  - o For the investment that the program made, were they an impactful program?
    - ▪ What are the economic impacts and benefits (e.g., value, jobs, businesses) of

the program?
- ▪ Are there new or expanded industries, companies, businesses?
- ▪ Are there cost savings or productivity improvements?
- ▪ What has been Sea Grant's role in producing this impact or benefit?

2) Performance Ratings Determination

The SRT now looks in more depth at the performance section of the *Standards of Excellence* to evaluate how effectively the program performed in national focus areas with respect to Performance (leadership and productivity). A rating must be provided for each national focus area identified in their strategic plan.

The national focus areas are:
- ● Healthy Coastal Ecosystems (HCE)
- ● Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture (SFA)
- ● Resilience Communities and Economies (RCE)
- ● Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development (ELWD)

SRT members will review and discuss with programs their accomplishments, impacts, and national performance measures and metrics for each relevant national focus area, in the context of the program's funding levels provided. The SRT will also assess the impact on science and society relative to federal investment. In addition, progress in areas of research, education, and training, or advisory service in fields related to ocean, Great Lakes, and coastal resources should be considered. The evaluation of program performance involves the use of judgment in weighing the qualitative and quantitative evidence available.

After discussion with the program, the SRT will convene and determine a rating for each relevant national focus area. The SRT Chair will ask each of the external reviewers and the co-Chair to rate the program (1-5), using whole number ratings only. The SRT Chair and SG director who participate as SRT members are non-voting and will not provide ratings.

The SRT uses the following rating scale:
- ● Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)
- ● Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)
- ● Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)
- ● Performance below that expected in <u>some</u> areas/aspects (4)
- ● Performance below that expected in <u>most</u> areas/aspects (5)

Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)
- ● This is the baseline level of where to start the review. At this level, the program achieved their goals/objectives in the strategic plan.

- If a program did not meet a particular goal/objective, it may still meet this level if there is significant progress or a reasonable explanation (unexpected difficulties, shift in partners, etc.).

Performance below that expected in <u>some</u> areas/aspects (4)
- At this level, the program did not achieve <u>some</u> of their goals/objectives of their strategic plan, as shown by only some progress.
- Program did not provide a reasonable explanation for not meeting <u>some</u> of the goals/objectives within their plan.

Performance below that expected in <u>most</u> areas/aspects (5)
- At this level, the program did not meet <u>most</u> of their goals/objectives of their strategic plan and did not show reasonable progress.
- Program did not provide a reasonable explanation for not meeting <u>most</u> of the goals/objectives within their plan.

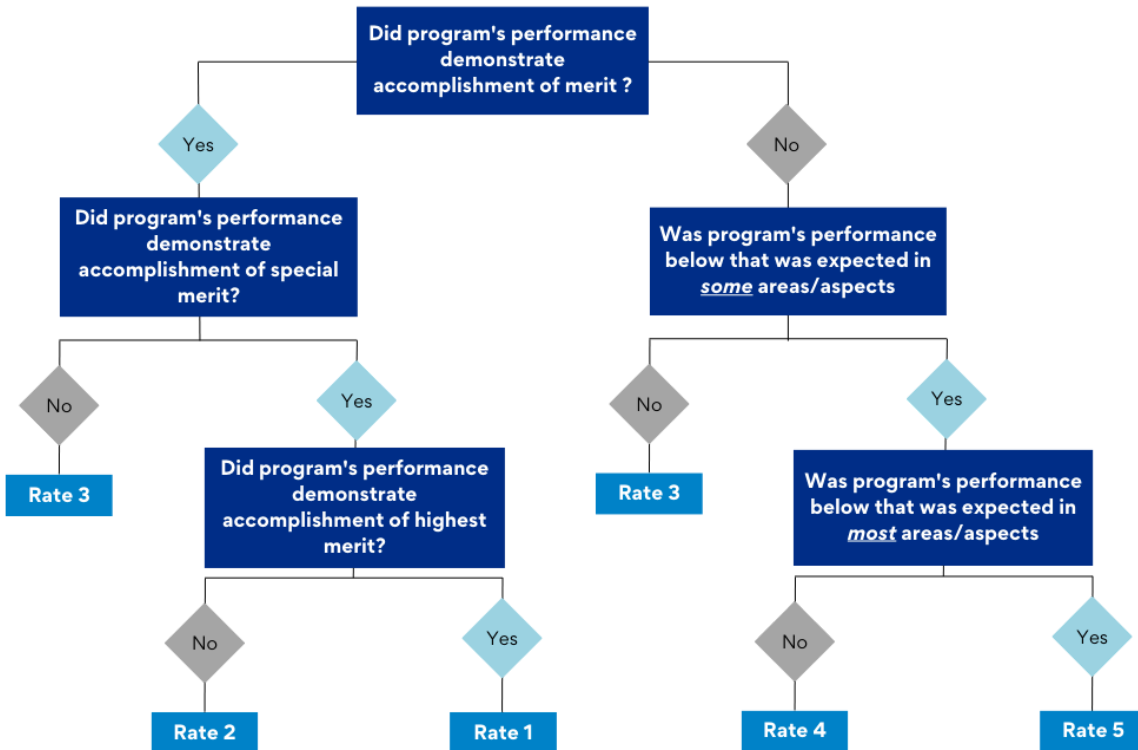**Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)**
- At this level, the program <u>exceeded some</u> of their goals/objectives of their strategic plan.
- Program demonstrates progress beyond achieving the strategic plan goals and objectives with significant breadth and quality of work performed.

Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)
- At this level, the program <u>far exceeded all</u> of their goals/objectives of their strategic plan.
- Program demonstrates progress that far exceeded expectations of the program's strategic plan goals and objectives due to exceptionally high quality of work performed.

Given the rating system shown above, clear language that describes why a rating was given for a particular focus area needs to be consistent with the high-level summary of results per relevant national focus area provided in the site review report. For example, a rating of "performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit" indicates that performance clearly and significantly exceeded expectations. And a rating of "performance demonstrated accomplishment of the highest merit" should reflect exemplary performance and be limited in use.

The following decision tree may be used by each team member to determine performance rating.

The following table may be used by each team member to capture feedback.

National Focus Area	Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)	Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)	Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)	Performance below that expected in *some* areas/aspects (4)	Performance below that expected in *most* areas/aspects (5)
Determination of Performance Rating Leadership and Productivity					
Healthy Coastal Ecosystems					
Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture					
Resilient Communities and Economies					
Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development					

Site Review Report of the

XXXXX Sea Grant College Program

Dates of Review

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Site Review Team's (SRT) visit to the *xxxx* Sea Grant (*xxxx*SG) Program took place from *enter site visit dates*.

The SRT members included:

Name (Chair) NOAA, National Sea Grant Office City, State	Name (Co-Chair) National Sea Grant Advisory Board Member City, State
Name *XX* Sea Grant Director City, State	Name (External Reviewer #1) Affiliation City, State
Name (External Reviewer #2) Affiliation City, State	Name (External Reviewer #3) Affiliation City, State

Prior to the beginning of the site review visit, and in conformance with National Sea Grant College Program guidelines, the *xxxx* Sea Grant issued a public notice of the upcoming site review visit by inviting interested parties to send written comments to the NOAA National Sea Grant Office. The public notice was distributed by means of *xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx*. The NOAA National Sea Grant Office received *xxx* letters in response to the public notice.

NOTE: Characterize the letters in no more than a few sentences (e.g., "Most of the letters were highly supportive of the xxxx Program. A few letters raised issues/challenges/concerns with…, which were either covered in the course of the review or were deemed to be minor in consequence.")

The site review visit took place *(in one sentence, describe the site review visit location venue: hotel, campus, city, state, etc.)*

During the site review visit, the SRT met with *(brief description, e.g., identifying partners/constituents, university administrators, researchers, management staff, etc.)*. The SRT also benefited from poster sessions *(if applicable provide brief description, e.g., name specific topics, or with researchers, extension staff, and graduate students)*.

This site review visit report follows the provided guidance for program site review visits. The SRT discussed broad issues related to the *xxxx* Sea Grant's: 1) Program Management and Organization; 2) Engagement; 3) Collaborative Network Activities; and 4) Performance, as well as how effectively the program performed respect to leadership and productivity as determined by progress made towards each national focus area as identified in the strategic plan of *xx* Sea Grant Program. Within each of these areas, each member of the SRT provided expert insights and opinions to the SRT Chair.

With this report, the SRT Chair presents the findings of the SRT and presents suggestions and recommendations to the Program to facilitate program advancement and improvement. It does not necessarily reflect the views of any specific SRT member.

II. *STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE (SoE)* **DETERMINATION**

NOTE: The first finding listed in this section should be the overall SoE determination.

- *Standard of Excellence* Finding (1):
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program meets the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs
    - *OR*
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program could meet the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs if they address the following recommendations
    - *OR*
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program does not meet the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs for the following reasons.

