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# Elements Impacting the Integration of the National Network of Fusion Centers with the U.S. National Security Strategy

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2017

Abstract

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U.S. National Security Strategy

by

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MA, Naval Post Graduate School, 2014

BS, Upper Iowa University, 2003

AA, Barton County Community College, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2017

## Abstract

The National Network of Fusion Centers (Network) represents one of the post-9/11 era organizational efforts to strengthen the security of the homeland through collaboration, analysis, and information sharing. These entities have been subjected to criticisms and have been noted in studies as being deficient in certain areas suggesting that the Network has been experiencing problems with integrating the U.S. national security strategy. Using the multiple streams framework, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to identify and understand elements that have been impacting the Network's integration with broader national security efforts as well as identify items contributing to negative perceptions of fusion centers. Data for this qualitative study were collected through interviews with 13 individuals working within the Network. Collected data elements were inductively coded and then analyzed, demonstrating the relevance of framework to this topic area. Research findings indicated that there were challenges with Network integration that were influenced by perceptions of problems/threats, views concerning a fusion center's primary stakeholder, and constraints related to existing organizational policy and mandates. Barriers to integration stemmed from differing priorities, ineffective marketing, policy requirements, relationships, and limited resources. Study recommendations included the development of a strategic engagement plan, alignment of priorities, and increases in federal funding and representation. The implications for positive social change of this study are associated with proving transparency on the Network, informing national security agencies and decision makers on issues impacting integration, and promoting operational efficiencies.

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## Dedication

This academic journey over the last several years has proven to be as challenging as it has been rewarding, but has required significant sacrifice from my family that I would like to recognize. To my wife, Melanie, your support and encouragement has been, at many points throughout this program, the greatest driver for me. As in past career or academic endeavors, you have always grounded me, motivated me, and inspired me. I can never express in words my appreciation and devotion to you, but please understand that you are my “True North.”

To my children, this has been another long haul guys and I appreciate you picking up some of the slack during my academic hibernation sessions that took place most weekends for the last few years. You three mean the world to your mother and I. I hope that you keep “getting at it,” learn, do, see, and experience all you can in the world and then share that with others.

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I would like to express my gratitude for the support and mentorship from the members of my committee, Drs. Cole and Lane. I have learned a great deal from each of you during the coursework phase of this program and could not have made it through the daunting dissertation process without your guidance and expertise. Beyond survival through the program, I appreciate you providing me a template of the type of professor that I would like to be.

To the participants in this study, who will obviously remain nameless, thank you for taking interest in this research and providing candid responses. I pray this study reflects the reality of the environment that you and your colleagues are working in every day and hope that this contribution positively informs decision-making in this field.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Recounts of modern history have often highlighted societal changes and the evolution of geopolitical relationships, associations, and priorities as obvious segments that provide a frame of reference and context into periods of time. Eras have routinely been marked by technological advances, critical disasters, and incidents that were so significant they have been viewed as points of note which altered the course of humanity in some or many fashions. Conflicts among nations resulting in war and other impactful armed conflicts have provided such a breakpoint in the description of how the world, a country, or society changed. Notable examples of similar chapters in history are World Wars I and II, the Civil War, and the War for Independence (in the case of the United States). The opening of the 21st century will be viewed by Americans through a lens that considers how terrorism shook the foundation and altered the course of the U.S. national security. This era of terrorism renewed conversation about the government's responsibility to protect its citizens and how it can do so efficiently and within the boundaries of the country's democratic ideals.

These ideals offered by classical philosophers, such as Rousseau, Locke, and Hobbes, touch on the government's responsibility to serve the citizenry and uphold its end of the social contract (University of Delaware, n.d.). Locke's call for citizen participation and challenge to government argued for government accountability to the people (Uzgalis, 2012). Rousseau's beliefs in individual sovereignty are even reflected in the country's nickname, "land of the free" (Bertram, 2010). Increasingly some Hobbian

values that emphasize security as a tool to ensure social harmony have been more heavily considered in this era that has been dominated by concerns over national and homeland security (Rose, 2013; Spieker, 2011). During this era of terrorism, one of the many governmental responses to the increased pressures to provide a safe and secure environment for the citizenry was the creation of National Network of Fusion Centers (Network), which emphasized collaboration, information sharing, and integration of law enforcement, intelligence, and public safety organizations. The Network, established as part of independent state and local government initiatives, was conceptualized to be in service to the people by providing an environment supportive of the core democratic ideals involving safety, prosperity, and liberty.

In this study, I explored protective and security measures taken by different levels of government operating within the United States specifically focusing on the combining of certain aspects of the domestic law enforcement community and the national intelligence community through fusion centers. Prior examinations concerning these organizations have largely focused on the performance, effectiveness, relevance, organizational structure, and impacts of Network operations on individual rights and liberties. Many of these study findings identified best practices and pointed out areas of recommended improvement but were limited in diagnosing the symptoms, which were potentially impacting the Network's integration with broader national security efforts.

