Strengthening the Value of the National Network of Fusion Centers by Leveraging Specialization: Defining “Centers of Analytical Excellence”

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on the main findings of a project sponsored by the National Fusion Center Association to more precisely define the term “Centers of Analytic Excellence.” Secretary Janet Napolitano, Department of Homeland Security previously used this term to focus public attention on the analytical component of the fusion process. Drawing upon the input of a select group of federal, state, and local intelligence expert professionals through the application of the Delphi Method, the article proposes the (re)definition of the term “Centers of Analytical Excellence” to mean a validation of a fusion center’s demonstrated excellence in a particular subject area of analytical methodology. This is a significant departure from the sense in which this term has been used previously and provides a next state for individual fusion centers that aspire to share their analytic competencies across a national network. This article also discusses a number of additional perspectives regarding the state of analysis in fusion centers as raised by the experts consulted in the project.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent history of the National Network of Fusion Centers, the expression “If you have seen one fusion center you have seen one fusion center” was used to emphasize the multiplicity of ways that fusion centers were developing. It also demonstrated the need for a nationwide effort to standardize processes and capabilities across all state and major urban area fusion centers. While it remains important that fusion centers maintain uniform baseline capabilities, today there is a renewed interest in acknowledging the value individual fusion centers can provide with unique expertise and specializations.

This should be no surprise since the strength and influence of the larger and older United States Intelligence Community (IC) derives as much from the individuality of its core members as from its commitment to collaboration. Each of the sixteen IC member agencies has a different purpose and function and therefore different strength that adds to the power of the collective federal intelligence network. With the best practices of the IC as a model for success, one could argue that the same attribute of specialization should be extended to the network of fusion centers. This notion of specialization among state and major urban area fusion centers is taking shape through the recognition that fusion centers with specialized expertise should have the opportunity to contribute their special strengths to the larger network as Centers of Analytical Excellence.

Developing a set of common operating procedures and capabilities across the network made collaboration and cooperation between fusion centers achievable. It united a diverse group of centers not only around a common cause of securing the homeland but also around a common framework for communicating and doing business. Broadening the ways in which individual fusion centers can contribute within the network will enrich the collaborative power of the network without threatening either the unity of purpose or their ability to interact successfully. This article contends that developing Centers of Analytical Excellence is an important next step toward strengthening America’s homeland and hometown defenses. Drawing upon the input of a select group of federal, state, and local intelligence expert professionals, the article redefines the term “Centers of Analytical Excellence” to capture this forward looking vision of a collaborative network in which the individual nodes can share a common approach while developing specialized areas of excellence.
THE ANATOMY OF A FUSION CENTER

Fusion centers are multiagency task forces designed for receiving, gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information and intelligence among constituencies that have a law enforcement, counter terrorism, public safety, or homeland security mission or focus. The purpose of a fusion center is to aid law enforcement, homeland security, public safety, and private sector entities in better understanding their environments as they relate to the risk and threat of crime, terrorism, and other crises. Additionally, fusion centers are intended to serve as the primary focal point for information sharing among broad jurisdictions where multiple entities reside, such as a state or Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) region.

The catalyst behind the concept of fusion centers stemmed from the general admission, following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, that the nation’s law enforcement community’s information sharing and intelligence capability necessary to inform decision-makers about the threat of terrorism was both ineffective and inefficient. The fusion center concept started as grassroots efforts in jurisdictions like Arizona, Georgia, New York, and the Los Angeles region to fill the void of combining information and intelligence sources at the local level to ferret out terrorist activity, thereby underpinning a national effort to share information that could be used in overall preparedness efforts. Today, there are seventy-seven fusion centers designated by governors across the nation that integrate all aspects of public safety information. While their origin may have been rooted in counter terrorism, state and local officials have come to find fusion centers to be of equal importance for assessing crime and other homeland security trends or issues.

The federal government quickly realized the significance of the fusion center as a keystone in its national effort to share information needed to guard against terrorism and respond to national crises. The National Network of Fusion Centers was erected to bolster this much-needed capability. While the identification of the network itself may have stemmed from an informal designation given to the collaboration among federal interagency partners with state, local, tribal, and territorial partners, today it is used to formally recognize this national partnership. Moreover, it is this formal recognition that underpins a programmatic effort by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis (DHS I&A) to follow guidance derived from the Information Sharing Environment (ISE) established by the United States Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. Under that authority, DHS I&A in cooperation with the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) provides coordinated support to recognized fusion centers in a given area across the nation. DOJ has recognized the usefulness of fusion centers for identifying terrorist and criminal trends and processing suspicious activity reports in state and local jurisdictions. It is the recognition of these two federal departments that has fueled the growth of fusion centers since the concept first came to the fore early in the millennium.

The “National Network of Fusion Centers” has been embraced by the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice as a focal point of collaboration in support of federal counterterrorism efforts and other homeland security priorities. In fact, the 2010 National Security Strategy of the United States specifically cites fusion centers as a central element in preventing future acts of terrorism. Simply put, this decentralized and organically developed network is a national asset, and sustainment of that asset is a shared responsibility across all levels of government. In the absence of fusion centers, there is no other nationwide mechanism for leveraging the breadth and depth of more than two million public safety practitioners in every corner of the country for homeland security purposes. Notably, as seasoned intelligence experts and information analysts from all levels of government will concede, some of the most important information and actionable intelligence that we depend on to protect the country flows up, not down – the knowledge is collected at a granular State or local level and then fused to permit all levels of government to act decisively in the protection of Americans. That is a central
purpose for the fusion centers, and one that has been well-served by their existence. 7

Despite the fact that state and local law enforcement and homeland security professionals mainly staff fusion centers, these centers are also comprised of personnel and systems from the federal government. The DHS and FBI footprints within fusion centers serve as gateways to the intelligence community for state, local, and private sector entities. State and local fusion center analysts conduct assessments and produce intelligence products related to state and local level threats and risks that otherwise would not be addressed by federal authorities. This information is shared nationally, and provided to the federal government and the intelligence community to answer standing information needs related to homeland security.

While each fusion center enterprise may differ on how they refer to their respective intelligence product frameworks, the key assumption is that finished intelligence informs state and local decision-makers about the threat environment in a manner that supports planning, operations, resource allocation, and training. Achieving this dynamic requires fusion centers to answer four very important questions for their consumers:

• What has happened?
• What is happening?
• What is about to happen?
• What could happen? 8

In answering the above four questions, fusion centers across the network likely arrange their intelligence products in four distinct categories: investigative support/research products, situational awareness reports, analyses, and forecasts. 9 Investigative support/research products focus on past and current events and issues that require additional information for decision makers and investigators to better understand or to assist with the describing evidence of a crime. Situational awareness reports aim specifically at answering the question of what is happening in a particular environment or what is about to happen. Analytical products go a step further and determine the impact of an event, threat, or issue on a particular environment or constituency. Finally, forecasting products seek to answer the question of what may happen in the future that will require a policy decision, operations response, or resource allocation.

