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Evaluation of USFF's Environmental Outreach Initiatives

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Evaluation of USFF's Environmental Initiatives

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

This Naval Research Program (NRP) project evaluated US Fleet Forces Command's (USFF) environmental assessment program. This study addressed five questions:

1. What is the best practice guidance from the extant literature about environmental outreach program evaluation? *Deliverable: U.S. Navy Environmental Outreach Evaluation Guidebook*
2. Using environmental assessment best practices, how robust is USFF's environmental outreach assessment. *Deliverable: Assessment of USFF's Environmental Outreach Program 2014–2017*
3. How USFF might improve their media analysis to better achieve their objectives and desired stakeholder effects? *Deliverable: Media Daily Clip Tracking and Coding System*
4. Do existing activities measures of performance (MOPs) link to desired stakeholder effects measures of effectiveness (MOEs) and commander's intent? What environmental assessment dashboard might be relevant for planners and leaders? *Deliverable: Evaluation of Existing Tools and Platforms*
5. What are the perceptions of selected regulators about U.S. Navy environmental practices? *Deliverable: Regulator Survey Results*

The study's output includes: An *Environmental Outreach Guidebook* that can be used across the US Navy to better plan and execute their environmental outreach programs. It draws on national best practices and exemplars in outreach assessment. Second, using standards from the *Guidebook*, we provided a systematic evaluation for four years of USFF's environmental outreach assessments, 2014-2017. This part of the study provides strengths and suggestions for USFF's environmental outreach program improvement. Third, we developed a daily media clips tracking and coding system as a way of monitoring environment-related issues that could predict concerns and influence Navy operations for leading, lagging, and coincident measures. Fourth, we developed a procedure to evaluate return on investment for outreach activities as well as an example dashboard that could be useful for senior leaders to monitor and assess outreach programs. Last, we facilitated the development and implementation of a regulator feedback system that would allow USFF to better understand how these important stakeholders view USFF's efforts.

Keywords: *environmental, outreach, program evaluation, media trend analysis*

Background

USFF implemented a formal environmental outreach program in 2013. Their strategy is designed to reach key stakeholders with fact-based messages about Navy environmental policy and efforts. The desired end state is increased support amongst the public, environmental regulators, non-government organizations (NGO)s and scientific and regulatory communities for USFF and Navy at-sea training activities and

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basing actions. USFF's outreach strategy is to determine its effectiveness and has expanded over the recent years from a local/regional focus to a national focus.

Research of local, national, and global news, including reviews of internet blogs and social media sites, has indicated that in recent years, well-funded NGOs have devoted considerable amounts of time, effort, and money to broadcasting the negative impacts of Navy training at sea, particularly with regard to the use of active sonar. Also of great interest to them has been alleged negative health effects of jet noise and the intentional harming of marine life via ship strikes and live fire exercises. Litigation against the Navy has been their weapon of choice.

For obvious reasons, misperceptions and misinformation have the potential of negatively affecting Fleet training activities and operational readiness (e.g. stricter regulations, injunctive relief, and negative comments on environmental planning documents).

Each year USFF conducts an annual assessment and evaluation of their environmental outreach program. With several years of data, USFF wanted an outside evaluation of their assessments with a desire to take program assessment to the next level.

Findings and Conclusions

This NRP project was designed to evaluate USFF's environmental outreach program and provide suggestions for improving their programmatic efforts. The idea is to use this as a model for all Navy environmental outreach efforts around the world. To accomplish this end, we addressed five study questions and provided associated deliverables.

SECTION 1: US NAVY ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH GUIDEBOOK

RQ1: What is the best practice guidance from the extant literature about environmental outreach program evaluation?

The *Environmental Outreach Guidebook* draws from best practices in program evaluation. Our research team conducted a literature search as well as examined organizations that are seen as exemplars in outreach assessment. Because of our search, we developed a short guidebook that can be used by Environment Outreach Programs across the US Navy.

Outreach evaluation is the systematic assessment of how outreach activities affects program goals. Evaluation provides an opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses of current activities, to critically evaluate how activities and programs are (or are not) having an impact on high priority stakeholders, and to generate concrete recommendations for improvement in outreach activities.

Common questions that serve as the foundation of any evaluation effort include:

- 1) Did we meet our objectives?
- 2) Did we have an impact?

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- 3) Who benefits from the evaluation?
- 4) Should our efforts be continued and/or replicated elsewhere?

Effective evaluation involves inquiry and learning, and the results provide a foundation for informed decision-making. Ultimately, program evaluation informs good resource management.