In this study, I will provide the background and context into the creation and composition of the Network, highlight competing views of these organizations and their operations by various entities, and examine factors concerning the Network's integration

with the U.S. national security strategy. I used a phenomenological approach in this qualitative study, which resulted in the discovery and understanding of factors that were impacting this integration and informing policy and operational decision-making concerning domestic security as well as offered a rich description of these organizations contributing to the body of knowledge in this field. This study on the Network was orientated toward discovering and understanding these factors impacting integration, from the perspective of those engaged in Network operations. This research endeavor allowed me to take a unique angle of research, resulting in findings that will inform policy and decision making regarding domestic intelligence; advance the discussion concerning privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties (P/CRCL); and inform practitioners managing and operating fusion centers as well as leadership from organizations that support and partner with the Network.

This research was supportive of Walden University's vision to advance positive social change in several ways. The study topic itself promoted interagency collaboration and civic engagement dealing with matters concerning public safety by highlighting the discourse, concerns, and angst often expressed in the public realm surrounding domestic security. Findings are also likely to inform public policy focused on intelligence and security operations and could offer recommendations for organizational and institutional practice improvements. Ultimately, this study positively supported the understanding of and the continued development of the Network in a manner that improves the human condition through the generation of results that may impact future public safety and security strategy.

The following chapters will cover different aspects of this study. In Chapter 1, I will provide a background on the topic, describe the angle of research, explain the current issues in this field, and justify the need for study in this area. In this Chapter, I will also highlight the different parts of this study and clearly identify the alignment of the problem, the purpose, the theoretical framework, and the central questions that drove this overall research. In Chapter 2, I will pull together relevant works in the field of study to establish a baseline for the Network's operations further detailing how fusion centers support the national security apparatus of the United States. In this chapter, I will thoroughly review prior research focused on fusion centers and identify key areas of consideration in the field as well as gaps that this study intends to fill. In Chapter 3, I will describe the methodology that will be used in this research study. In this portion of the manuscript, the rationale for the research design will be highlighted along with the description of the sample population that was used and how the framework informed interview questions and data analysis. In Chapter 4, I will describe the research setting, participant demographics, and data collection methods. In this segment of the manuscript, I will also highlight the data analysis process and detail the results for the study. In the final chapter, I will provide an interpretation of the study findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for the Network, and address the implications of the study.

### **Background**

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11) significantly altered the view of global and homeland security in the United States. All of a sudden, individuals

previously only known to the intelligence community, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, architect of the 9/11 attacks; Mullah Mohammed Omar, founder of the Taliban; and Osama Bin Laden, leader of al-Qa'ida; became household names representing new rivals to the Nation (Wright, 2006, p. 425, 429). Events that were largely unnoticed or quickly forgotten such as the 1998 and 2000 attacks against U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya and the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen appeared to be relevant to the homeland (Strindberg & Warn, 2011, pp. 93-94; Coll, 2004). Mass-mediated fear was prevalent and played into public sentiment and political responses that created popular support for bolder security efforts at home and abroad (Breckenridge & Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 116-118; Moghaddam, 2006, pp. 78-80).

All of these variables led to an internal discussion about the nation's ability to address these security challenges giving way to worry about the integration and effectiveness of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement services (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). Increasingly, government and public opinion came to realize that the 9/11 attacks may have been disrupted if information was shared between security agencies and across levels of government (Logan, 2010). Fragmented government disaster response due to piecemealed policy that governed agency responsibility was also noted (Sylves, 2015, pp. 13-14). The overall assessment of the nation's security apparatus during the period immediately following the attacks can be summarized by prevailing thoughts and feelings that the system was broke.

These concerns spurred sweeping changes in government and policy priorities related to security and emergency management (Bullock, Haddow, & Coppola, 2016, pp.

3-5). The passage of significant legislation, such as the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 and the Homeland Security Act of 2002 signaled the government's renewed priorities to enhance national security efforts and integrate the country's intelligence and law enforcement resources in the furtherance of homeland defense (Mahan & Griset, 2013, pp. 317-321). This era was also marked with the proliferation of concepts that considered greater associations between global threats and domestic security concerns. Bellavita (2008) described the emphasis on the integration of disciplines to address this new homeland security challenge. Others (e.g., Bach & Kaufman, 2009; Cole, 2017; Smith, 2016) noted the need for wider public engagement to address these issues. The bottom line was that the United States was in crisis and the associated panic created an open highway for policy and initiatives that were oriented in the direction of national and homeland security.

One of these initiatives dealt with the establishment of fusion centers and the subsequent mergence of these organizations into strategic security efforts. The fusion center concept was based on basic foundational beliefs related to organizational cooperation and collaboration (DHS, 2016b). Prevailing thoughts about the evolving threat centered on the belief that it could be suppressed through interagency partnerships, federation of resources, and greater information sharing (Klem, 2016).

All fusion centers have state, local, tribal, and/or territorial (SLTT) agency executive agencies and serve federal, state, and local security missions (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2014b; Taylor, Rodriguez, Gowadia, Ragsdale, &

McAleenan, 2016, p. 6). These multiagency entities are involved in operations that include collection, investigation, dissemination, and analysis of information and items with a nexus to terrorism and homeland security (Nationwide SAR Initiative [NSI], 2016, p. 7). As more of these organizations were established to the present number of 79, fusion centers began to collaborate with each other initially forming loose regional federations and eventually creating what is currently referred to the Network (DHS, 2016d).