Each fusion center is responsible for determining who within their area of responsibility (AOR) requires information and intelligence products that address threat and risk related to crime, counter terrorism, and homeland security. These constituencies include law enforcement, public safety, emergency management, government, and private sector personnel and organizations. While the intelligence and information products created are based on the needs of the requestor, the decision maker individual fusion centers aim to inform runs the gamut from line level police, investigators, fire, and EMS personnel to mayors and governor; from attorney generals and homeland security advisors to state police superintendents to municipal police chief; from private sector security managers to emergency management and risk mitigation planners. 10 Each of these decision makers requires a different type of product or service from the fusion center to inform them about threat, risk, and problems within the environment.

Although fusion centers share many of the characteristics discussed in this section, there is no “standard model” of a fusion center, owing to resourcing, funding, and capability constraints. As the value of the fusion centers became more central to the counterterrorism intelligence and information sharing relationship between and amongst the federal government and the states and major urban areas, several initiatives were undertaken from 2006 to 2010 to build a platform for increased communication and collaboration. The first initiative produced the Guidelines for Fusion Centers (2006) and the related document Baseline Capabilities (2008). A second initiative undertook to evaluate how well the Guidelines and Baseline Capabilities had created the necessary conditions for desired levels of interoperability amongst fusion centers and between fusion centers and the federal government. This second initiative produced the Critical Operational
Capabilities (2010). The emphasis during the period 2006-2010 as reflected in these initiatives was on developing a more “standardized model” fusion center while recognizing that the diverse environments in which the fusion centers developed circumscribed the benefits of pushing all the way to a “standard model.”

PROJECT GENESIS AND OVERVIEW

For the past two years, Secretary Janet Napolitano, Department of Homeland Security, has highlighted the centrality of analysis in fusion center capability by calling them “Centers of Analytic Excellence” in an effort to focus public attention on this core component of the fusion process. The use of the term “Centers of Analytic Excellence” succeeded in drawing attention to the important role fusion centers play in securing their communities. As the term became more widely used, it raised an important question: What exactly is a “Center of Analytic Excellence?” While the genesis of the term may have been a speechwriting flourish, those in the fusion center community viewed it as an important opportunity to reflect on both the current and future state of analysis. Rather than leave it a tagline, several leaders in the National Network of Fusion Centers argued that exploring the definition of the term could positively impact the National Network by elevating the capability of analysis. In providing an answer to the question, it opens up the opportunity to illuminate a desired end state for fusion centers – an end state that could drive training, resources, and the sustainability of the analytical elements within fusion centers. Moreover, the definition could be a critical step in defining evaluative metrics for the analysis component in a fusion center.

The National Fusion Center Association convened a project team comprised of fifteen state and local fusion center analysts and DHS and FBI intelligence practitioners to research and craft a definition of Centers of Analytical Excellence. [See Appendix B for a list of participants.] This work resulted in a definition that depicts a Center of Analytical Excellence as a specialized component within the national network. The following definition recognizes the application of analytical techniques in a consistent manner that strengthens the nation’s information sharing environment:

**Proposed “Center of Analytical Excellence” Definition**

Centers of Analytical Excellence, as they relate to the National Network of Fusion Centers, are defined as those fusion centers that have demonstrated, and been recognized by an interagency committee for, an accomplished record of information fusion and analysis on a given topic or domain area that has demonstrably strengthened the network and provided value to the network’s customers. Centers are recognized because of their advanced proficiency in analysis, which includes high quality, accurate, timely, and actionable products, standing operating procedures and well-defined product lines, outreach and mentorship across the network and with other entities, and a focus on strategic outcomes and customer impact. Nominated Centers are evaluated by an interagency committee to ensure all qualifications are met or exceeded for this two-year designation.

This definition for Center of Analytical Excellence differs substantively from the original use of the term by Secretary Napolitano. Rather than a term that describes an aspiration that all fusion centers arrive at a point where they do “excellent” analysis as it relates to assessing the local implications of federal threat information, this definition recognizes fusion centers on the basis of specialized analytic expertise in a particular subject area or methodological approach.

In developing this definition, the group of subject matter experts involved in the project has charted a new possible future for the fusion center network that had not been previously envisioned. This future introduces the idea that specialization can complement the foundational investments in interoperability that so defined the development of fusion centers, especially
from 2006 to 2010. This article discusses what led to the definition of a Center of Analytical Excellence in this particular way as well as the broader findings by the project team. The article also identifies many of the challenges that fusion centers and their analysts face during this adolescent stage of development. Lastly, the article calls for an independent body, which will objectively recognize those fusion centers that have the demonstrated expertise and can leverage this capability across the national network.

METHODOLOGY

One of the guiding principles for this project was to use a research methodology that modeled the collaboration that has made the fusion center network so successful. The desired objective was to develop a definition of Center of Analytical Excellence that would reflect the expertise and perspectives not only of the research team but of the fusion center community. In this manner, the resulting definition would be founded upon a much richer basis than that of only a few individuals and also be more likely to be applicable across the diverse members of the fusion center network. The project team adopted the Delphi Method as its core research methodology because it enables a group of individuals to bring their collective expertise to bear on a complex problem in a structured manner. The Delphi Method also has the advantage of being a “tried and true” research method with proven success since its development by RAND in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Delphi Method typically utilizes a series of questionnaires that enable a group of individuals to express their opinions anonymously, learn the results of the group’s input, and then provide additional input on the basis of those results. The project team used a combination of three questionnaires and one one-and-a-half-day in-person group discussion to solicit input from a group of fifteen analytic experts nominated by each region of the fusion center network and the federal government. Since the quality of the Delphi Method depends to a great extent on the composition and expertise resident in the group of respondents, considerable attention was given to ensuring the nomination process resulted in the selection of well-respected experts within the fusion center community. The National Fusion Center Association led the nomination process that identified the experts. Each of the four National Fusion Center Association regions, represented by their regional co-chairs, identified those persons who exhibited a high degree of expertise in fusion center analysis or policy development from a regional area. In addition, DHS and FBI identified personnel from their agencies who are considered experts in the field of fusion centers and analysis. This group of analytic experts, chosen by the National Fusion Center Association and the federal government for their demonstrated analytical expertise, had ten days to respond to each questionnaire. The project team provided the group of analysts with a summary of the results of the previous questionnaire as the context for answering the subsequent questionnaires.

