

*Engagement, Planning, Prioritization, Evaluation*  
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The Pacific Islands Ocean Observing System (PacIOOS) employs a variety of processes and people to guide programmatic priority setting and decision-making. Overall, the PacIOOS 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 Pacific. 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 Governing Council who work with the PacIOOS staff to balance the benefits, costs, and risks of the program's many projects and observing efforts at local, regional, and national levels.

### **PacIOOS Project Prioritization and Selection Process**

#### ***Stakeholder Engagement***

PacIOOS 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. PacIOOS 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 PacIOOS region. Input is gathered at community and in-person meetings, workshops, training sessions, focus groups, through webinar and web-based feedback services, online surveys, 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 and beyond. Through these ongoing and diverse modes of engagement, PacIOOS 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 PacIOOS staff lead efforts to engage stakeholders and ensure a continuous feedback loop with the PacIOOS staff, regional partners, and the IOOS program office. In addition to the Honolulu-based staff, PacIOOS hires and/or contracts liaisons to manage extension and stakeholder engagement work outside Hawaii. PacIOOS has liaisons in Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and American Samoa. The liaisons ensure regular engagement, stakeholder feedback, and input into the short-term annual priority setting as well as the long-term strategic planning.

## ***Governing Council***

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 PacIOOS through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). It is through the MOA signatories that the Governing Council members are nominated and elected. Signatories to the MOA populate electing cohorts (i.e., regional partners, Hawaii-specific partners, Palau-specific partners, etc.), each of which votes to determine their representative(s) to the Governing Council.

Governing Council Members provide general oversight and policy guidance, adopt implementing documents and strategic plans, and advise on major decisions for PacIOOS. The Council works with PacIOOS 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.

At each PacIOOS Governing Council meeting and its Executive Committee meeting (each meet once per year), PacIOOS staff members present the latest updates of engagement and partner development strategies and efforts. Every other year, the Governing Council elects a new Executive Committee. During these meetings, the Council discusses “representation” of the region in various ways, including composition of the Executive Committee and the broader Governing Council and who else to reach out to as potential MOA partners. These discussions are often in terms of sector and expertise, including indigenous representation. In this manner, the Council members help assure broad representation of stakeholder considerations.

## ***Strategic Planning and Priority Setting***

PacIOOS, through its Governing Council and rich stakeholder engagement process, executes annual work-plans that are designed to meet the long-range goals and objectives of the PacIOOS 5-year Strategic Framework. This Framework, adopted by the Governing Council, sets a 5-year planning horizon for the program, and is reviewed annually 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 PacIOOS co-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. PacIOOS 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 Governing Council 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, PacIOOS 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 PacIOOS 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 PacIOOS to select which projects to continue or discontinue. For more detail on this internal evaluation process, please review Ostrander et. al., 2019 at <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2019.00111/full>.

### ***Summary***

An ongoing prioritization, strategic planning, and annual evaluation process provides PacIOOS with the tools necessary to assess whether the investments made by the system are meeting the goals and objectives identified in the Strategic Framework. Stakeholder needs 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 Governing Council, which is focused on meeting the goals/objectives of the Strategic Framework while balancing user needs, regional priorities, and system capabilities and strengths. Over the course of a five-year planning cycle, long-range strategic goals and 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 Pacific Islands region. The Strategic Framework is updated and released every 5 years.