NOTE: The SRT should use the criteria and questions listed in Appendix F: Site Review Visit Criteria for assessing if the program is addressing the Sea Grant Standards of Excellence expected of all programs. In these sections please explain how the program addresses each of the following. Please include any finding, recommendation, and suggestion in these sections as well - list these separately and identify them as such. List them either at the end of the paragraph they are associated with or at the end of the SoE section. Please avoid the use of absolute statements, which may not be fully and fairly reflective across a program's work and lead to creating an opportunity for findings to be contested unnecessarily (e.g., "no one…," or "the program always…".)

- *A <u>finding</u> is a conclusion based on the site review visit*

- *A <u>recommendation</u> is a formally prescribed course of action for which the Sea Grant program is accountable*

- *A <u>suggestion</u> is an idea that is presented for consideration*

- *A <u>best management practice</u> is a method or technique that has shown results superior to those achieved with other means. The best management practices identified are shared with other Sea Grant programs.*

Program Management and Organization

- *Leadership*
- *Productivity*
- *Finding (#X):*
- *Recommendation (#X):*
- *Best Management Practice (#X):*

Engagement
- *Leadership*
- *Productivity*
- *Finding (#X):*
- *Recommendation (#X):*
- *Best Management Practice (#X):*

Collaborative Network Activities
- *Leadership*
- *Productivity*
- *Finding (#X):*
- *Recommendation (#X):*
- *Best Management Practice (#X):*

Performance Review
- *Leadership*
- *Productivity*
- *Finding (#X):*
- *Recommendation (#X):*
- *Best Management Practice (#X):*

III.   PERFORMANCE RATING DETERMINATION

NOTE: The SRT should use the criteria and questions listed in Appendix F: Site Review Visit Criteria for assessing the Sea Grant SoE "Performance." The SRT should provide a high-level summary of results per relevant national focus area in the following paragraphs. The summary should support the rated categories provided for each national focus area found in the table below. If there are any recommendations, suggestions, or best management practices, please provide these in the section of the report above called, SoE "Performance."

After discussions with the program on progress made towards each national focus area identified in the program strategic plan, the SRT determined a performance rating for each national focus area.

The SRT used the following rating scale:
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)
- Performance below that expected in <u>some</u> areas/aspects (4)
- Performance below that expected in <u>most</u> areas/aspects (5)

Healthy Coastal Ecosystems	Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture	Resilience Communities and Economies	Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development
Rating: *Include the rating value and the language associated with the rating value*	Rating: *Include the rating value and the language associated with the rating value*	Rating: *Include the rating value and the language associated with the rating value*	Rating: *Include the rating value and the language associated with the rating value*

Healthy Coastal Ecosystems

Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

Resilience Communities and Economies

Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development

IV.   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, and SUGGESTIONS

NOTE: Provide a list of all findings, recommendations and suggestions that are found in this report below.

Findings
- (1):
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program meets the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs
    - *OR*
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program could meet the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs if they address the following recommendations
    - *OR*
  - The SRT Chair finds that the Program does not meet the *Standards of Excellence* expected of all Sea Grant programs for the following reasons.
- (2)...
- (3)...

Recommendations (items the Program must consider)
- (1)...
- (2)...

Suggestions (ideas the Program may want to consider)

- (1)...
- 2)...

V.   BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

NOTE: Provide a list of best management practices found in this report below.

- (1)...
- (2)...

VI.   SITE REVIEW VISIT AGENDA

Insert agenda below

Appendix H: Recertification and Allocation of Merit Funding

Per the [National Sea Grant College Program's (Sea Grant) Planning, Implementation and Evaluation (PIE) policy](#) for the 2018-2023 cycle, the evaluation process wraps up with a full cycle NSGO Review. The full cycle NSGO Review includes a complete program evaluation review that is based on the findings from the site review visit and Evaluation Committee.

At the conclusion of the full cycle NSGO Review, the National Sea Grant College Program Director will make the final determination of whether or not an individual Sea Grant Program meets the *Standards of Excellence* and thus if a program is: 1) recertified, 2) eligible for merit funding, and the 3) determination of final merit score. While occurring very rarely, the National Sea Grant College Program Director may require a program that doesn't meet the *Standards of Excellence* or has poorly rated performance to submit a corrective action plan for a particular area that is not meeting standards.

