

SAFMC Citizen Science Operations Advisory Panel
Webinar Meeting Summary
6/4/2026

Welcome and Meeting Overview

- Staff gave a short welcome and introduced the SAFMC Citizen Science Committee chair (Amy Dukes); AP members introduced themselves
- Staff reviewed the webinar goals:
 - *Provide update on Citizen Science Program activities*
 - *Share final Citizen Science Program Indicators and discuss plans for tracking and sharing more broadly*
 - *Discuss Citizen Science Program growth strategies and approaches*
 - *Discuss AP membership and reappointments*

Citizen Science Program Updates

- Staff provided a brief update on the Citizen Science Program and project activities that have occurred over the past several months
- AP members asked for additional information on the SMILE project survey work and on shark depredation information collected through SAFMC Release

Development and Use of Program Indicators

- To evaluate progress, the Citizen Science Program will conduct a review of activities under each goal, objective, and strategy every five years; between these reviews, the Program will annually track key indicators associated with each goal to assess progress, identify opportunities for improvement, and measure program impact
- Indicators were developed with input from the Citizen Science Advisory Panels and reviewed by the Council at its December 2025 meeting
- Staff presented the final set of 14 program indicators, including accompanying infographics, outlined plans for tracking the indicators, and requested input on effective ways to share indicator information and potential audiences
- AP members felt the infographics were clear, visually appealing, and easy to understand
- Members recommended sharing the indicators with a variety of audiences, including fishermen, Council APs during spring / fall meetings, SSC, researchers, and attendees at professional meetings and conferences (e.g., AFS chapter meetings); members also suggested using the indicators as an outreach tool to introduce the Program to researchers who have not previously collaborated with it, potentially helping build new partnerships
- Members noted that the indicators could also support volunteer recruitment; suggested outreach included developing materials for locations where potential volunteers seek information (e.g., tackle shops and dive shops) and using messaging that highlights the Program's growing community of participants (e.g., emphasizing the number of volunteers already contributing to projects)

- AP emphasized the importance of tailoring indicator communications to different audiences, highlighting those indicators most relevant to fishermen, scientists, managers, or the general public
- Members suggested that indicator information may have greater reach and credibility when shared by trusted members of the fisheries community, project participants, and partner organizations, in addition to Council communication channels; developing easily shareable communication products could help expand dissemination
- AP also discussed opportunities to recognize volunteers through appreciation events (either in person or virtually); while in-person events may provide the greatest benefit, members acknowledged logistical challenges associated with the Program's geographic scope and diverse projects; suggested seeking input from the Citizen Science Projects Advisory Panel on effective approaches for volunteer recognition

Citizen Science Program Growth

- Staff presented three potential priority areas to guide the Citizen Science Program's next phase of growth:
 - **Sustain the Program and Build Capacity**
 - Continue strengthening and improving the Program's current work.
 - Expand strategic partnerships to support long-term program capacity.
 - Sustain existing projects that continue to address priority data gaps.
 - Develop new projects that address additional high-priority research needs.
 - Increase engagement across fishing, scientific, and management communities.
 - **Integrate Collaborative Science into Fisheries Science and Management**
 - Increase awareness of collaborative science projects across fishing, scientific, and management communities.
 - Identify additional pathways for collaborative science data to inform stock assessments and fisheries management.
 - Strengthen feedback loops to ensure project participants receive updates on project findings and how data are used in science and management.
 - **Improve Communication and Coordination of Collaborative Science**
 - Increase coordination among organizations and individuals conducting collaborative science in the South Atlantic and across regions to share lessons learned, best practices, and opportunities for collaboration.
 - Explore working with partners to organize a South Atlantic Collaborative Research Summit, modeled after the Northeast Cooperative Research Summit.
- Staff also shared information from the Collaborative Science Workshop held in May 2026 in Charleston, South Carolina, which brought together representatives from the Citizen Science Program, the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, and the Skipper Science Partnership; the workshop has led to development of a collaborative, cross-regional proposal for NOAA Fisheries' Broad Agency Announcement funding opportunity

- AP members were supportive of the proposed priority areas; members emphasized the importance of sustaining the Program's existing projects that continue to fulfill data gaps while carefully expanding capacity to address additional research priorities; noted that the Program's growth has been successful because it has been deliberate and well planned, and encouraged maintaining that thoughtful approach as new opportunities arise
- Members strongly supported exploring a South Atlantic Collaborative Research Summit; those familiar with the Northeast Cooperative Research Summit noted that it provides valuable opportunities to showcase collaborative research, build relationships among fishermen, scientists, and managers, and foster informal learning through field visits to working waterfronts, fish houses, processing facilities, marinas, and fishing operations; members felt a similar event in the South Atlantic could strengthen partnerships and highlight collaborative science occurring throughout the region
- Members emphasized that future growth should continue to focus on the "citizen" component of citizen science by expanding participation from fishermen and other volunteers; suggestions included identifying ways to scale participation and ensure projects provide clear value and meaningful feedback to participants
- Members also encouraged strengthening relationships with successful collaborative research programs in the Northeast and other regions; building on these partnerships could expand opportunities for collaboration, improve information sharing, and increase competitiveness for future funding opportunities
- Members discussed the importance of improving communication between collaborative research programs and fisheries management bodies; encouraged developing more consistent pathways for informing management and assessment teams about ongoing collaborative research projects and their findings
- Members also noted the value of reviving opportunities for researchers to regularly share project results through in-person meetings or workshops, which could improve coordination, increase visibility of collaborative science efforts, and help recruit new participants and partners

Advisory Panel Membership and Appointments

- Staff provided an overview of the Citizen Science Operations AP membership; AP currently consists of nine seats: five Citizen Science AP members, one member each from the SSC, SEFSC, and SERO, and one representative from ASMFC/ACCSP, a position added by the Council at its December 2025 meeting
- AP appointments are typically for three-year terms, with no term limits.
- Staff reviewed the terms of current AP members. Four members' terms will expire in December 2026: Scott Baker, Wally Bubley, Rob Cheshire, and Michelle Duval. Staff plans to reach out in the coming months to determine their interest in reappointment. Scott Baker and Wally Bubley have indicated they would like to be reappointed, while Michelle Duval has expressed interest in stepping down when her term ends.
- Staff noted that the Citizen Science Program SOPPS do not specify chair or vice chair positions for the Operations AP; group discussed whether establishing these roles would be beneficial

- Members noted that the AP is relatively small and that meetings have functioned well without formal leadership roles; others suggested that having a chair and vice chair could provide additional support to staff by helping to develop meeting agendas and serving as sounding boards between meetings
- AP supported staff bringing a recommendation to the Council to establish chair and vice chair positions for the Citizen Science Operations AP

Webinar Attendance:

AP Members: Scott Baker, Wally Bubley, Michelle Duval, Will Heyman, Kathy Knowlton, Nikhil Mehta

Council Members: Amy Dukes

Other Attendees: Beth Aguilar, Sydney Bates, Robert Hale, Tia Offner, Mick Walsh, Barrett Colby

Council Staff: Julia Byrd, Meg Withers, Ashley Oliver, Nick Smillie, Kate Chatman (contractor)