

Topic 5: Social Sciences and Decision Support in NOAA

Lynn Scarlett

Richard Moss

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