Since the inception of the Network and the expansion of fusion center operations, criticisms and study findings (e.g., Coffey, 2015; D. Evans, 2013; Regan, Monahan, & Craven, 2015; Taylor & Russell, 2012, Tromblay, 2015) have suggested that these entities have been suffering from challenges related to its integration with broader national security efforts. The body of research concerning fusion centers has been saturated with studies that have attempted to measure capabilities, evaluate effectiveness, determine legality of operations, diagnose ideal policy adjustments, and define the best structural models for the Network (Chermak, Carter, Carter, McGarrell, & Drew, 2013; R. Evans, 2013; Joyal, 2012; Price, 2013; K. Stone, 2014). I executed this research project with an intention to address gaps present in the current literature by discovering and understanding factors that impact the Network's integration with national security efforts as perceived by staff working within the Network. This research is relevant to policy and decision makers involved in security operations, practitioners attempting to decrease deficiencies within the current approaches to domestic security, as well as

advocacy groups and academic efforts to understand the dynamics of security and privacy.

### **Problem Statement**

The Network's main focus is rooted in processes and responsibilities in support of the U.S. national security strategy, specifically intelligence and security operations (DHS, 2014). The Network conducts operations, analysis, and investigations and collects and disseminates information of relevance to homeland security and law enforcement (DHS, 2016b). A clear majority of fusion centers were established in the post-9/11 era to address information sharing and domestic intelligence gaps that were identified after the terrorist attacks (Klem, 2016). These fusion centers have been involved in development and maturation processes since their inception, attempting to negotiate the homeland security landscape, which involves all levels of government and a variety of disciplines. Research by Taylor and Russell (2012), Price (2013), and Monahan and Regan (2012) has established that the Network has several shortfalls, including questions about the lawfulness of operations, the migration of mission focus away from terrorism, the commitment to privacy protections, the ability of fusion centers to produce relevant analysis, and governance/oversight mechanisms. Prior assessments and evaluations of fusion centers (e.g., Baker, 2013; Chermak et al., 2013; DHS, 2016; House, 2013) have also found that the Network has made substantial improvements concerning capacity and capabilities and are supportive of policing efforts. Still, a problem remains related to the Network's integration into and with national security efforts. The U.S. national security strategy emphasizes law enforcement and intelligence activities such as the collection,



analysis, and dissemination of products in support of strategic priorities like the strengthening of national defense, reinforcement of homeland security, and the combating of terrorism, all of which are in the scope of the Network's overall mission (Obama, 2015).

There is limited evidence of inquiries that have considered fusion center integration or how the Network is associated with national security strategies, which may be the root cause of many of the negative findings of research in this area. Some examinations (e.g., Carter & Chermak, 2012; Coffey, 2015; Hoffman, 2015) have focused on the performance and efficiency of the Network, but may have neglected to identify factors that may be contributing to many of the Network's above-mentioned shortfalls. Prior research on the Network conducted by academia, advocacy groups, and government institutions has also explored various aspects of fusion center operations (Constitution Project, 2012; German & Stanley, 2007; U.S. Senate, 2012). For example, some of these examinations assessed the effectiveness of fusion centers (e.g., Carter, Lewandowski, & May, 2016; Graphia, 2010; Monahan & Regan, 2012), while others evaluated its value, cost, structure, governance, and overall implications on citizen liberties (e.g., Alimahomed, 2014; Carter et al., 2012; Taylor & Russell, 2012). Researchers (e.g., Coffey, 2015; Hoffman, 2015; Peled, 2016; Smith, 2011) have also defined performance metrics and evaluation policy and procedure. Some of the issues raised by these researchers have questioned the efficacy of, need for, and legality of fusion centers. The identified challenges threaten the survival of the Network, which

could result in recreating deficiencies in the U.S. national security posture that were noted during reviews of the contributing factors to the 9/11 attacks.

Prior discussion and recommendations highlighted in other works hint at the Network's difficulty with finding its appropriate place within the scope of homeland security (Baker, 2013; Price, 2013; Vidal, 2013). Those involved with advancing the Network's mission appear to be experiencing problems related to operational integration with broader national security efforts. Some of these challenges could stem from Brady's (2015) claim of lack of role definitions, Ferrandino's (2014) assertion that the Network's structure requires application of different management principles, and/or Harbisher's (2015) findings that threats are being overblown. If ignored, fusion centers may experience continued criticism and angst that could result in a reduction of funding, resource allocation, personnel support, and overall confidence in their operations.

Should the Network cease operations or parts of the Network be discontinued, the domestic security posture of the nation could be degraded to a point where the country's security operations were again compartmentalized and segmented like that prior to 9/11, and at least one report explains that diminished funding for fusion centers would likely result in a complete refocusing of efforts "toward exclusively state and local mission needs" (House, 2013, p. vi). A 2017 joint report that focused on domestic intelligence sharing amongst agencies noted that while fiscal contributions by state and local governments to fusion centers has increased, federal grants in support of the Network have significantly diminished (Inspector General Intelligence Community, Office of the Inspector General Department of Homeland Security, and Office of the Inspector General

Department of Justice, 2017, pp. 45-47). This joint report noted that this decrease in federal financial support has been attributed to the lessening of federal influence over the Network.