The project team used the first two questionnaires to explore general perspectives about what analytical excellence meant to the group, what the group of analytical experts viewed as their customers’ perspectives on analytic excellence, and how they distinguished between simply achieving the ability to do “good analysis” and becoming a Center of Analytical Excellence. The one-and-a-half-day off-site was used in between Questionnaires Two and Three as an intensive learning opportunity for the group and as an opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the potential qualities of the term, Centers of Analytical Excellence. The project team used the third questionnaire to solicit feedback from the group of analytical experts on the specific wording of a definition of Center of Analytical Excellence and the challenges that the group felt their fusion center might face in working toward becoming a Center of Analytical Excellence. [See Appendix A for the questions included in each questionnaire.] The use of three questionnaires and the offsite session brought the project methodology into accord with the classic Delphi method which assumes Delphi groups reach decision-making stability in four iterations of questions.
ARRIVING AT A PROPOSED DEFINITION

QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

The project team e-mailed the first questionnaire to the group of analytical experts (here on referred to simply as the “participants”) on May 1, 2011 and requested responses by May 10, 2011. The purpose of Questionnaire One was to set the stage for future discussion by soliciting input on what a Center of Analytical Excellence should be. In the absence of an existing definition (as noted previously, while the phrase had been used in speeches by the Secretary Napolitano, there was no explicit definition behind the phrase), the first step was simply to ask participants what they imagined a Center of Analytical Excellence would be. Questionnaire One included two questions,\(^ {17}\) the first asking about the fusion center perspective and the second asking participants to think about their customers’ perspectives.

**Question 1.A:** From your perspectives and experience, please describe what you imagine a Center of Analytical Excellence should be within the context of the future of fusion centers.

In the responses to Question 1.A, the project team did not see a definition for Center of Analytical Excellence emerge that differed significantly from a general definition of what “good” analysis is. The initial perspective from the group of experts was that a Center of Analytical Excellence was a fuller realization of a fusion center’s existing analytic capability rather than something new. In their responses, participants placed emphasis on ensuring that a Center of Analytical Excellence would be able to: produce both tactical and strategic analysis; customize products for a wide variety of customers; have access to necessary information; have well-trained analysts, who would become experts; and have sufficient resources. These aspects of their vision for a Center of Analytical Excellence resonate with the general concerns expressed by fusion centers about resources, training, access to information, and the need to balance tactical and strategic analysis.

**Question 1.B:** For this question, please put yourself in the “shoes” of fusion center customers. Based on your perspectives and experiences, please describe what you think fusion center customers envision when they hear the term Center of Analytical Excellence within the context of the future of fusion centers.

In the responses to the Question 1.B, there was no observable gap between what participants articulated as their own vision for a Center of Analytical Excellence (Question 1.A) and what they imagined their customers’ visions of a Center of Analytical Excellence to be. Many of the same themes about quality analysis emerged in both questions. There were some additional areas of focus, however, when participants discussed their customers’ perspectives. In particular, participants highlighted a concern that a significant part of their customer base is unclear as to what it wants from fusion centers much less from a “Center of Analytical Excellence.” The participants did not suggest that customers have a negative view of fusion centers but instead made a general observation that their customers have not yet figured out how to best integrate the fusion center and its products into their own business processes. Some remarks indicated that customers may be experiencing difficulties in articulating concrete requirements for fusion centers and this may have complicated participants’ abilities to narrowly define what a Center of Analytical Excellence would be from their customers’ perspectives. These perspectives align with other research findings that suggest fusion centers are “undergoing a marketing phase” where some customers understand them and buy-in while at the same time “they are not yet equally or well-understood by the collective law enforcement community.”\(^ {18}\)

QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

The project team e-mailed the second questionnaire to participants on June 1 and requested responses by June 10. As noted above, after analyzing the results of Questionnaire One, a specific definition of Center of Analytical Excellence did not appear to emerge either from the fusion centers’ perspectives or from their customers’ visions of what such a center would be.
center perspective or from their understanding of their customers’ perspectives. Furthermore, it was difficult to distinguish between participants’ views of a Center of Analytical Excellence and what one generally understands “good” analysis to be. The project team decided to probe this area further and attempt to gain greater insight into whether the participants saw any difference between a fusion center that has achieved a level of “good” analysis and a fusion center that has become a “Center of Analytical Excellence.”

To gain this insight, the project team needed to identify a definition of good analysis that the participants would understand and be able to visualize. The project team decided to rely upon an existing framework with which the fusion center experts would be very familiar – the Critical Operational Capabilities (COC). The COC were defined by the leadership of the fusion center community in coordination with the federal government in 2010. The four Critical Operational Capabilities are:

- **COC 1 – Receive**: Ability to receive classified and unclassified information from federal partners;
- **COC 2 – Analyze**: Ability to assess local implications of threat information through the use of a formal risk assessment process;
- **COC 3 – Disseminate**: Ability to further disseminate threat information to their state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) and private sector entities within their jurisdiction; and
- **COC 4 – Gather**: Ability to gather locally generated information, aggregate it, analyze it, and share it with federal partners, as appropriate.

With this in mind, the intent of Questionnaire Two was to see whether participants did indeed distinguish between fusion center COC 2 (Analysis) and an idea of what a Center of Analytical Excellence should be. A second area of focus was to see how participants viewed the risk assessment process, a key component of COC 2, within the context of a Center of Analytical Excellence.

**Question 2.A:** From your perspective, how would a Center of Analytical Excellence differ from a fusion center that has fully achieved Critical Operational Capability (COC) #2 “Analysis” (if at all)?

In their responses to Question 2.A, participants expressed a strong opinion that there is a difference between attaining COC 2 and becoming a “Center of Analytical Excellence.” Participants indicated that a Center of Analytical Excellence has a higher level of capability than a fusion center that has simply achieved COC 2. They also indicated that a fusion center should achieve COC 2 before working toward status as a “Center of Analytical Excellence.” This may sound obvious, but it is important to highlight because it set the foundation for arriving at a definition. It was an important advance in the dialogue from the responses to Question 1.A – in which it appeared participants might have felt that a Center of Analytical Excellence was synonymous with doing “good” analysis – to a distinct perspective in which a Center of Analytical Excellence is something more than being able to perform “good” analysis.

At the same time, participants provided less direct commentary on exactly how a Center of Analytical Excellence differs from a fusion center that has attained COC 2. They did note that a Center of Analytical Excellence would display a consistency of excellence across a broad range of analytical functions beyond solely the aspect of risk assessment highlighted in the definition of COC 2. This aspect – that fusion centers should perform a broader range of analysis than risk assessment – appears to be a strongly held concern by participants as they also stress this issue in their responses to Question 2.B. This likely relates to the experience of fusion centers that they already provide a variety of additional analytical services (presumably of benefit to their customers) and they value these areas of analysis as highly, or more highly, as the conduct of formal risk assessments.