The *Environmental Outreach Guidebook* provides a systematic process for developing a logic model that links inputs to activities to outputs, outcomes, and ultimately to impact.

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT OF USFF'S ENVIRONMENTAL OUTREACH PROGRAM 2014-2017

RQ2: Using environmental assessment best practices, how robust is USFF's environmental outreach assessment.

The Naval Postgraduate School research team undertook a systematic review of USFF's assessment strategy for environmental outreach efforts. We reviewed four years of Environmental Outreach End-of-Year (EOY) assessments, along with a wide range of supplemental documents, and conducted a series of in-depth interviews. This allowed us to gain a deep understanding of how USFF's assessment strategy has evolved over time and to determine the strengths and weaknesses of current efforts.

We included a rating of USFF's efforts on each step in the framework for the past four years. This longitudinal analysis provides insights into which areas have been improving over time, and which have remained at status quo. We also included concrete recommendations we believe will allow USFF to improve their environmental outreach strategy.

SECTION 3: DAILY MEDIA CLIPS TRACKING AND CODING SYSTEM

RQ3: How might USFF improve their media analysis to better achieve their objectives and desired stakeholder effects?

Effective tracking and evaluation of strategic outreach efforts requires regular monitoring of vast and widespread sources of data. From traditional media to social media to public comments, opinions and perspectives of stakeholders are being constantly shared. This media demonstration project takes one of USFF's regular sources of data, daily news clips, and provides a simple, yet powerful means of tracking changes in volume, content, and coverage over time.

The USFF press clip process is robust in its regularity and reliance on deep tacit subject matter expertise. The simple process allows clippings to be updated to include new and emergent topics and the in-email text allows quick and easy perusal of media conversations. The current process is limited, however, in its ability to look across time and at trends in topic coverage. This makes alignment of this information with trends in other data sources, such as public comments, or legal or legislative activities, as well as alignment with communication strategy more difficult.

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To demonstrate the increased analytical power of compiling the daily clips into a single data set, we created an excel template that can be used as the basis for beginning to monitor trends over time. The sheet we created requires that the basic pieces of information from each article (title, byline, source, text, etc.) be inserted into the sheet and then using formulas, each article is automatically coded for a set of topics. These topics can be updated, expanded or deleted over time to keep up with changing needs and results can be depicted in charts or tables to create a shared understanding of stakeholder perceptions.

SECTION 4: TOOLS FOR EVALUATING ACTIVITY IMPACT - ROI AND DASHBOARD

RQ4: Do existing activities (MOPs) link to desired stakeholder effects (MOEs) and commander's intent?

What environmental assessment dashboard might be relevant for planners and leaders?

Assessment of outreach efforts requires evaluation of return on investment of individual outreach activities. This deliverable provides a set of exercises to help USFF assign an ROI to ongoing activities. The exercises provide five steps:

1. Develop theories of stakeholder change as a result of USFF Outreach activities
2. Generate hypotheses about the link between USFF activities and stakeholder impact
3. Track activity outcomes using the stakeholder tracking chart
4. Assign resources to individual activities
5. Compare outcomes of stakeholder changes relative to resources invested

As requested by the sponsor of this study, our results can be used to upgrade USFF's environmental assessment program. We have identified specific strengths and areas for improvement and provided several tools that could be implemented in their data gathering, trend analysis, and assessment efforts.

SECTION 5: REGULATOR SURVEY FEEDBACK

RQ 5: What are the perceptions of selected regulators about U.S. Navy environmental practices?

Important to USFF's effort are the approvals that are given by national, regional, or local regulators. Our research team facilitated the development of feedback instrument that was administered to selected regulators. The purpose of this part of the study were fivefold:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Navy's efforts to inform regulatory agencies of the impact its training and testing activities have on the environment.
- Assess perceived strengths and weaknesses relevant to collaboration during consultations.
- Determine if the Navy has been successful in demonstrating its commitment to incorporating environmental stewardship into testing and training efforts whenever possible.
- Identify subject matter areas in which the Navy could improve recognition of expertise and capabilities.

Recommendations for Further Research

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Future research could be conducted to further develop and test traditional and social media algorithms. Additionally, operations research analysts or economists could further develop a ROI model that could more adequately assess a program's effectiveness.

Acronyms

EOY End-of-Year

MOE measures of effectiveness

MOP measures of performance

NGO non-government organization

NRP Naval Research Program

ROI return on investment

USFF US Fleet Forces Command