Graphia (2010) noted that funding challenges experienced by the Network have already negatively affected operations specifically in areas such as analytical training, marketing, and personnel allocation. As I mentioned above, there appears to be limited work in the field that has attempted to determine if operational integration challenges are related to negative findings and criticisms expressed in the literature. Likewise, researchers have not attempted to discover aspects that have or could positively support fusion center integration. Identification of smart fusion center practices and procedures could help strengthen the Network's contributions to national efforts by illuminating areas of success that could be replicated across organizations or addressed in strategic policy initiatives. Therefore, I angled this study of the Network towards discovering and understanding potential barriers to integration between fusion centers and national security initiatives in order to positively support current and future policy efforts focusing on law enforcement and intelligence operations aimed at increasing the country's security posture.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand and discover phenomena that impact the integration of the Network with national security efforts. To achieve this purpose, I conducted an exploration of Network staff and leadership's perceptions about factors that have and are affecting fusion center integration. A greater

understanding of these elements will create opportunities to mitigate negative factors and build upon positive aspects through the implementation of targeted strategies and policies in an effort to enhance integration. This could result in a positive effect to overall national and homeland security.

My examination attempted to shed light on existing integration barriers and provide a greater understanding of these factors through a qualitative study design. I integrated my engagement of Network staff and leadership on this topic area within the methodology of this study in order to create an opportunity for the collection of unique information. This also led to the gathering of data consisting of Network staff's insight about how fusion center operations, challenges, and opportunities impacted the integration of the Network. With this study, I strived to further the current depth of the body of knowledge on this topic and extend the discussion concerning the Network, intelligence and law enforcement communities, as well as organizational integration. With this research project, I addressed gaps in the literature, which concern the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy.

In this study, I used in-person and telephonic interviews of Network staff and leadership to answer research questions (RQs), which were centered on factors concerning Network integration. This angle of inquiry was directly related to the above-mentioned problem statement that was derived from prior study findings that I assessed to suggest that fusion centers may be suffering from a form of alignment issues with broader security efforts. While I will explain in more detail in the literature review in Chapter 2, previous examinations concerning the Network have not targeted this line of

inquiry concerning fusion centers demonstrating a significant research gap that the results of this study filled.

### **Research Questions (RQs)**

The following RQs directly supported the purpose of the study through their focus on having participants identify variables that they perceived were associated with fusion center integration:

RQ1: What factors influence the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy?

RQ2: What barriers impact the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy?

RQ3: What circumstances contribute to the criticisms voiced about fusion centers?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, I relied on some of the many theoretical concepts made available from prior work conducted in the public policy arena. I used a theoretical framework in this study, in a manner described by Patton (2015) to inform action, process, and evaluation (p. 18). Additionally, the framework for this study was used as a lens for viewing the data, informing analysis, and as a tool in the development of participant interview questions. In Chapter 3 and Appendix C, I will provide a more detailed explanation of this framework, how components of it related to the interview questions, and how I used it to inform data analysis.

The chosen framework that I applied to this study was based on works conducted by Kingdon (2003) that centered on the creation and implementation of public policy. Kingdon's multiple streams framework (MSF) strived to describe and explain influential factors that impact the goal setting and prioritization during the making of public policy (R. Evans, 2014, p. 3). Howlett, McConnell, and Perl (2015) explained that the foundation of this theory is based on the idea that policy agenda items achieve top billing and subsequent action when there is an intersection of three factors that Kingdon described as streams: problem, political, and policy (p. 420).

Each of the three streams was described as having distinct values and influence. The problem stream refers to conditions which individuals or organizations believe need to be changed in some capacity (Boswell & Rodrigues, 2016, p. 508). The political stream concerns leadership, atmospherics, the balance of power, and changes in administration, where priorities and focus are influenced by specific interests or party ideology (Wie-Yusuf, Neill, St. John, Ash, & Mahar, 2016, p. 231). The policy stream is comprised of various ideas and initiatives that are generated from area specialists where feasibility, value, and resource availability determine the level of consideration (Zahariadis, 2014, pp. 33-34).

These three streams exist independently and evolve over time (Kingdon, 2003). Cohen-Vogel and McLendon (2009) explained that an integral point of this theory concerns the coupling of these streams with a choice opportunity. Kingdon (2003) described individuals or organizations championing a certain objective as policy entrepreneurs, which act as bonding agents of the streams. These entrepreneurs also

recognize policy windows that represent a favorable point in time for desired policy outcome (Kingdon, 2003).

MSF was derived from classical organizational theories and has often been used to explain policy outcomes (Zahariadis, 2014, pp. 25-26). Some of the central features of this theory appear to have been derived from or influenced by Cohen , March, and Olsen's (1972) garbage can model of choice, which addresses some of the elements of decision-making through varied participation, attention, and opportunity. MSF was relevant to this study as the tenets provide a logical structure to understand and frame participant responses, which will consist of perceptions about the factors influencing the Network's integration with broader national security goals.

Concepts of the framework helped me articulate why fusion centers have chosen to prioritize certain aspects of operations over others. MSF also aided in the identification of links in the stages of Network policymaking, providing meaning for institutional action, and describing how these affect integration. Ultimately, I used this framework to simplify the complexities of the different dynamics that are impacting fusion center operations. The three streams in MSF provided a solid foundation that aided in the development of interview questions and the categorization of respondent comments. Data were analyzed and coded and then assessed for their intersections with each other in a manner similar to how MSF describes the interaction of streams, which informed the study results and helped to increase the overall value of the findings of the study.