Participants also took the opportunity to raise additional concerns related to the process of achieving status as a “Center of Analytical Excellence.” One concern was that
efforts to define a Center of Analytical Excellence could result in pressure on fusion centers to fit within one narrow definition of excellence (rather than share a common approach and yet have the flexibility to meet a diverse set of AOR-specific requirements). This aligns with concerns raised throughout the evolution of fusion centers that the federal government (or some other entity) not drive in a single-minded fashion toward standardization at the expense of a fusion center’s ability to meet its customers’ needs.

Another concern was the potential for a Center of Analytical Excellence designation to create unhealthy competition between fusion centers to achieve this title. This competition might harm the network by reducing the willingness of fusion centers to work together (as a result of trying to achieve a Center of Analytical Excellence status by exceeding other fusion centers’ capabilities). Similar to the issues that arose in Questionnaire One, training and hiring/retention of analysts were also concerns that weighed on the participants. Other earlier research on fusion centers also identified training – especially the lack of standardized training – as a significant concern among fusion center analytic personnel.  

**Question 2.B:** For this question, imagine you are working in a CoAE and you are assessing the local implications of threat information through a formal risk assessment process. From your perspective, what would make the risk assessment process in a CoAE “excellent”?

In defining what “excellence” is in terms of a formal risk assessment, participants provided more specifics in response to Question 2.B than in defining the particulars of a Center of Analytical Excellence itself in Question 2.A. In terms of the risk assessment process, participants defined excellence in terms of conducting a formal risk assessment on the basis of a well defined, well documented and broadly accepted (across the fusion center network) risk assessment approach. This aspect of defining excellence may emanate from participants’ concerns that they have not been provided with the substantive guidance they need to implement a risk assessment process. It appears that participants are still seeking very specific guidance from the federal government as to “how to do” a formal risk assessment. Participants expressed the opinion that an excellent risk assessment methodology should be consistently applied and produce results that are internally consistent (meaning that the methodology will produce the same outputs when using the same inputs; i.e. it is reliable). Participants also highlighted their perspective that a Center of Analytical Excellence should be proactive in conducting risk assessments. This proaction is defined both in terms of gaining access to the needed vulnerability data ahead of time (i.e. before a risk manifests itself) and in terms of using local information to produce risk assessments that are shared with the federal government (rather than only producing risk assessments when provided with threat information from the federal government).

The most strongly expressed aspects of participants’ answers to Question 2.B were the concerns they raised about formal risk assessment. These concerns appear to reflect continued apprehension by fusion centers about the responsibility assigned to them by the federal government to conduct “formal risk assessments.” The concerns centered on three core issues. First, participants offered perspectives that fusion centers may not be the most effective place to conduct formal risk assessments. They suggested that other state and local agencies may have been assigned the responsibility by the non-federal leadership and/or that other agencies will have greater access to data or expertise, etc.

Second, in line with this latter aspect, participants expressed concern that fusion centers do not have access to the data and expertise required to conduct formal risk assessments. Participants stressed that fusion centers rarely have all the required data under their own control and this complicates their ability to conduct a formal risk assessment. They implied that gaining access to the needed data is very challenging perhaps due to bureaucratic resistance by other agencies to their gaining access.

Third, participants communicated their opinions that there are other tasks that should be a higher priority within a fusion center than conducting formal risk assessments.
assessments. Participants also took the time in Question 2.B to emphasize again their opinion that a Center of Analytical Excellence should be defined in broader terms than the ability to conduct an “excellent” formal risk assessment.

While it is outside the scope of this project to resolve these three core issues about fusion centers’ responsibility to conduct formal risk assessments, it is important to raise them. Any attempt to define a Center of Analytical Excellence within the context of conducting a formal risk assessment will be impacted by these related concerns about the overall roles and responsibilities of fusion centers (whether a Center of Analytical Excellence or not).

OFF-SITE DISCUSSION
To help participants formulate their perspectives on the definition of a Center of Analytical Excellence – and to provide learning and networking opportunities for the participants – a one-and-a-half-day off-site session featuring outside expert presentations was held June 8 – 9, 2011 before responses to Questionnaire Two were due. An off-site meeting, consisting of state and local fusion center personnel and intelligence practitioners from the federal government, was held at the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center (NJ ROIC), West Trenton, New Jersey. The off-site included thirteen of the fifteen analytical subject matter experts from each of the four National Fusion Center Association regions already participating in the Delphi Method questionnaires as well as outside experts in law enforcement intelligence, risk assessment, and intelligence community analysis. [See Appendix C for a list of outside experts participating in the off-site.]

The off-site supplemented the Delphi research methodology and offered an opportunity for the Delphi group members to meet one another and exchange ideas. The agenda included topics designed to inform participants about emerging issues in law enforcement intelligence and analysis, perspectives on risk assessment in the private sector, and current issues in the national intelligence community. These discussions helped participants formulate their responses to Questionnaire Two (which were due shortly after the off-site) and culminated in a facilitated brainstorming session on the specifics of a definition for “Center of Analytical Excellence.” The use of a face-to-face session was a deviation from a traditional Delphi approach, but it had the advantage of providing the experts with a better understanding of on-going efforts related to the central topic of discussion. It also enabled the experts from within the fusion center to take advantage of outside expertise as they considered the question of what a Center of Analytical Excellence should be. In essence, this incorporated additional expertise to enhance the Delphi method and helped increase the expertise of the core Delphi group of fusion center analytical experts.

In this facilitated brainstorming discussion, the off-site participants identified several characteristics that a Center of Analytical Excellence should incorporate. These characteristics built on the most current outside expert opinion on law enforcement intelligence and analysis shared with the participants at the off-site while also incorporating the participants’ own expertise and experience of how practitioners work in the field. These characteristics included:

- Relevant product line
- Outcome metrics
- Individual standards and skill sets
- Information sharing capacity
- Credentials for classified information access
- Outreach
- Standard Operating Procedures

Just as importantly, the working group offered their insights on the processes that should surround a definition of a “Center of Analytical Excellence.” Several key takeaways resulted from these discussions that would assist with the development of a definition. The takeaways included:

- Center of Analytical Excellence should not be another capability level within the fusion center lexicon.
Center of Analytical Excellence should be a specialization.

Center of Analytical Excellence should be peer- or self-nominated.

Center of Analytical Excellence should include a vetting committee and an established objective process.

Center of Analytical Excellence should strengthen the national network by leveraging expertise residing in individual centers.

Center of Analytical Excellence should include training and mentoring opportunities.

Centers of Analytical Excellence should be recognized by the intelligence community for their demonstrated expertise in a given area.

After the conclusion of the off-site, the task team synthesized the results of the discussion and developed a proposed definition:

**Proposed Center of Analytical Excellence Definition**

Centers of Analytical Excellence, as they relate to the National Network of Fusion Centers, are defined as those fusion centers that have demonstrated, and been recognized by an interagency committee for an accomplished record of information fusion and analysis on a given topic or domain area that has demonstrably strengthened the network and provided value to the network’s customers. Centers are recognized because of their advanced proficiency in analysis, which includes high quality, accurate, timely, and actionable products, standard operating procedures and well-defined product lines, outreach and mentorship across the network and with other entities, and a focus on strategic outcomes and customer impact. Nominated Centers are evaluated by an interagency committee to ensure all qualifications are met or exceeded for this two-year designation.

