

# 2009 OPWG Support and Opportunities Committee Plan

*“Outlining Avenues that Foster the Recruitment and Retention of a Professional, Equitably Employed, Workforce of Observers”*

## **I. Background and Objectives:**

In the context of the International Fisheries Observer and Monitoring Conference (IFOMC) series, the work of the Support and Opportunities Committee of the OPWG addresses such topics as: conflict resolution instruction, grievances procedures, counseling options, awarding credit where due, inclusion in professional fora, and assistance for observer advancement among related careers.

With regards to the continued work of the OPWG Support and Opportunities Committee, certain important Observer professionalism topics have been highlighted as focus areas to investigate further. Opportunities for observers to advance in a related careers; support for observers to attend professional fora (such as conferences); and, the benefits associated with moving between observer programs continue to all be important topics in the workings of the S & O Committee. This stage of information gathering is centered about conducting “Focused Interviews” designed to dig deep from within important Support and Opportunities topical areas, with the 2009 OPWG driving theme of *Outlining Avenues that Foster the Recruitment and Retention of a Professional, Equitably Employed, Workforce of Observers*.

With the intention of constructing a more solid foundation in regards to the *OPWG Support and Opportunities* area of study, this Committee hopes to gather more detailed yet broaden-scoped information during 2009. This Plan is primarily meant to act as a template for facilitating Committee interviews leading up to and to continue during the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC. Nevertheless certain adjustments to this plan may arise depending on the context of interviews conducted and as Committee work progresses.

## **II. Interview Target Topics:**

**Primary Target Topics:** Following, are OPWG S & O Committee *primary* target topics for Focused Interviews to be conducted before and during the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC:

- 1. Career Advancement** – Our goal regarding this topic is to detail the types of advancement opportunities that currently exist for observers, as well as identifying desired forms of advancement that do not currently exist.
- 2. Support to attend professional fora** – Our goal regarding this topic is to see if and how the support (assumed as monetary support) to attend professional meetings (such as the IFOMC) has influence on the livelihood of Observers and retention of a professional Observer workforce.
- 3. Movement between observer programs** – Our goal regarding this topic is to examine if the ability to easily move between programs is considered a major benefit to observers, and how such movement could be fostered.

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**Secondary targets:** The following are OPWG S & O Committee *secondary* target topics for Focused Interviews to be conducted before and during the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC. Though these topics are important to the continued work of the OPWG S & O Committee, they are currently not our priority focus:

1. **Life counseling and training** – Our goal regarding this topic is to see if and how the availability or lack of availability of counseling (e.g. post-cruise life-at-sea interviews, substance abuse, relationship, financial) and training (e.g. conflict resolution, sexual harassment, preparation for the isolation of life at sea) impacts the recruitment and retention of observers.
2. **Observer evaluations** - Our goal regarding this topic is to see how various observer programs use observer evaluations; both as a means to help the observer improve his/her performance or to allow the observer to give feedback as to how the observer program works.

***\*\*\*For each of the S& O Committee interview targets goals, we also aim to identify the priority interviewees place these issues among other issues (e.g. compensation, workplace safety), which may influence the recruitment and retention of observers.***

### **III. Interview Questions:**

Interview questions listed here are meant to act as a template, though questions during actual interviews may vary.

#### **Primary Interview Questions:**

##### **1. Career Advancement:**

- a. Do you feel that your experience being an observer provides opportunities for future career advancement? Please explain your answer.
- b. What specifically is a typical career path in your observer program?  
Examples include: Observer>Debriefeer>Coordinator>Program Manager, Observer>\$>Graduate School>Scientist.
  - i. Do you feel like you are progressing on the career path you have outlined?
- c. Rank the following possible career development options in order of how important they would be to you if your observer program provided them:
  - i. Involvement as a co-author on scientific papers
  - ii. Partial or full support to attend training classes (e.g. USCG Captain's License; computer language workshops, etc)
  - iii. Partial or full support to attend classes at a college or university
  - iv. Extra pay to be used as you please. For your answer, assume that an equal \$ value is placed on answers i, ii, and iii.
- d. How would you feel if your observer program offered to support your career advancement, but required a long-term commitment from you?
  - i. For example, if the observer program offered to pay for one year college; would you commit to 2 years of observing?

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2. **Support to attend professional fora (i.e. conferences):**
  - a. Given that observer programs often have limited resources, which are most important to you in terms of supporting your attendance at a professional meeting:
    - i. Reimbursement of travel expenses
    - ii. Waiver of meeting/conference fees, or
    - iii. Being paid for the time you are at the meeting?
  - b. Do you feel that support for an observer's attendance at a meeting should carry the assumption that the observer will participate in the meeting other than just "being there"? (Examples: give a talk, present a poster; help with conference set up, etc.)
  - c. On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being the most important); where does support to attend meetings rank among the various issues that might keep you going as a career observer? Think carefully before answering about things like health benefits, increased pay, better working conditions, etc.
  