This framework aligned with the problem, purpose, and RQs for this study as evidenced by each component's association with policy, priority, and institutional

operations. The problem statement described evidence of integration issues. The purpose of the study explained the focus of study on discovering and understanding what these issues are. The RQs were angled toward identifying the specific phenomena that impacted integration. The framework provided the construct for interpreting said phenomena. MSF helped inform aspects of the interview questions specifically questions in Category III, which were directly tied to core concepts offered by the framework, such as perceptions of problems, existing policy constraints, and political influences.

### **Nature of the Study**

I angled the RQs for this study toward arriving at a detailed and focused understanding of the phenomena with no intent to control variables that were known prior to the conduct of the study or those that were identified during the execution of the examination. Gill (2014) argued that qualitative designs offer the ideal research approach for gaining a detailed and thorough understanding of phenomena in line with the intent of this research. Janesick (2016) also stated that qualitative research emphasizes understanding of the topic of study over the prediction of an outcome. The RQs supported a qualitative design because of the challenges that would have likely been presented should specific measurements be taken of inputs. My collection emphasis for this study centered on the harvesting of opinions, beliefs, feelings, and impressions of participants that worked within the scope of the Network for at least 1 full year. The qualitative design also ensured that there was adequate alignment of all of the study's integral components, such as design, problem, purpose, RQs, and theoretical framework.



The angle of this research examination was also in line with characteristics of a phenomenological approach, which was applied in this study. Creswell (2013) described phenomenological research as intending to discover, understand, and explain experiences of those associated with the topic of study (p. 76). This supports Gill's (2014) claim that phenomenological study often requires examination of the phenomenon through the collection of data that centers on perceptions from individual experiences of relevance to the topic.

The qualitative design coupled with a phenomenological approach provided a logical process framework to this study since they were congruent and helped support the intent and orientation of this research study. Therefore, the foundational concepts of the design and approach were aligned with the different elements of this study. These items also allowed for the collection and analysis of data that was not available through direct and indirect observation, was not found elsewhere, and appeared to me to only be attainable through direct contact with participants who were representative of the overall population that was studied.

My original intent with this study to understand and discover phenomena impacting integration was based on the lived experiences of participants. This was supportive of a phenomenological approach, which is rooted in the exploration of how individuals make sense of their environment and experiences. The explorative nature of this study, which sought to extract meaning from participant narratives to generate a rich understanding of the phenomena, was highly suggestive of a qualitative design that permitted the collection of data from the study participants that can be best described as

unstructured, fragmented, and nuanced. The approach and design also offered the ability to collect and analyze data that could not necessarily be directly observed, does not currently exist elsewhere, and can only be collected through direct contact with participants who are in the population of interest.

I generated study findings and recommendations from data collected through in-person and telephonic interviews of 13 individuals that were selected from the finite population of 2,844 individuals participating within fusion center operations that were identified in a recent government study that focused on cataloguing the Network's capabilities and providing a description of the Network in its entirety (DHS, 2016b, p. 6, 10). The population was comprised of individuals from federal and SLTT levels of government, many of who work within the public safety and first responder disciplines. Interview questions were created with the desire to illicit responses from participants concerning their personal views of the Network's integration into broader national security efforts. Data collected during the interview process also pertained to participant opinions about factors that they perceived as having influenced or will impact fusion center integration in the future. The unstructured data collected during the interview process was then processed through multiple levels of coding with each level assisting in the refinement of information categories. My first cycle evaluation of the information utilized a blend of descriptive, in vivo, and evaluation coding techniques, since participant responses were not uniform. This was followed by selective coding in order to aid in the identification of patterns relevant to the angle of inquiry. I then interpreted emerging themes through concepts described in the MSF.

## Definitions

In this section, I will highlight terms and concepts that are central to the understanding of the research topic. Each item is listed in alphabetical order and is followed by the operating definition used throughout the execution of this study. These terms were selected based on their relevance to understanding the Network and/or elements of this study.

*Fusion Center:* A “collaborative effort of two or more agencies that provide resources, expertise, and information to the center with the goal of maximizing their ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity” (Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative [Global], DHS, & the Bureau of Justice Assistance [BJA], 2008, pp. 47-48). Fusion centers referenced within this manuscript are organizations that have been further evaluated for determination of meeting baseline capability criteria and are further identified by DHS (2016d) as primary or recognized fusion centers.

*Homeland security:* “Homeland security describes the intersection of evolving threats and hazards with traditional governmental and civic responsibilities for civil defense, emergency response, law enforcement, customs, border control, and immigration” (DHS, 2010, p. viii).

*Information sharing:* The gathering, processing, and dissemination of information for use by relevant stakeholders. This term can be understood as the linking of collection to analysis to mobilize information through the transfer of data between organizations

(National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004; Program Manager Information Sharing Environment [PM-ISE], 2015).

*Intelligence*: Data and information that has been processed through analysis and is gathered through activities in response to policymaker requirements. Intelligence can be generically categorized as either being raw or finished. Raw intelligence is intelligence that has not undergone a formal vetting process to determine validity. Finished intelligence refers to information that has been processed through more formal means and often is combined with other pieces of raw information, which aids in the formulation of analytical judgments (Rollins, 2008).