**Questionnaire Three**

After the off-site discussion revealed that expert opinion appeared to be strongly coalescing around the idea of a definition for a Center of Analytical Excellence that involved certification in a particular area of expertise rather than a capability level, the project team used Questionnaire Three to test the level of consensus around this idea and around the specific wording of a definition. Rather than rely on the free-form narrative used in Questionnaires One and Two, the project team designed Questionnaire Three as a survey both to gauge consensus and to gain specific feedback on each aspect of the definition. The use of a ranking tool is consistent with the range of participant interaction used in previous Delphi method studies.23

Questionnaire Three’s survey format was designed to solicit participant feedback on the proposed definition of “Centers of Analytical Excellence.” The survey asked a series of questions about participants’ levels of comfort with the wording of the definition, their sense of whether the standard was appropriately challenging, and whether they felt their fusion center would pursue certification as described in the proposed definition. Overall, the results indicated participants were comfortable with the proposed definition (though some minor adjustments were proposed), felt it was appropriately challenging (or slightly too challenging), and overwhelmingly felt their own fusion center would pursue certification as described in the proposed definition.

The first question in the survey asked participants to rate their level of comfort with each portion of the proposed definition. As can be seen in the table below, participants expressed high levels of comfort with all portions of the proposed definition. The two highest portions are highlighted in bold and the lowest portion is annotated with italics.
Participants were also provided a free text comment block to indicate if there were other aspects to a definition they would like to see included. Participants highlighted a number of additional areas to consider, including: inserting a section on privacy and civil liberties; evaluating if there are opportunities to align the certification process to existing best practices in use in universities; avoiding the insertion of a new “certification bureaucracy” by making use of existing oversight structures already in place in the fusion center network; and being cautious about too much emphasis on “strategic” services given that some fusion centers, especially state regional centers, may be primarily tactically oriented.

The second question asked participants how challenging the proposed definition of certification would be for fusion centers to successfully attain. Just over 50 percent of participants (55.6 percent) felt the proposed standard was neither too high nor too low. About a quarter of participants (27.8 percent) felt the definition was slightly too high and just over 10 percent felt the standard was slightly too low (11.1 percent). These perspectives suggest the proposed definition would be attainable by most fusion centers but that progress across the network would need to be monitored to see how well the standard works in practice.

The project team used the third question to gauge how likely participants felt their fusion center would be to pursue certification. Participants were asked to respond positively or negatively to the following statement: “My fusion center is likely to work toward certification as a Center of Analytical Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.” Participants overwhelmingly (94.4 percent) indicated they agreed with the statement. Participants were also provided a free text comment block to further explain why they felt their fusion center would or would not pursue certification. Many participants noted that certification would lend additional credibility to their fusion center in the eyes of their customers or senior police leadership because of the evaluation by an expert, impartial committee. Similarly, participants felt that certification would contribute to the continued development and
professionalization of fusion centers by defining a higher threshold of analytical achievement.

For these participants, certification is viewed as providing a structured opportunity for their fusion centers to reflect on their internal processes, products, and standards and make improvements to attain certification. Additionally, certification is seen to contribute to a potential rise in the standing of the fusion center analytical occupation. The concern over the standing of the law enforcement analytical profession (especially its perception by its uniformed counterparts) is a long-standing one in the law enforcement community. Participants also expressed some reservations about certification, most notably in connection with the challenges they may face in attaining certification. The next section discusses the challenges that participants highlighted as potentially impeding their fusion centers’ ability to achieve certification.

**POTENTIAL CHALLENGES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

As noted above, Questionnaire Three also included survey questions that were intended to solicit participants’ perspectives on the challenges they anticipated facing in attaining certification. Participants did not necessarily view an incentive as a requirement for pursuing certification – and disagreed strongly with the statement that their fusion center would not pursue certification – but they did express concerns about their current ability to achieve certification. Participants most strongly expressed a need for additional analytical training (88.9 percent agreed completely or agreed somewhat) and analytical resources (83.3 percent agreed completely or agreed somewhat) to be able to achieve certification (as described in the proposed definition). An additional area of concern was a need for increased resource levels to achieve certification (61.1 percent agreed somewhat or agreed completely). The chart below shows how participants responded to questions about the challenges their fusion centers were likely to face in the pursuit of certification. While it is not a new finding, the repeated emphasis by participants on the need for training continues to underscore that this is a major concern for the fusion center analytical community. This echoes a similar concern about the need for training and the lack of opportunities that has surfaced for at least the past thirty years in the broader law enforcement analytical community. Underscoring both of these issues is the need for additional funding. Many fusion centers face uncertain times due to the current fiscal climate in their states, so it is difficult to place emphasis on specialization.
NEXT STEPS

The new definition is a significant departure from the sense in which this term has been used previously. It now relates to demonstrating excellence in a particular domain or topic area involving analytical methodology. The definition is a major step toward increasing the value – and stature – of the National Network of Fusion Centers because it provides recognition for domain or topic area expertise of individual fusion centers within the collective whole of the network. Individual fusion centers that achieve this status can serve as touch points within the network to offer specialized support for the variety of threat and risk issues that face the nation. In crafting a description for Center of Analytical Excellence this research provides a next state for individual fusion centers that aspire to share their analytical competencies across a national network for the sole purpose of strengthening the collective enterprise of fusion centers within the homeland security domain.

At the most fundamental level, a Center of Analytical Excellence consists of a team of fusion center personnel who promote collaboration and have been recognized for using best practices around a specialized focus area. By being identified as a Center of Analytical Excellence in a given area, a fusion center should be able to offer support to other fusion centers, the intelligence community, and state and local intelligence units that require assistance related to the “Center of Analytical Excellence’s” specialty. Individual Centers of Analytical Excellence will have standards, methodologies, and tools they could share with interested partners. Additionally, the accomplishments of the Centers of Analytical Excellence will be...
quantified through measurements aligned with output metrics.

The purpose of the project, on behalf of the National Fusion Center Association, was to clearly define Center of Analytical Excellence for the federal government and state, local, tribal, and territorial entities. Within that context, by leveraging the insights of subject matter experts nationally, the project met its objective: define “Center of Analytical Excellence.” However, for the definition to truly have meaning and add value in safeguarding our homeland, it must be linked to a mechanism that enables its application. To that end, the progress of this initiative was briefed to the Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council (CICC) on September 28, 2011. The CICC looked favorably upon it, and requested that the project team continue to take steps towards implementation.