3. **Observer movement between programs:**
  - a. **For Observers that have worked with multiple programs:**
    - i. Provide some comments on how you were able to do this, and any problems you encountered.
    - ii. Suggestions for how your transition could have been made easier.
    - iii. To what extent do you feel your initial training assisted with training/duties required for additional programs you worked with
  - b. **For Observer that have not worked with other programs:**
    - i. Do you have interest in working with other programs? If yes, please indicate what reasons are applicable to you:
      1. Gain experience with different/varied species and gear types to further your observer career.
      2. Gain more experience to transition from observing to other positions or areas of work
      3. Opportunities to experience new people and cultures
      4. Opportunities for travel
      5. Opportunities to earn higher wages or obtain better benefits
      6. Looking to off-set the seasonal nature of your current program (work opposite seasons)
    - ii. Have you explored working with others programs in: your own region/country/another country/an international commission/multi-national organization?
      1. If yes, have you explored working with other programs, and do you feel that you could easily move between observer programs?
      2. If no, what best describes why:
        - a. I would have to move (i.e. find a new home) and I don't want to or can't
        - b. I would get paid less than I am getting paid now

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- c. Another program wouldn't hire me because I don't have the right experience or education
  - d. It is too much of a hassle to learn new data forms, codes, etc.
  - e. Other (please explain).
- c. **For Service Providers/Contractors etc (anyone who recruits/hires observers):**
  - i. What are your current eligibility requirements for Observers
    - 1. Education
    - 2. Nationality/Citizenship requirements
    - 3. Work permits /visas
    - 4. Experience
  - ii. Do you help facilitate any of the requirements for the first point?
    - 1. How?
    - 2. Travel costs/paid training/gear/accommodation?
  - iii. Current Training Protocols:
    - 1. Length and scope
    - 2. Required/recommended pre-training certifications?
- d. **For All:**
  - i. Do you feel you could benefit from/use "Observer Professionalism Central" (as outlined in last point of Discussion from last conference proceedings)
    - 1. How could you benefit from/use this?

**Secondary Interview Questions:**

**1. Life counseling and training:**

- a. Does the program(s) you work with offer any counseling options to observers? If you haven't used, how sure of your answer are you?
  - i. If so, please detail these counseling options.
  - ii. If so, have you used these options ever? How?
  - iii. How does each of these counseling options affect the retention of professional observers in your program(s)?
- b. What training does your program(s) provide to observers in regards to subjects such as conflict resolution, sexual harassment, life at sea, substance abuse, etc.?
  - i. How does each of these trainings affect the retention of professional observers in your program(s)?

**2. Observer evaluations:**

- a. How are observers evaluated in the program(s) you work with?
  - i. Are observers rewarded (monetarily, special assignments, otherwise) for exceptional work? Explain.
    - 1. How does each of these rewards affect the retention of professional observers in your program(s)?
- b. Do Observer Evaluations help to improve the performance of Observers in the program(s) which you work with? Explain.

- c. Are Observers also able to provide feedback/evaluations to the program(s) in which they work? How?
  - i. How does/would this affect the program(s) in which you work?

#### **IV. Scope of Interviewees:**

The main focus group for OPWG Support and Opportunities Committee interviews are active and prior Fisheries Observers, though other stakeholders (i.e. management-agency personnel, observer provider/contractor personnel, Observer data end-users, Observer Union personnel, fishers, industry personnel, NGO's) may also be sought and included in this process. The Observer stratum may be divided by length of experience or multi-program experience criteria.

#### **V. Interview Techniques:**

1. This plan is available by way of the IFOMC website [www.ifomc.com](http://www.ifomc.com) so that it may be referenced and considered prior to interviews.
2. The primary techniques used for conducting interviews will be via: in person, on-line correspondence, telephone, or post. Interviews may be digitally recorded.
3. Interviews may be conducted over multiple correspondences.

#### **VI. 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC Observer Professionalism Workshop Proceedings:**

1. The OPWG-coordinated Observer Professionalism Workshop at the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC is scheduled to commence in the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the conference – from 08:30am to 12:00 (noon/lunchtime) on Thursday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>.
2. This Workshop is being run currently with the plenary session and will be in a separate room than the main conference room- signs will be posted.
3. 08:30am to 09:00am: will consist of a brief orientation of the Workshop and an audience-participant discussion.
4. 09:30am to 12:00: The OPWG Workshop room will be arranged with separate stations for each of the four areas of study of the OPWG- Wages and Benefits, Support and Opportunities, Employment Standards, and Social Equity. This time is designated for OPWG Workshop participants to walk about to the station(s) of their choice, providing their feedback (via interviews) to the workings of those specific OPWG committees.
5. If someone does not get a chance to participate or complete an interview at the Workshop and would like to participate, arrangements can be made to complete interviews either during the remainder of the conference or soon thereafter..
6. Plans are available on the IFOMC website and will be available at the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC.

#### **VII. OPWG Focused Interview Outputs:**

1. An overview of all OPWG work leading up to and at the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC will be published in the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC Proceedings document.
2. Complete findings from the OPWG's "Focused Interview" stage of information gathering will be available within a year following the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC. This will be a separate output from the 6<sup>th</sup> IFOMC Proceedings document.
3. The OPWG will also follow-up with all interview participants following the conference, ensuring that they have received these findings.

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## **VIII. OPWG Support and Opportunities Committee Members:**

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