*Intelligence community*: The intelligence community consists of 17 federal government executive agencies, which are involved with gathering and analysis of intelligence information relevant to foreign relations and national security (Office of the Director of National Intelligence ([ODNI], n.d).

*Law enforcement community*: The law enforcement community consists of approximately 18,000 SLTT law enforcement organizations, as well as approximately 70 law enforcement agencies at the federal level. These organizations have the primary responsibilities of enforcing law, promoting public safety, and protection of persons/property (Bohm & Haley, 2012; Department of Justice [DOJ], 2011).

*National Network of Fusion Centers (Network)*: The federation of the 79 federally recognized fusion centers (DHS, 2016d; Mead, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>All source materials commonly reference the Network strength at 78 fusion centers. As of 30 May 2017, the Wyoming Information and Analysis Team was designated as a

*National Security*: "Safeguarding the sovereignty, territorial integrity, citizenry and socioeconomic functionality of a nation from an aggressor intent on undermining a particular valued aspect of a nation through violent or unjust means" (Premaratne, 2016, p. 1).

*Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative*: "A standardized process for identifying and reporting suspicious activity in jurisdictions across the country and also serves as the unified focal point for sharing suspicious activity reporting information" (BJA, 2013, p. 5).

*Organizational integration*: The seamless and efficient business processes that enable an entity to reach its organizational goals.

*Policy stream*: One tenant of the multiple streams approach (MSA), which describes the creation and communication of policy that supports organizational norms (Herweg, Hub, & Zohlnhofer, 2015, p. 439).

*Politics stream*: One tenant of the multiple streams approach (MSA), which describes the environment, relationships, atmospheric, associates, and other factors that support decision-making (Zahariadis, 2014, pp. 25-26).

*Problem stream*: One tenant of the MSA, which describes the requirement that a perception of a societal problem is required to influence decision making (Knaggard, 2015, pp. 451-452).

*Terrorism*: An act of violence or threat of violent action by an individual, group, or nationstate motivated by an ideological framework intending to intimidate or coerce a

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primary fusion center for its state bringing the overall number of federally recognized fusion centers to 79.

population, influence government policy, and/or disrupt the conduct of government (McEntire, 2009, pp. 26-28).

*Transparency:* Open government and public visibility into operations (Obama, n.d.), which is often measured through perceptions based on the availability of organization policy, procedure, and activities to the citizenry.

*U.S. national security strategy:* The formal National Security Strategy document required by law to be completed by U.S. government executive administrations as well as associated policies that encompass strategic homeland and national security initiatives. A. Quinn (2015) explained that the strategy has historically comprised elements such as “security of the territory and people of the United States, security of the economy and American ‘way of life’, and the spread of liberal values and government abroad” (p. 2).

### **Assumptions**

My primary assumptions about the processes and procedures associated with the study were related to sample participation and participant response. I assumed that individuals involved in the study participated without any perceived or real external pressure. This assumption was based on and supported by the thorough verbal and written explanation of interview protocol of the study, assurance of information confidentiality, as well as the issuance of detailed informed consent documents to participants, which underscored these and other ethical principles. Participants also understood that they were able to cease their participation and/or choose to not answer questions that they were not comfortable addressing. Another assumption was that participant responses to interview questions were true, honest, accurate, and void of

deception. While not experienced during the data collection process, I had planned on not using information that appeared to be false or inaccurate. These assumptions were necessary for this research in order for execution of the actual study, aspects of each of these items were also difficult or impossible to prove or for me to have ever have 100% certainty. While every individual participant's experience certainly varied, the concept of sampling until saturation greatly assisted in identifying response anomalies, which could have indicated, but not necessarily proven participant deception.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The research problem centered on evidence from the body of literature of integration issues between the Network and U.S. national security strategies. As I described earlier, this research focus was chosen due to the ability to address a gap in the field of knowledge on this topic. I intended this study to be directed at the perceptions of study participants who represented a small sample of the total population of individuals working within the scope of Network operations. According to government estimates based on self-reported information during the annual assessment process, the population of the Network consisted of approximately 2,844 employees from federal and SLTT government organizations with expertise in various public safety disciplines as well as individuals from private sector organizations which were detailed to the fusion centers (DHS, 2016b, p. 6, 10). Positions represented in the above-mentioned figure consisted of individuals with one or more responsibilities that can be described as management, governance, policy-making, data management, analysis, investigations, liaison, planning, operational coordination, training, and/or general administration. The 13 participants that

I selected for this study provided a degree of some generalizability to the specific fusion centers represented, but did not provide the transferability that a mixed method and/or quantitative examination would have likely generated. Every potential experience, discipline, fusion center, and job category was not represented by the participant sample in this study. Data analysis was based on the perceptions of the participants who had personal experience within the Network whose views of items influencing organizational integration was key to addressing the RQs. There was no anticipation that any measurements would be required to be taken of any physically tangible items nor were any in actuality during the execution of the examination.

### **Limitations**

In this study, I focused on a Network-level viewpoint as opposed to an individual fusion center comparison in the hopes that this approach could inform broader policy decisions for the entire Network and discipline. A study centering on individual fusion center comparisons would have likely resulted in a more detailed contrast and distinction of elements impacting integration, but perhaps only relevant on a per-specific fusion center basis. The proposed sample size for this study relative to the population of those federal and SLTT staff working within the realm of the Network presented the most significant limitations of this research. I sought participants that were individuals with at least 1 year of experience in positions with responsibilities associated with one of the 79 recognized fusion centers that consisted of any one of the following disciplines: management, governance, policy-making, data management, analysis, investigations, liaison, planning, operational coordination, training, or general administration.



