



Creating a Performance-Based National Fusion Capability

Since the 9/11 Commission declared the Nation's collective failure to "connect the dots" of information on potential terrorists, various organizational and strategic changes have restructured information collection, sharing, and reporting at all levels of government. The development of "fusion centers," which in many situations emerged organically from local police, fire and other first responders' efforts to prevent future attacks, represents an innovation with the potential to reshape how information is collected, analyzed, and shared in this country. Yet in many cases, fusion centers have struggled to realize this potential and to consistently deliver original analyses that offer strategic insights and support tactical operations.

The federal government has supported the establishment of fusion centers to facilitate effective information sharing. The Department of Justice's (DOJ) Global Information Sharing Initiative (Global), in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), has published the *Global Fusion Center Guidelines*, and DOJ and DHS jointly offer a *Fusion Process Technical Assistance Program*, which supports implementation of the *Global Fusion Center Guidelines* and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) *Information Sharing Environment Implementation Plan*. States and local governments have also been able to leverage billions of dollars in preparedness assistance provided by DHS for fusion center activities. Yet it is Global's recent publication of *Baseline Capabilities for State and Major Urban Area Fusion Centers* that offers the first real opportunity to begin to link individual centers into an integrated national network of fusion centers with consistent capabilities, as called for in the *National Strategy for Information Sharing*.

In identifying the essential operating capabilities for fusion centers and the operational standards necessary to achieve these capabilities, the baseline capabilities document provides the foundation for a performance management system for fusion centers that can both improve the quality of products they produce and support their effective integration into the national Information Sharing Environment (ISE). An effective fusion center performance management system should involve independent certification of fusion center capabilities, performance-based testing to validate those capabilities, and ongoing links to federal funding in support of these processes.

Certification Process

Fusion centers receiving federal funding or support should be subjected to an independent review of their operations and capabilities to ensure compliance with national standards. To maintain objectivity and separation from funding processes, DHS, DOJ, and ODNI should partner to identify and fund an independent professional association, consortium, or other organization that would be responsible for conducting the certification process, based upon the minimum levels of capability identified in the baseline capabilities document. The federal government should provide start-up funding to establish this certification process and support the first round of certifications in order to gain early momentum for the effort and

eliminate barriers to participation. Subsequent certifications could be funded by each participating fusion center. Participation in the certification process either through fees or personnel costs should be an eligible use of federal grant funds, and should be mandatory for all states receiving federal grant support.

Similar to the Emergency Management Accreditation Program that has been employed in the emergency management community, the fusion center certification process could leverage both a self-assessment phase led by personnel from the participating state or local jurisdiction and an independent on-site assessment phase with recognized subject matter experts to validate findings.

Statewide fusion processes (including fusion centers at the state and local levels) could be required to undergo certification periodically (e.g., every three years). The certification process could include multiple levels of certification, with higher capability levels potentially allowing the fusion center(s) greater access into the federal intelligence community (e.g., higher priority for deployments of analysts, systems, such as HSDN, clearances, seats in DHS analytic training courses, technical assistance and analyst exchange services, etc). The results of this two-step assessment process could yield the following certification levels:

- Has not achieved minimum, baseline capabilities
- Has achieved minimum, baseline capabilities
- Has exceeded minimum, baseline capabilities

An objective certification process that combines resident know-how with national subject matter expertise should reveal capability gaps relative to the fusion process and identify specific corrective actions that could be implemented to address them.

Validation Process

A fusion center validation initiative to further validate the achievement of baseline capabilities in fusion centers and test their ability to interact across a national network should also be implemented. This effort should be conducted in coordination with existing DHS exercise initiatives, such as the Terrorism Prevention Exercise Program (TPEP). The validation process would leverage federal, state, and local analytical resources and DHS' Universal Adversary (UA) Program to establish an ongoing cycle of prevention capability testing and improvement nationally. As a component of the broader prevention effort, this performance testing should center on the validation of fusion processes (including state and urban area fusion centers) and information sharing baseline capabilities.

The validation initiative could utilize an ongoing exercise program to conduct rigorous analysis and testing of baseline capabilities related to the intelligence fusion process. This would enable the homeland security community to “train as it fights” by providing an analytical framework of current and potential future criminal and terrorist adversaries for planning, training, and exercise purposes. If a three-year cycle was chosen, approximately 15-20 fusion centers would participate in the validation process each year, with all active fusion centers participating in the program during the cycle. This cycle of analysis and evaluation could continue indefinitely to ensure consistent improvement in all terrorism prevention plans and capabilities.

Specifically, the validation initiative should utilize hybrid teams (to include state and local IPAs and DHS, DOJ, FBI, and DNI representatives) acting as a core planning cell targeting each state and urban area participating in a given year. Additional intelligence personnel from each participating state and urban area, to include local and/or state fusion center staff and representatives from the local FBI field office, could comprise the rest of the planning cell, which would conduct red-teaming operations and attack planning using open source information for a defined period of time (e.g., three or six months). During this time, the ability of the targeted state and local fusion centers to detect surveillance activities, synthesize information, and disrupt a potential attack would be thoroughly tested.

At the end of the process, all parties should go through a detailed, joint debriefing and all targeting and surveillance information gathered by the attack planning cell turned over to the state, urban area, and local FBI for their continued use in hardening their communities. In addition to providing an ongoing mechanism to aggressively test and validate the achievement of fusion center baseline capabilities, including intelligence systems, information sharing mechanisms, and interdiction capabilities, the validation process could also:

- Improve the effectiveness of horizontal and vertical partnerships through the use of collaborative processes, common terms and definitions, and shared lessons learned and best practices;
- Create a cadre of highly trained analysts at all levels of government operating in the domestic intelligence space with robust partnership networks spanning all levels of government;
- Support increased awareness and cooperation among federal, state, local, and tribal jurisdictions as well as the private sector.

Funding Improvements in Fusion Capabilities

Participating states and local jurisdiction could be required to use the results of the certification and validation processes to develop an Improvement Plan for its fusion capabilities. The Improvement Plan could identify necessary steps to effectively mitigate any identified vulnerabilities, capability gaps, and/or weaknesses. The Improvement Plan could directly align to the *Baseline Capabilities* document to facilitate capability comparisons against a national standard. The Improvement Plan could also provide a detailed, data-driven, and validated justification for state and urban area requests for funding and technical assistance.

The Improvement Plan must be tied to funding if it is to be an impactful road-map for improving state and urban area fusion center capabilities. Requirements should be established in existing DOJ and DHS grant and technical assistance programs linking these resources to Improvement Plan implementation. Funding should still be available to support establishment of new state or urban area fusion centers, but once those centers have begun the certification process, ongoing use of funds should be contingent upon achieving and maintaining certified and validated levels of capability.

The ideas presented in this paper have been and continue to be discussed in the National Fusion Center Coordination Group, which is co-chaired by DOJ and DHS in support of the Program Manager—Information Sharing Environment (PM).