



GULF OF MEXICO COASTAL OCEAN OBSERVING SYSTEM

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GCOOS Strategic Plan, 2013-2018

Addendum – Engagement, Planning, Prioritization, Evaluation

The Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS) employs a variety of processes and people to guide programmatic priority setting and decision making. Overall, the GCOOS program is designed to be stakeholder driven, operating in a continuous effort to meet the needs of widely distributed and diverse stakeholder communities throughout much of the Gulf of Mexico. Simultaneously, the program operates as one of 11 regions under the U.S. IOOS Program Office and is, therefore, guided by funding levels, policies, and priorities set at the national level. Strategic planning and priority setting are guided by the Board of Directors who work with the GCOOS staff to balance the benefits, costs, and risks of the program's many projects and observing efforts at local, regional, and national levels.

GCOOS Project Prioritization and Selection Process

Stakeholder Engagement

GCOOS collection, assessment, and adoption of system priorities are built upon an inclusive, iterative, and bottom up stakeholder input process. Initial engagement of stakeholders was extensive, both geographically and programmatically. GCOOS engages many levels of Federal, State, and local/regional government, ocean recreation and commerce sectors, the hotel and tourism industry, nongovernmental organizations, the media, community and indigenous groups, as well as residents and visitors throughout the GCOOS region. Input is gathered at community and in person meetings, workshops, training sessions, focus groups, through webinar and web based feedback services, and through review of strategic plans, prioritization documents, needs assessments compiled by partner organizations at local, regional, and federal levels. Engagement is ongoing with all partners, throughout all states of the Strategic Planning process. Through these ongoing and diverse modes of engagement, GCOOS maintains a strong, diverse, and engaged user base that provides regular input on needs and priorities within their cohorts, and contributes critical assessment on the effectiveness of the regional system in satisfying user needs.

A number of GCOOS staff lead efforts to engage stakeholders and ensure a continuous feedback loop with the GCOOS staff, regional partners, and the IOOS program office. In

addition to the Texas A & M based staff, GCOOS hires and/or contracts liaisons to manage extension and stakeholder engagement work outside Texas and Florida.

Board of Directors

In addition to ongoing and regular contribution to needs assessments, gap identification, and priority identification, stakeholders can choose to participate in higher level priority adoption and planning through governance framework.

Stakeholder groups and organizations are invited to become partners with GCOOS through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). It is through the MOA signatories that the GCOOS Board members are nominated and elected.

Signatories to the MOA populate electing cohorts (ie. industry, government, outreach, and academic) to determine the ballot slate for the Board of Directors.

Board Members provide general oversight and policy guidance, adopt implementing documents and strategic plans, and advise on major decisions for GCOOS. The Board works with GCOOS staff, through annual meetings, individual discussions, and through a five member Executive Committee to review region wide needs and priorities from all stakeholders and determine annual guidance to the program on implementation, as well as long term strategic planning.

Strategic Planning and Priority Setting

GCOOS, through its Board of Directors and rich stakeholder engagement process, executes annual work plans that are designed to meet the long range goals and objectives of a Strategic Plan. This Plan, adopted by the Board, sets a 5 year planning horizon for the program, and is reviewed every three years to ensure that the organization is focused on relevant, appropriate, and timely activities while still maintaining its focus on large scale goals and objectives tied to the national observing enterprise. The goals, objectives, and recommended actions represent a collection of expressed needs, gathered over years and geographies, carefully matched with the capabilities of the GCOOS Principal Investigators, Staff, and Governing Council to create a cost effective, operational ocean observing system.

A number of factors are taken into consideration when prioritizing annual allocation or resources within the organization. GCOOS leadership evaluate funding levels, progress toward strategic plan goals/objectives, and existing program capabilities along with partner support for activities, and the potential impact of an investment to individuals, organizations, and populations as a whole. The results of these comparisons are presented to the Executive Committee of the Board who then provides guidance on the balancing of resources and priority setting for the most efficient and effective operations.

Annual Evaluation

In addition to reviewing the priority of activities with respect to stakeholder needs and interests, GCOOS evaluates each program component area annually based on a number of criteria. The evaluation process provides information needed to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of each component within the system, and informs a decision making process that determines additional investment, sustainment, or retirement of individual observing assets, services, or component groups.

A number of factors are considered in the evaluation of each component area. These guiding questions required GCOOS to evaluate criteria such as: demonstrated level of need or use; uniqueness of service; potential for a positive, significant impact; reasonable use of financial and human resources; ability to integrate into existing regional and national networks; level of customer utility and number of identified users; balance of partner contributions; level at which partners rely on the component area for operations; cost of operations and maintenance; and performance record. An evaluation of component areas using these criteria allows GCOOS to select which projects to continue or discontinue.

Summary

An ongoing prioritization, strategic planning, and annual evaluation process provides GCOOS with the tools necessary to assess whether the investments made by the system are meeting the goals and objectives identified in the Strategic Plan. Strategic Plan priorities are collected continuously, and are reviewed annually in concert with the performance of each component of the observing system. Annual work plans are guided by the Board that are focused on meeting the goals/objectives of the Strategic Plan while balancing user needs, regional priorities, and system capabilities and strengths.

Over the course of a five year planning cycle, long range strategic objectives are defined, refined, and adopted that provide for high level goals to ensure the investments made by the system generate real and lasting value to the Gulf of Mexico region. The Strategic Plan document is updated and released every 5 years.