Other limitations stemmed from factors that could have diminished the dependability of the information. As I discussed in the previous section, this examination used 13 individuals from the finite Network population. The limited percentage of individuals representing the population presented challenges to generalizing findings far beyond those individuals that engaged in study interviews and/or the specific fusion centers represented by participants.

Snowball sampling techniques using referrals from potential participants also present a risk due the potential of participant selections being made from a pool of individuals that could be a part of a previously unknown (to me) specific culture group subordinate to the total population. Because there are no strict guidelines for nonprobabilistic sample sizes, in this study I relied on data saturation as a main factor to enhance the generalizability. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) explained that purposive samples, like that used in this study, commonly rely on the concept of saturation. Their study examining qualitative study guidelines determined that data saturation during an interview process occurred around the point of 12 interviewees with metathemes (general/broad themes) coming to light as soon as six interviews into the research interview process (Guest et al., 2006). The use of 13 interviewees for this study ensured that saturation was achieved during the collection phase of the study.

There is also the possibility that the dependability of the data could be called into question by consumers of the findings of this study and/or viewed as subject to influences and interpretation. The findings for this study relied on individual perceptions based on the personal experiences of the participants for the study. These perceptions could have

been influenced by variables and situations that were and/or are not known to me and possibly to the participant as well. One example of a potential external pressure/influencer that could limit the dependability of the data might be a participant that was concerned that some impressions relayed during their interview process could be viewed negatively by supervisors and result in a disciplinary response.

Researcher bias and background could have confounded study outcomes. While more thoroughly explained in Chapter 3, I have a professional background in the national security field, which could have influenced data analysis. To mitigate bias in this area, I made every attempt to ensure that the study results were based solely on data collected during the interview process and void of any coloring of the data with my personal viewpoints or opinions.

Procedural issues related to data collection could also have potentially led to study limitations such as telephonic interviews. To mitigate issues such as this that might be viewed as diminishing the quality and credibility of the data, I employed member checking to the greatest extent possible in an effort to ensure integrity of the data. In-person interviews offered the benefit of permitting the collection of observable data such as facial expressions, gesticulations, and body language in general. These direct data collection encounters were sought at every opportunity. However, some engagements were only possible through telephonic interviews due to participant preferences, scheduling issues, and time constraints for the study. In the cases of the telephonic interviews, opportunities to collect the above-mentioned observable data as well as additional atmospheric information was diminished and could be viewed by some as

having presented the potential of restricting some data elements that could have provided context or have aided in the analysis and/or the interpretation of the information.

### **Significance**

The focus of this examination was centered on the identification and understanding of and what situations, programs, environments, policies and procedures were associated with barriers to the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy. The results of this study support the protection of the Nation's democratic principles as well as the public safety needs of the citizenry specifically by addressing transparency (illumination of security operations); accountability (examining aspects of mission and responsibilities); human rights (highlighting privacy, civil rights, and civil liberty implications); and rule of law (review of legality of operations and jurisdictional constraints). This research provided a unique angle of inquiry through my consistent focus on the impressions from internal staff and leaders that resulted in the discovery of factors impacting integration and which ultimately addressed the Network integration research gap previously described in this manuscript. Findings will contribute to security and intelligence policy and operational priority decisions concerning homeland security and the intersection of domestic and international intelligence activities. The data and findings of this study will provide the Network with information to move the discussion about the Network beyond the often studied topics of performance metrics, individual privacy, and structure to areas that aim to understand what affects (positively or negatively) the evolution of the Network. My examination of this topic provided a greater understanding about how the Network functions, and I presented and

illuminated factors and concepts that should be considered by Network staff, decision-makers, stakeholders, as well as organizations considering future partnerships with the Network for increasing collaboration between these entities.

The results of this study are relevant to a litany of public and private organizations, agencies, and groups. The first category of consumers of this examination consists of fusion center partners and stakeholders from all levels of government and public safety disciplines. These entities have a vested interest in understanding phenomena that are affecting the Network due to their financial, personnel, equipment, and/or other asset investment in operations. My research findings will help with the assessment of fusion centers' value to their individual organizational priorities and inform decision-making concerning future resource allocation. The Network's expansive prevention and protection responsibilities for individual communities and private sector organizations touch upon a variety of policy areas ranging from security to privacy, which makes this topic of relevance to another category of entities consisting of nongovernmental organizations and advocacy groups. The results of this study provide additional context into the Network's operations, how and why it has evolved into its current state, and ideally can assist with private sector organizational decisions concerning collaboration with fusion centers.

