

NOAA Social Science Committee Terms of Reference

1. Background

The NOAA Social Science Committee (Committee) was created to advise the agency on policy, promote operational consistency, and advance strategy on decisions involving social science, methods, data collection, and organization infrastructure. Social science, as defined by the NOAA Science Advisory Board, is the process of describing, explaining and predicting human behavior and institutional structures in interaction with their environments. Social science is not a singular discipline, but rather a collection of associated disciplines that spans the social, behavioral, and economic sciences. A Committee body that considers the complete spectrum of the social sciences throughout NOAA will increase and streamline the integration of social science into NOAA's operations. To maintain this charge the Chief Economist, or designee, shall hold a seat as an Advisory Member in the following Councils: Science Council (SC), NOAA Observing System Council (NOSC), NOAA Ocean and Coastal Council (NOCC), and NOAA Data Governance Committee (DGC). The Committee reports to the NOAA Science Council.

Social science research plays a critical role in understanding societal needs, improving NOAA's information and services, and evaluating agency outcomes. Research involving the social, behavioral and economic sciences can help NOAA:

- Understand societal needs and decision making to determine which research priorities, scientific capabilities including products and services, and improvements therein, are the most needed and/or will produce the greatest societal benefit,
- Assess how people interpret and perceive threats as well as manage and respond to risks relevant to changes in climate, weather, oceans, and coasts,
- Design products and services that maximize the utility of NOAA data while integrating an understanding of end-user decision needs,
- Consider human behavior and integrate social science data across the full spectrum of research design through the application of results,
- Evaluate societal outcomes and quantify the economic value of NOAA's products and services.

2. Purpose

The Committee shall be NOAA's main advisory body for matters related to social science, whose mission is to strengthen, coordinate, and integrate the social science research and analysis capabilities at agency and interagency levels. Topics covered by the Committee will span the social, behavioral, and economic sciences and consider methodologies, emerging issues, as well as policy, planning, and data needs. The Committee shall advise the Chief Economist and other NOAA leadership bodies, as appropriate, on current and future research and data needs as well

as challenges and suggested approaches to overcome them. The Committee shall also provide support for the successful implementation of the [NAO 216-124](#) Policy on Development and Coordination of Economic Analysis and Statistics for NOAA as well as Acts and Executive Orders, such as [The Evidence Act \(PL 115-435\)](#), [The NOAA Weather Act \(PL 115-25\)](#), or [EO 13985](#). The Committee shall address issues related to research, operations, and decision-making by working to:

- Review and provide feedback and comments on decisional documents, including policy directives, from the strategic councils such as Science Council, NOCC, and NOSC. Topics of interest may also be raised by the SC, NOCC, NOSC, and DGC for the Committee to consider
- Advise the Science Council on strategic direction and emerging opportunities that integrate and expand the social, behavioral, and economic science components of NOAA's research activities and enterprise.
- Identify critical issues that constrain agency capacity for social science research and impede implementation; engage with relevant decision-making bodies to scope and address such issues (e.g., Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) Information Collection Requests (ICRs), social data access, storage and archival).
- Report and communicate progress and achievements to NOAA and major stakeholders (Science Council, Science Advisory Board, National Academy of Sciences, Academia, etc.).
- Assess corporate/agency policy, data, and staffing capacities relative to the social, behavioral, and economic sciences and champion those necessary to meet agency strategic plan goals, objectives, and mandates.
- Identify corporate priorities and major research questions in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences that will support NOAA's mission.
- Convene and facilitate partnership discussions across NOAA and with other federal agencies interested in partnering.
- Identify and elevate issues that the Chief Economist or designees might help resolve from a corporate standpoint.

3. Membership

The committee shall consist of:

- The NOAA Chief Economist or designee.
- Up to three representatives from each NOAA Line Office (LO) and Staff Office (SO), preferably, with at least one social science practitioner and one person (social scientist or not) responsible for budgetary and/or policy decisions, such as division or branch chief, director, or program/portfolio manager and be able to provide strategic advice to their LOs or SOs leadership. The LO Science Council representatives shall coordinate with their respective LOs leadership and recommend the LO representative to the Chief

Economist or designee. Regardless of the number of representatives a LO provides, the Committee will have no more than three official LO representatives nominated by the LOs/SOs, each of whom must be a federal NOAA employee.

- All SOs are welcome to nominate a representative. We recommend the following SOs to have at least one representative: Office of Education, Office of the Chief Administration Officer, Office of the Chief Information Officer, Office of Human Capital, and Office of Civil Rights and Inclusion.
- The Social Science Committee also actively engages other NOAA entities such as the Data Governance Committee, the Service Delivery Team, and the Paperwork Reduction Act Working Group and encourages cross-participation between these groups.
- The Performance, Risk, and Social Science Office (PRSSO) in service to the NOAA Chief Economist will also participate and support the Social Science Committee.
- Non-voting participation is welcome and open, at the discretion of the LOs, to all other employees or contractors working on social science at NOAA.
- Designated Line Office (LO) representatives are expected to dedicate approximately 2 hrs monthly for meetings and other needed activities, such as LO and SO engagement, document review, and approval.
- If the LO or SO official representative cannot attend the meeting, an alternative should be identified.

In addition to the Chief Economist (or designee), the Committee shall have two co-chairs nominated by their LOs/SOs on a rotating basis every two years. In the absence of nominations, LO representatives shall select co-chairs by consensus. Along with the Chief Economist or designees, the co-chairs shall also help coordinate with the Science Council and work to achieve consensus on pertinent issues.

4. Meetings

The Committee meetings will be held regularly, approximately six times per year, or as needed. Agenda and materials will be emailed to participants at least one day in advance. A call-in number will be provided. Virtual meeting capabilities may be available, including live video and presentations, as appropriate. Each LO will provide executive secretarial support (Executive Secretary) on a 6-month rotation basis.

5. Decision Making Process

The Committee shall gather input and feedback from its broader membership¹ in matters brought before the Committee. Committee decisions will be made by the LO representatives. The group

¹ For the purpose of the ToR, broader membership is defined as individuals who regularly attend NOAA Social Science Committee meetings but are not a Line Office Representative

will strive for consensus and, in the event no consensus can be achieved, a vote among the LO representatives shall be organized. LO representatives in attendance, in person or virtual, may vote. For research-focused issues, the Committee shall engage and provide advice to the Science Council. The Chairs reserve the right to make final decisions that are within the scope of the position's authority.