With that guidance in mind, the next step in this overarching initiative will be to convene a group of subject matter experts who would delineate a governance structure and associated processes that are needed to identify, assess, support, and evaluate Centers of Analytical Excellence. A Center of Analytical Excellence validating entity would ensure that fusion centers that achieve Center of Analytical Excellence status do so within an objective and endorsed framework, which would hold up to scrutiny and enable those fusion centers to deliver value to the rest of the national network. After all, fusion centers should be more than just information exchange brokers.

However, it is worth noting that one concern that might arise from those among the fusion center leadership is how those centers that choose not to pursue CoAE recognition may be perceived. Will they be assumed to be mediocre because they did not pursue this recognition? First, it is important to note that the recognition as a Center of Analytical Excellence is not intended to be another rung on the progression from critical operational capabilities to achieved baseline capabilities. This was clearly not the way the group of experts envisioned the way ahead. A Center of Analytical Excellence instead designates a particular specialization. Second, an easy fix to this misperception would be to append the recognized specialization after the term Center of Analytical Excellence as in "Center of Analytical Excellence – SARs" or "Center of Analytical Excellence - Gun Violence." This would make it clear that the particular fusion center is not any more excellent than it's counterparts with regard to overall capabilities, but instead that it has identified and developed a particular area of analytical excellence it can bring to bear on behalf of the national network of fusion centers.

It is entirely likely that some fusion centers will simply choose not to participate in the Centers of Analytical Excellence initiative regardless of the endorsement by the larger National Fusion Center Association. The reasons for not participating may run the gamut owing to resourcing, timing, or other localized issues affecting a particular fusion center. A decision not to participate at a given time should not be seen as a detriment or an obstacle to the effort, since the overall initiative is aimed at the strengthening the capacity of the whole network as opposed to assessing the capabilities of an individual fusion center.

CONCLUSION

The National Network of Fusion Centers is integral to the nation’s homeland and hometown security. A decentralized, distributed network that involves all levels of government and collaborates routinely on information analysis and sharing with federal intelligence and law enforcement partners is precisely what the Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Acts Upon the United States and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) envisioned.26 Within this network, there are now individual nodes that strengthen, bolster, or intensify the network's collective impact. These nodes have developed an expertise in a given area and their proficiency lends itself in a manner that can greatly benefit the overall capability of the national network. In this, the National Network of Fusion Centers is no different than many other similar, decentralized networks.

Using the momentum created by Secretary Janet Napolitano's use of the term “Centers
of Analytic Excellence” to describe fusion centers, a grassroots effort has ensued. Through the support of the National Fusion Center Association and DHS Office of Intelligence Analysis, a group of fusion center subject matter experts convened and worked towards defining “Centers of Analytical Excellence.” The resulting definition focused on a process of identifying those fusion centers with a specialized expertise that could greatly benefit the national network. This article presents this fusion center network effort both to generate discussion and to facilitate acceptance of the arrived at definition.

The definition includes two main components: (a) recognition by an inter-agency committee for a demonstrable accomplished record of information fusion and analysis and (b) recognition of a specialized focus in a given subject matter with a demonstrable benefit to the overall National Network of Fusion Centers. This definition is a significant departure from the original, albeit inferred, use of the term, which seemed to focus more on a general standard of excellence for all recognized fusion centers within the network. The new definition instead places emphasis on identifying those fusion centers whose excellence in a given area needs to be recognized in order for the network as a whole to increase its capacity.

By the time this work is published, a second phase of the Centers of Analytical Excellence effort will have commenced through the support of the National Fusion Center Association, DHS Office of Intelligence & Analysis, the Program Manager’s Office of the Information Sharing Environment, and the Criminal Intelligence Coordinating Council. This follow up effort will focus on how best to integrate the Centers of Analytical Excellence concept into the National Network of Fusion Centers by defining standards, processes, time lines, and a governance body. This effort will undoubtedly stimulate additional policymaking and discussions of validation and accreditation programs and processes. These aspects, as they relate to fusion centers, are worthy of future research opportunities.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Justin Lewis Abold is assistant to the industry director, Global High Wealth Industry, Large Business and International Division, Internal Revenue Service. His last assignment before joining the Internal Revenue Service was as a National Defense Intelligence College research fellow focused on researching state and local fusion centers. He has a master’s degree in Strategic Intelligence from the National Defense Intelligence College and a PhD in Criminology from Oxford University, United Kingdom.

Ray Guidetti is a captain with the New Jersey State Police and recently completed a twelve-month fellowship with the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Intelligence and Analysis. He is currently assigned to the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center as the deputy director. Captain Guidetti holds a master’s degree in National Security, Homeland Defense and Security, from the Naval Postgraduate School.

Douglas Keyer currently serves as the director of the New York State Intelligence Center where he is responsible for commanding the day-to-day operations. He is also the vice-president of the National Fusion Center Association, a non-profit organization started to ensure the fusion centers had a collective voice with federal agency partners. At the state level, he sits on the New York State Homeland Security Strategy Work Group and also chairs the “Secure the Cities” Intelligence Committee.
APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS

QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

Question A: From your perspectives and experience, please describe what you imagine a Center of Analytical Excellence should be within the context of the future of fusion centers. You might wish to comment on what would make it a center of Analytical “excellence;” how this differs from the analysis taking place in fusion centers today (if it does); how information should be managed, processed, and fused; what processes may be needed to leverage existing ones; and what types of analysis and Analytical products should be produced. If you are aware of best practices within fusion centers today, you may opt to highlight them as well.

Question B: For this question, please put yourself in the “shoes” of fusion center customers. Based on your perspectives and experiences, please describe what you think fusion center customers envision when they hear the term Center of Analytical Excellence within the context of the future of fusion centers. You might wish to comment on what you think fusion center customers would want from a Center of Analytical Excellence, how this differs from the products and services they are receiving from today’s fusion centers, and what would make a fusion center a Center of Analytical “Excellence” from the perspective of fusion center customers. If you assess that different customers might have different views of a Center of Analytical Excellence, please feel free to comment on those different perspectives and customers as well.

QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

Question A: In their responses to Questionnaire 1, respondents identified several areas that are important to their vision of a Center of Analytical Excellence (CoAE) to include: providing value to their customers; performing both tactical and strategic analysis; having access to a broad spectrum of information; being able to hire, train and retain expert analysts; being resourced with an adequate number of analysts; and being able to customize intelligence products / assessments for specific customers. As one looks across these areas, it appears to suggest that many respondents view a CoAE as a fusion center that has achieved a solid level of performance in the four Critical Operational Capabilities (COCs) rather than possessing other more distinct capabilities. This raises an important question: Is a CoAE different from a fusion center that has mastered the four COCs?

