



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Damage Assessment Restoration Center NW
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg 1, Seattle, WA 98115

November 6, 2019

FR: Paul Cereghino, NOAA Restoration Center
TO: Ecosystem Coordination Board
RE: Proposal for Cross-Agency Continuous Improvement

Dear Ecosystem Coordination Board,

Please find enclosed a proposal for a cross-agency continuous improvement system. This proposal follows an October 2018 discussion, where the ECB endorsed the concept of continuous improvement, but some members expressed concern about how to implement continuous improvement with existing resources.

Between then and now, NOAA staff collaborated with a volunteer Lead Entity coordinator, a Local Integrating Organization coordinator, and a Puget Sound Partnership Ecosystem Recovery Coordinator. Over the summer of 2019 we solicited and organized 39 claims about how state-federal processes could be improved. We defined a general improvement strategy focused on funding systems, and hosted a focus group to evaluate development of project description standards. This work was completed with existing resources.

NOAA staff also participate in the Align Grant Coordination Workgroup. Align is convened by RCO and Ecology and assembles state and federal programs that allocate approximately \$500M to project work each biennium—the engine of Puget Sound recovery.

Informed by local practitioners, and with NOAA support, Align moved \$9,000 of administrative resources among three capital programs, into a pilot project with a project sponsor. We are currently testing a cross-program budget structure that we aim to pilot during the 2020 project development season. Budget alignment is foundational to project description standards, and is the first step to improved information transfer among funding programs, improved metric capture, reduced project administrative cost, and reconsideration of our matching system.

These two parallel efforts involve the capture and evaluation of potential improvement strategies from field practitioners, and the deployment of small nimble agency investments to implement cross-agency improvement in collaboration with local practitioners. These efforts resulted from an approximate 0.25 FTE subsidy from NOAA over a 6-month period.

Our proposed approach combines four critical attributes:

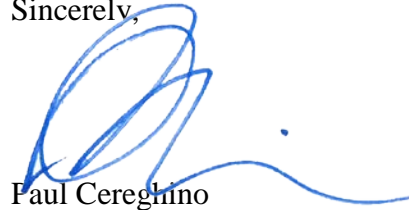
- It focuses initial work on our funding system, where we have existing coordination efforts, and which reflects a capability that could lead regulatory innovation.
- It increases the connectivity and capabilities of existing networks, and does not create new redundant networks.



- It exercises the ability of agencies to move in coordinated action to quickly solve simple problems.
- It is a lightweight and continuous operational system. It does not divert effort into generating large policy documents containing generalities that don't result in action.
- It is "pulled" by local need and field intelligence. By continuously removing the most important solvable barriers to local work, we are reducing costs and increasing rate of recovery, while improving morale.
- It brings local practitioners meaningfully into a real-time two-way conversation around our shared operational systems, improving our overall awareness of system function.

Our small team would like to see this experimental work become a pilot effort in 2020, leading to a state initiative in the FY2021 budget. We believe this work is urgent and important. For this work to continue to mature, state leaders must match NOAA Restoration Center in providing modest support and encouragement for these efforts.

Sincerely,



Paul Cereghino
NOAA Restoration Center

Reason for Action

Local teams experience how the aggregate function of state and federal programs enable or disable recovery of ecosystems and wild salmon populations on the ground. Agencies underutilize this perspective as a driver for the evolution of our recovery systems and processes, missing opportunities to improve efficiency and slowing progress towards recovery.

Current State

Local practitioners have few options to improve the state-federal systems within which they operate. A would-be reformer must develop contacts among process owners, discover root causes, convince leadership, and finding resources to drive change. Because we have no improvement system, improvement is laborious and risky, so we don't believe improvement is cost effective, so we don't attempt improvement. We recreate lists of barriers¹.

Over three dozen staff provide coordination services among Lead Entities (LEs), Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs), Marine Resource Committees (MRCs) and the Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) alone. This coordination community has direct contact with practitioners, they are discussing improvement concepts, but have no mechanism for acting on their observations.

In 2015, RCO and Ecology established a workgroup to improve project funding coordination. This team has very limited resources for coordination and is only indirectly linked to the LE/LIO/MRC/ERC coordination community. In 2018 the ECB supported a NOAA proposal to explore how to implement continuous improvement. With NOAA support, three volunteers from LEs, LIOs, and PSP developed a simple improvement process, solicited and organized claims², and developed a potential improvement project with process owners and practitioners.

Improvement Target

Establish a continuous improvement process, sponsored by the ECB that is able to capture and curate opportunities to improve the aggregate performance of local, state and federal agency programs,. Based on available resources, we would turn opportunities into improvement projects that, 1. Reduce project cost, 2. Reduce project delays, or 3. Increase the feasibility of innovative actions.