Recertification of the Sea Grant Programs

The Office of Management and Budget, the Advisory Board, and other entities have recommended that the Sea Grant programs be recertified on a reasonable and regular schedule. The full cycle evaluation, including the program site review visit, the Board EC findings, and full cycle NSGO review, constitutes the program recertification process. A successful review results in the recertification of the program for the next four years. Recertification is required for a program to maintain its federal funding.

At the end of the full cycle review process, the National Sea Grant College Program Director will submit to each Sea Grant program a final evaluation and recommendation letter that summarizes the findings from the site review visit and the Board EC. The letter will include recertification status and details on the program's eligibility for merit funding. If the program is eligible for merit funding, the letter will include an overall merit score that determines the estimated amount of merit funding the program will receive over the next four-year cycle.

A determination that a program 'meets' the Sea Grant *Standards of Excellence* per [Sea Grants Federal Regulations (15 CFR 918)](#) (Appendix A) results in recertification of the program for the next four-year Omnibus cycle. Programs that meet the *Standards of Excellence* are then eligible for merit funding. Recertification and merit funding timelines are below:
- 2018-2023 evaluation results in recertification and merit funding for 2028-2031
- 2024-2027 evaluation results in recertification and merit funding for 2032-2035
- 2028-2031 evaluation results in recertification and merit funding for 2036-2039

If a program does not meet the *Standards of Excellence* based on the program site review visit or if the program's overall performance is determined to be "*unsuccessful* in most areas/aspects," the program is placed on probationary status. Any program on probation will not be eligible for merit

funding. Once a program is on probation, the program will be assessed to determine if the program is making progress towards meeting the *Standards of Excellence* on a yearly basis after each annual reporting cycle. If progress is satisfactory, the program will be allowed to continue on probation until the next site review visit. Any program placed on probation as a result of the site review visit must be rated as "meets" expectations in most areas/aspects or higher in the next site review visit. If, at the next site review visit, the program meets the *Standards of Excellence*, the program is considered recertified. However, if progress toward meeting the *Standards of Excellence* is not being made for two annual reporting years, or if a program does not reach the *Standards of Excellence* for a second consecutive full cycle evaluation, the National Sea Grant College Program Director will refer the matter to the Advisory Board for consideration of whether to recommend decertification of the program.

Allocation of Merit Funding

A merit pool of funds has been established in the Sea Grant budget to be allocated to individual Sea Grant programs on the basis of overall performance. If programs are eligible for merit funding, then the programs' national focus area performance ratings from the site review visit are used to assign each program an overall merit score. The following rating is used during the site review visits in determining progress towards a program's national focus areas per their strategic plan:

- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of highest merit (1)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit (2)
- Performance demonstrated accomplishment of merit (3)
- Performance below that expected in some areas/aspects (4)
- Performance below that expected in most areas/aspects (5)

The overall merit score and the available funds in the merit pool determine the amount of merit funding a program will receive in the next four-year cycle. For each program the national focus area rating is weighted based on the proportion of funding resources allocated (by estimated level of effort) by the program to that national focus area. A final merit score is determined for each program by weighting the ratings by the proportion of funding resources allocated by the program to that focus area. Funding resources include all Sea Grant core (base and merit + match) and all other funds arising from Sea Grant's appropriation (e.g., aquaculture and other national initiatives) and associated match, and pass-through funding used to meet the goals and objectives of the program's four-year strategic plan. Leveraged funds are not included in the calculation, but will be seen as additional resources that a program obtained to achieve its strategic goals.

For example, if a program allocated 25% of its Sea Grant-appropriated funding resources to the HCE focus area and was rated a 2, allocated 15% of its resources to SFA focus area and was rated a 2, allocated 20% of its resources to RCE focus area and was rated a 3, and allocated 40% of its

resources to ELWD focus area and was rated a 3, then it would score an overall weighted rating of 2.6, calculated as follows:

$$\underset{\text{HCE}}{[25\% \times 2]} + \underset{\text{SFA}}{[15\% \times 2]} + \underset{\text{RCE}}{[20\% \times 3]} + \underset{\text{ELWD}}{[40\% \times 3]} = 2.6$$

The final merit score is 2.6, corresponding to a rating of "performance demonstrated accomplishment of special merit" The final merit score determines merit funding levels. Final merit funding levels depend on the size of the merit pool of funds available, which cannot be finalized until Sea Grant's appropriation levels are known. Any program that does not meet the Sea Grant *Standards of Excellence* based on the site review visit or is on probation will not be eligible for merit funding.