*From your perspective, how would a Center of Analytical Excellence differ from a fusion center that has fully achieved Critical Operational Capability (COC) #2 “Analysis” (if at all)? You might wish to comment on what would a CoAE do differently than a fusion center that has achieved COC #2? Is it doing the same things as a fusion center that has achieved COC #2 but doing them better (or more frequently or in greater quantities)? Is a CoAE the same as a fusion center that is fully capable in COC #2?*

Question B: Respondents appeared to focus their comments in Questionnaire 1 on the crime control and crime reduction missions of fusion centers. Respondents only infrequently referenced the role that a Center of Analytical Excellence (CoAE) may need to play in the risk assessment process included in the Critical Operational Capabilities (COCs). This raises an important question about how respondents view the role of a CoAE in a risk assessment process.

*In particular, COC #2 states that fusion centers will demonstrate the “Ability to assess local implications of threat information through a formal risk assessment process.”*  

*For this question, imagine you are working in a CoAE and you are assessing the local implications of threat information through a formal risk assessment process. From your perspective, what would make the risk assessment process in a CoAE...*
“excellent”? You might wish to comment on what a formal risk assessment process should mean to a fusion center.

**Questionnaire Three**

See following pages.
CoAE Questionnaire 3

1. At the off-site, we discussed defining Centers of Analytic Excellence in terms of a specialization in a particular topic or issue. To help guide our discussion forward, please respond to each part of the following definition. For each part below, please indicate how strongly you agree with that aspect of the definition. For ease of reading, we have included the full draft definition here:

Proposed Center of Analytic Excellence Definition:

Centers of Analytic Excellence, as they relate to the National Network of Fusion Centers, are defined as those fusion centers that have demonstrated, and been recognized by an interagency committee for, an accomplished record of information fusion and analysis on a given topic or domain area that has demonstrably strengthened the network and provided value to the network’s customers. Centers are recognized because of their advanced proficiency in analysis, which includes high quality, accurate, timely, and actionable products, standing operating procedures and well-defined product lines, outreach and mentorship across the network and with other entities, and a focus on strategic outcomes and customer impact. Nominated Centers are evaluated by an interagency committee to ensure all qualifications are met or exceeded for this two year designation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I disagree completely and this should not be part of the definition.</th>
<th>I disagree somewhat but I don’t rule this part out entirely.</th>
<th>I am neutral about this part.</th>
<th>I agree somewhat but I am not entirely in agreement with the wording.</th>
<th>I agree completely and this should be part of the definition as it is.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Centers of Analytic Excellence, as they relate to the National Network of Fusion Centers, are defined as those fusion centers that have demonstrated an accomplished record of information fusion and analysis on a given topic or domain</td>
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<td>that demonstrably strengthened the network</td>
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<td>and provided value to the network’s customers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centers are recognized because of their advanced proficiency in analysis</td>
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<td>which includes high quality, accurate, timely, and actionable products</td>
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### CoAE Questionnaire 3

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<td>Outreach and mentorship across the network and with other entities</td>
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<td>and a focus on strategic outcomes and customer impact.</td>
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<td>to ensure all qualifications are met or exceeded for this two-year designation.</td>
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</table>

2. **Is there something you would add to the definition?** In other words, is there something that is essential to this definition of Centers of Analytic Excellence that is not included? Please use the text box below to suggest what needs to be added. The more specific you can be, the better.

3. **Think about the definition of Centers of Analytic Excellence proposed above.**

**Based on the definition and your experience with fusion centers, do you think it is a reasonable standard of excellence?**

**Please select from the following choices:**

- The definition as written sets much too high a standard. It will be hard for any fusion center to achieve it.
- The definition as written sets a standard that is slightly too high. Some fusion centers may be able to achieve it but it will be out of reach of the majority.
- The definition as written sets a standard that is neither too high nor too low. A majority of those fusion centers seeking to achieve this standard will be able to do so and the result will be a meaningful improvement in analysis.
- The definition as written sets a standard that is slightly too low. Most fusion centers will be able to achieve this standard without a significant change in performance.
- The definition as written sets a standard that is much too low. Almost any fusion center will be able to achieve this standard and it will not provide a meaningful standard of excellence.
### CoAE Questionnaire 3

4. Please indicate whether or not you agree with the following statement:

My fusion center is likely to work toward certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.

(If you do not work in a fusion center, please respond from your overall knowledge of fusion centers and indicate whether you think fusion centers in general will be likely to work toward certification.)

- [ ] I agree.
- [ ] I disagree.

5. Please explain why your fusion center would (or would not) pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire. Please provide as concrete a reason as possible. In other words, what makes this something your fusion center would pursue? (Or, what makes your fusion center unlikely to pursue certification?)

(If you do not work in a fusion center, please respond from your overall knowledge of fusion centers.)
CoAE Questionnaire 3

6. Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements.

(If you do not work in a fusion center, please respond from your overall knowledge of fusion centers.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I disagree completely</th>
<th>I disagree somewhat</th>
<th>I neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>I agree somewhat</th>
<th>I agree completely</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My fusion center would require an incentive (beside certification) to pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.</td>
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<td>My fusion center would require additional funding to pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My fusion center would require additional analytic training to be able pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.</td>
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<td>My fusion center would require additional analytic resources to be able pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My fusion center probably would not pursue certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire under any circumstances.</td>
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</table>
CoAE Questionnaire 3

7. Please indicate whether or not you agree with the following statement:

My customers would see value in my fusion center pursuing certification as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire.

(If you do not work in a fusion center, please respond from your overall knowledge of fusion centers.)

- [ ] I agree.
- [ ] I disagree.

Please feel free to explain your answer below.

8. Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement.

(If you do not work in a fusion center, please respond from your overall knowledge of fusion centers.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I disagree completely</th>
<th>I disagree somewhat</th>
<th>I neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>I agree somewhat</th>
<th>I agree completely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becoming certified as a Center of Analytic Excellence as defined in this questionnaire would help my fusion center provide better value to its customers.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS

**Practitioners**

Ms. Sondra Alexis, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A)
Captain Brad Carnduff, Illinois Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center
Mr. William Carter, Federal Bureau of Investigation
Mrs. Lacy Craig, Idaho Criminal Intelligence Center
Ms. Debbie Davenport, Central California Regional Terrorism Threat Assessment Center
Mrs. Shelagh Dorn, New York State Intelligence Center
Mrs. Erin Goff, Ohio Strategic Analysis and Information Center
Mrs. Amy Lay, Virginia Fusion Center
Captain Bryant Lucas, Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center
Mr. Justin Parker, Iowa Division of Intelligence and Fusion Center
Ms. Eva Rhody, Florida Fusion Center
Lieutenant Dan Rose, Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center
Mr. Charles Ross, Washington State Fusion Center
Mrs. Quinn Sullivan, DHS/Boston Regional Intelligence Center
Mr. Gregory Thomas, Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center