Root Cause Analysis

1. Inter-agency improvement projects involve work among many programs often among institutions which can present confounding complexity.
2. Systems improvement is generally not defined or expected as part of program mandates.
3. Improvement benefits may be difficult to quantify, while leadership wants clear return on investment for activities outside of mandates.
4. Coordinators are over-burdened with redundant regional planning processes and are not empowered to investigate improvement opportunities.
5. Discussion of waste or inefficiency is dangerous for agencies in a legislative environment.
6. Institutions often reserve interagency coordination for policy staff, while improvement often requires technical analysis.
7. Government culture may excuse individuals in being non-responsive to inquiries as a time management strategy.

Proposal

We propose to staff the relationship between the coordination community and the Align Grant Coordination Group using a simple and low-cost improvement process (figure on left). This system would pilot with a focus on improving the funding system focused

on Puget Sound. Compared to the regulatory system, the funding system has more capacity for improvement, and improved coordination on funding around project implementation may be necessary to drive regulatory improvements.

- Facilitators capture practitioner claims through an on-line form, and curate a well-organized backlog of opportunities.
- Volunteer labor, program administrative resources, or small contracts develop complaints into process improvements through a continuous interview and ranking process.
- The ECB encourages collaboration among process owners to implement process improvements.
- Annual workshops and occasional focus groups expand the community working on improvement.

This approach will not resolve all barriers. It helps us focus on increasing implementation efficiency where there is agreement. It does not resolve the social-political conflicts that prevent action in some cases. It does help us better discern these issues so we can apply the appropriate effort.

We anticipated initial work will focus on budget and project description standards, and more broadly defining the improvement backlog.

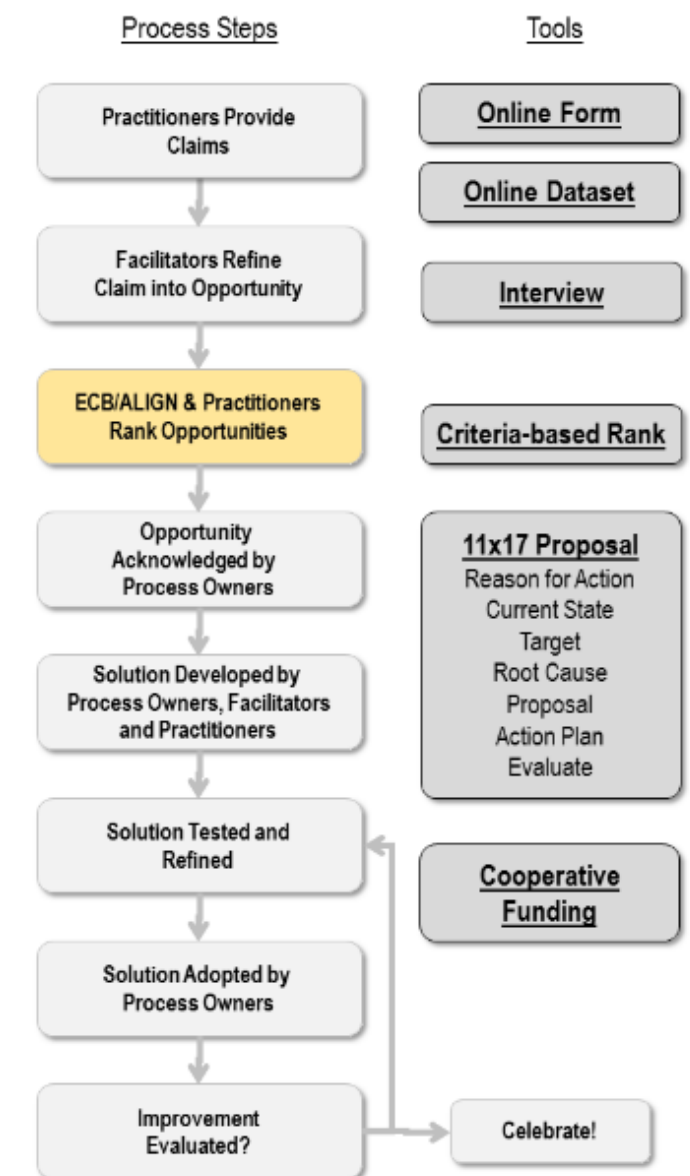
Action Plan

- State agencies match NOAA by staffing the Align Grant Coordination Group (½ FTE)
- Complete budget standard effort
- Initiate project description standard work
- Develop inter-agency agreements within the Align group to allow for efficient movement of funds among agencies
- Train LE/LIO/MRC teams in identifying improvement opportunities as part of local work.
- Refine claim collection and curation process for clarity and efficiency
- Identify a variety of resources for improvement implementation
- Integrate ongoing continuous improvement into emerging action agenda systems.

WHEN - Pilot over 2020, and develop joint Decision Package for state FY2021

DELIVERABLES - Expanded ALIGN Interagency Agreement, Improvement Opportunity Backlog, Funding System Improvement Strategy

Continuous Improvement Process



¹ For example [Blackmore 2009](#), [Sahandy & Daily 2014](#), [Ryan-Penuela et al 2017](#), [Cereghino et al 2018](#).

² Current claims are curated at https://salishsearestoration.org/wiki/Continuous_Improvement/Claims