Topic 5: Social Sciences and Decision Support in NOAA

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Broad Original Intent

• In July 2015, the NOAA Social Science Committee released *Vision and Strategy: Supporting NOAA’s Mission with Social Science*

• Scarlett and Moss held a phone meeting with NOAA social science staff

• Explored opportunities for SAB support, e.g.:
  – decision support
  – social indicators
  – integrated modeling of complex systems
  – societal benefits of observations
  – machine learning, social media, and predictive analysis
Proposed Option

• Suggest initial limited scope project to continue SAB efforts on social sciences
  – Explore how social science research can contribute to answering the question “How are NOAA decision support tools making a difference?”

• Proposed approach: workshop on approaches to evaluating value and effectiveness of a NOAA decision support tool/program
Proposed Option

• Potential questions:
  – How does the responsible office/program engage with stakeholders?
  – What data are currently collected and methods used for evaluation?
  – What questions about effectiveness and methods are being raised in the broader research community?
  – How can NOAA approaches to evaluation be improved?
  – Are there opportunities for use of new methodologies, e.g., crowd sourcing data and application of machine learning?
Deliverable: Short report or Slide Deck

– Suggests opportunities for improving evaluation of the impact of NOAA decision support efforts

– Outlines ways future evaluations of additional decision support activities could improve understanding of decision support processes more generally
  • I.e., contribute to advancing social science research on the topic of decision support
Steps

• Interactions with line offices/social science research committee to select a decision support tool or activity for evaluation

• Staff preparation of materials to characterize the program, its intended benefits, and ongoing evaluation efforts

• Workshop of NOAA and external social science experts in decision support to explore evaluation approaches and research questions about decision support processes and outcomes

• SAB synthesis of workshop input into final report
Participation

- SAB Members, NOAA liaisons, NOAA Federal Advisory Committees and Others Working on this Topic

- Participation would depend on the case study selected but would include:
  - Individuals identified above
  - Scientists and participants in the RISA and SARP programs
  - Engagement of relevant SAB working group(s)
  - Other external decision support and evaluation research experts.
Resources Needed

• Some staff time for organizing information on the decision support tool/program and for supporting the workshop

• Travel and workshop costs

• Engagement from relevant SAB working group (depends on tool/program selected for examination)

• SAB members’ time to organize and participants’ time to prepare and engage
Potential Challenges

• Selection of the case study will be challenging
  – Important to select a case broadly representative of how the impact of decision support activities is conducted

• Organizing a workshop will be time consuming