**Project Managers**

Captain Doug Keyer, New York State Intelligence Center
Captain Ray Guidetti, New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center
Dr. Justin Lewis Abold, Oxford University, UK and National Defense Intelligence College, USA
APPENDIX C: OUTSIDE EXPERTS

Mr. Eric Biersmith, DHS I&A
Mr. David Brannegan, Argonne National Labs
Mr. William Byrd, DHS I&A
Colonel Rick Fuentes, New Jersey State Police
Mrs. June Hill, Institute for Intergovernmental Research
Mr. Brad Johnson, DHS I&A
Mr. Art Martinez, Northern California Regional Intelligence Center
Mr. Tim Mathews, Educational Testing Service
Director Charles McKenna, NJ Office of Homeland Security Preparedness
Mr. Thomas O’Reilly, Nationwide SAR Initiative, Program Management Office
Mrs. Kathy Pherson, Pherson Associates
Dr. Jerry Ratcliffe, Temple University
Ms. Ashleigh Sanders, DHS Risk Management Analysis (RMA)
Mr. Kevin Saupp, DHS I&A
it necessary to further delineate what a Center or Analytical Excellence means for the National Network of Fusion related information. The Department of Homeland Security Office representing the interests of the larger network, thought it necessary and beneficial to the overall network to further explore the impact of defining Centers of Analytic Excellence. Moreover, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis has committed to assisting fusion centers in becoming centers of analytic excellence to serve as focal points within the state and local environment for the receipt, analysis, gathering, and sharing of threat-related information. These two factors have made it necessary to further delineate what a Center or Analytical Excellence means for the National Network of Fusion Centers.

1 An Overview of the United States Intelligence Community for the 111th Congress accessed at http://www.dni.gov/overview.pdf provides a thorough understanding of how the intelligence community is an assemblage of different intelligence agencies each with their own strengths and purpose.

2 Throughout this research project, the terms “analytic” and “analytical” were used interchangeably. Not until the final stages of the project did the project team recognize that it was important to drop the reference of “analytic” from the discussion surrounding fusion centers, and instead stay consistent with the term analytical. The reason being is that “analytic” connotes a mathematical relationship whereas “analytical” connotes assessing information. While the final published product has removed all references to “analytic” unless associated with a quoted reference, the reference still exists in the appendix within survey instruments.

3 In early 2010, leaders from the National Network of Fusion Centers representing leaders from federal, state, and local agencies met to discuss the critical operational capabilities (COC) required of the nation’s primary and recognized fusion centers. The integration of the four COC (receive, analyze, disseminate, and gather) have now become synonymous with a mature fusion center because these centers typically have plans and standard operating procedures in place to fully execute each COC. In 2010 and 2011, federal interagency partners assessed fusion centers against the COC to better understand the strength and maturity of the National Network of Fusion Centers.

4 In August of 2002, the International Association of Chiefs of Police published Criminal Intelligence Sharing: A National Plan for Intelligence-led Policing at the Local, State and Federal Levels: Recommendations from the IACP Intelligence Summit. The report was a call to action for law enforcement leaders across the country following the attacks of September 11, 2001, to engage in greater intelligence sharing to improve public safety. The document highlighted, as barriers toward this capability, the “absence of a nationally coordinated process for intelligence generation and sharing; the hierarchy within the law enforcement and intelligence communities; federal, state, local and tribal laws and policies that prevent sharing; the inaccessibility and/or disaggregation of technologies to support intelligence sharing; and deficits in intelligence analysis.”

5 Statement of Ross Ashley III, Executive Director of the National Fusion Center Association before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives (March 7, 2012), 2.

6 For more information, see the National Network of Fusion Centers Fact Sheet, http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc_1296484657738.shtm.

7 Ashley, Subcommittee on Homeland Security, 2.

8 Neil Quarmby in his chapter entitled “Futures Work in Strategic Criminal Intelligence,” in J. Ratcliffe, ed., Strategic Thinking in Criminal Intelligence, 1st ed. (The Federation Press, 2004), provides a descriptive overview regarding futures work in the law enforcement domain. Quarmby’s work underscores the value that specific categories of intelligence products have in answering decision-makers’ key questions about the threat environment.

9 This assertion is drawn from the knowledge and experience of the authors with regard to their familiarity of the network of fusion centers.


12 The National Fusion Center Association represents the interests of state and major urban areas fusion centers (see http://www.nfcausa.org/default.aspx/MenuItem/Map.htm). In March of 2011, the NFCA Executive Board, representing the interests of the larger network, thought it necessary and beneficial to the overall network to further explore the impact of defining Centers of Analytic Excellence. Moreover, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis has committed to assisting fusion centers in becoming centers of analytic excellence to serve as focal points within the state and local environment for the receipt, analysis, gathering, and sharing of threat-related information (see http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/gc_1156877184684.shtm). These two factors have made it necessary to further delineate what a Center or Analytical Excellence means for the National Network of Fusion Centers.
13 The National Fusion Center Association was established by fusion center directors to advocate on behalf of fusion center personnel nationally in an effort “To represent the interests of state and major urban area fusion centers, as well as associated interests of states, tribal nations, and units of local government, in order to promote the development and sustainment of fusion centers to enhance public safety; encourage effective, efficient, ethical, lawful, and professional intelligence and information sharing; and prevent and reduce the harmful effects of crime and terrorism on victims, individuals, and communities.” For more information, see the NFCA homepage: [http://www.nfcausa.org/default.aspx?MenuItemID=131/MenuGroup/Map.htm](http://www.nfcausa.org/default.aspx?MenuItemID=131/MenuGroup/Map.htm)


17 The questions included supplemental text, which is not displayed in this section to make it easier to read. The full questions, including supplemental text, are included in Appendix A.


19 In March 2010, fusion center directors from across the nation gathered in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the National Fusion Center Conference to discuss identifying the need to outline critical operational capabilities for fusion centers. Up until then, fusion centers relied on two documents for their direction, the *Fusion Center Guidelines* and the *Baseline Capabilities for State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers*. The directors reached consensus that while the *Baseline Capabilities* document provided important guidance for sustaining the operations of fusion centers it would be of much greater importance at this time in the development of fusion centers to identify fusion center critical operations capabilities. The discussions led to the identification of four Critical Operational Capabilities (COC) that included: the ability to receive threat information; the ability to analyze threat information; the ability to disseminate information and intelligence to AOR customers; and the ability to gather additional information about threat information. For additional information see [http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/ge_1296484657738.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/programs/ge_1296484657738.shtm).


22 In discussing this point, participants were referring to the fusion center guidance that delineated baseline capabilities and the more critical operational capabilities. Collectively, they agreed that a CoAE should not be a component within a scale that includes these other levels. This validated a theme that had emerged in Questionnaire One as discussed previously.


26 Ashley, Subcommittee on Homeland Security, 2.