

Action Learning Scenario #2
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What makes a center healthy?

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Issue/Challenges:

The front line of the USGS science effort is the more than 70 science centers, representing 6 mission areas, distributed on the landscape. These centers provided timely and relevant science and information to federal, state and local partners. Evaluating the success and processes within these Centers is important in evaluating mission delivery and the challenge is that there are multiple ways to define, assess, and represent center successes and failures.

Currently, input into USGS science directions is tied to annual review of science centers – the Center Health review. This review is handled at the Regional level and is often used to determine science thrusts, best management practices, financial stability, etc. However, such reviews may not address innovative workforce planning, the importance of workforce diversity, or effectively address impacts of standardization of processes (e.g. discipline reviews in water).

Although, several templates have been developed over the years to evaluate or define center health, these have often been tied to financial stability with an attached list of science projects, partners or proposed science directions. While the current evaluation process is important and does gather information, there is still a level of uncertainty surrounding the current strategy. How do we evaluate and document what it means to be a healthy Center?

At a time when realignment of the Bureau and DOI is imminent, USGS has a great opportunity to develop and evaluate a new definition of what makes a Center Healthy. Further, proposed models for realignment are seeking to empower the field and in the case of USGS the Centers. But, how can we best do that?

Challenges moving forward

Moving forward with this challenge may require examining some or all of the following questions:

What do we mean when we say Center?

Empowerment of centers... what does that look like?

How do we define what it means to be a healthy Center?

Center identity in times of turbulence.. can center be healthy if parent organization is not?

What are the stressors?

Why do we care?

How do we best represent and evaluate center health?

How do we define what matters and to who in the process?

How can we maximize Center health evaluations to better connect with Bureau priorities and stakeholder needs?

What have we done in the past and how can that be improved or replaced?

Background Materials

See attached RD Center Review questions

Expectations:

Develop creative ideas on the challenges posed above. These ideas may include:

1. A new definition of what it means to be a healthy Center.
2. A policy proposal for consideration by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT).
3. A pilot project with a Region and/or Organization to test new concepts