Findings from this research will also be utilized by legislative members who allocate appropriations for security and public safety projects; elected officials interested in protection of their constituency; law enforcement, public safety, and security organizations participating in and partnering with fusion centers; and executive

organizations that are managing and funding the Network's operations. A few specific examples of governmental organizations that have been keenly interested in all aspects of the Network's operations as has been demonstrated by reporting and evaluation from these same entities on this topic are the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Congressional Research Service, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and of course DHS (DHS, 2016; Global, 2008; House, 2012; Masse & Rollins, 2007; Senate, 2013). Other government organizations, which have attempted to routinely evaluate and understand the Network have consisted of the Offices of Inspector General from several of the organizations involved in domestic security and intelligence activities (Inspector General Intelligence Community, Office of the Inspector General DHS, and Office of the Inspector General DOJ, 2017). These organizations will also benefit from the findings presented in this study and could likely be consumers of recommendations provided later in the manuscript.

Other audiences that would likely find interest in a study of this nature concern academia, third-party entities, and/or advocacy groups that have conducted research in the areas of security and governmental impacts to personal liberties and rights. Some examples of organizations of this nature would be the American Civil Liberties Union, the Constitution Project, and the Brennan Center for Justice (Constitution Project, 2012; German & Stanley, 2007; Pfeifer, 2012; Price, 2013). These nongovernmental organizations, such as many of the privacy advocacy groups, are relevant to this topic as they often represent the main competing voice that ensures individual liberties are noted in the discourse concerning domestic security. The results of this study, in which I

intended to identify the factors supporting and/or hindering integration, also has the additional benefit of illuminating areas of the Network that have often been charged by some of these organizations as lacking appropriate transparency. The additional information provided by the findings of this study could help lead to more informed assessments and judgments about the Network.

Safety and security are cornerstones for all functional nations and are necessary for the maintenance of societal order and prosperity. My examination of the Network has potential positive implications on public safety, government transparency, as well as government efficiency by bringing to light aspects of fusion center operations, which have sometimes been previously misunderstood and/or misrepresented. Study findings could promote better collaboration between organizations involved in domestic intelligence and influence security practices while supporting P/CRCL protections. The focus of prior research (e.g., Givens, 2012; Joyal, 2012; Tromblay, 2015; Vidal, 2013) in this realm has demonstrated the importance of these elements.

The results of this study touch on operations and activities being executed by organizations involved in intelligence, security, and law enforcement missions. Positive social change could be realized from the results of this research through increasing topical awareness, providing information which could inform security policy decisions, and aiding in the understanding of past and future decisions concerning resource allocation. In this study, I also offered context of fusion center challenges, which have not been previously identified due to the limited research that has examined integration factors, and will assist with educating consumers of this study on how current policy has

supported and/or challenged fusion center staff. Information concerning the Network's background, environment, and barriers to integration will promote understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these organizations. This newer and/or more accurate understanding can arm those involved in strategic planning for individual fusion centers with a different perspective of the impacts of Network operations on society as well as offer suggestions to consider when attempting to implement initiatives aimed at increasing the effectiveness of these organizations.

In this study, I provided content that will help consumers better evaluate how fusion centers have been executing operations within what Cooper (2012) described as government's administrative ethical responsibilities. Findings that focused on highlighting examples of lawful fusion center practices could also result in an increased confidence in security policy and practice. Findings identifying deficiencies and challenges will also help identify specific areas for improvement, which will support targeted policy and procedural strategy development to address these shortfalls.

Because this research led to the discovery and better understanding of factors that are influencing integration into the security arena, this document will certainly add to the body of knowledge on government efforts to protect the citizenry and promote continued discussion about the U.S. national security strategy. This research is highly supportive of Walden University's interest in positively contributing to social change due to its orientation towards increasing collaboration within the community of public safety by resulting in the generation of findings and recommendations that will improve practices in this discipline. The results of this study further support civic engagement efforts due

to the participant base, which consisted of government officials working within the Network, while addressing topics of interest to many nongovernment advocacy groups as I briefly described earlier in the section. Participants, which were practitioners in the field and employed within the Network, also informed the design of the research and helped guide the process. Their input and perspectives on the research was sought and made available for self-validation.

### **Summary**

Fusion centers were created in response to the identification of critical deficiencies in U.S. security operations. The attacks on 9/11 became the catalyst for a hyper-focused effort to address these gaps through the implementation of policy and the restructuring of law enforcement and intelligence communities. The Network represents one aspect of these monumental changes in the national security realm. Many of the growing pains experienced by the Network throughout its maturation process are indicative of integration issues with U.S. national security efforts and priorities.

With this study, I intended to address gaps in the research on fusion centers that had largely focused on the performance, status, and implications of Network operations but had not centered on gaining an understanding of what factors are present that may be impacting the very integration. In this study, I used a qualitative design through a phenomenological approach to gather information from participants in an effort to discover and understand these factors. Kingdon's (2003) MSF provided the lens and structure for me to interpret the data that was subsequently collected and analyzed.



In the next chapter, I will provide detailed information that represents the body of work focusing on the Network. In the literature review, I provide a historical perspective on the evolution of security policy then moves to critical incidents and actions that influenced counterterrorism policy. This will provide the backdrop and entry point of the creation of the Network. The scope and structure of the Network is then offered to provide a thorough understanding of the operating environment. A review of studies that have examined the Network will aid in defining the field on this topic as well as the parsing out of research gaps that this study strives to address. Information concerning organizational integration and details describing the theoretical framework and how MSF has been commonly used in study will round out the chapter.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The Network exists to close some of the gaps that were highlighted in the Nation's security and intelligence processes. It addresses these responsibilities by acting as a focal point for information of relevance to homeland and national security (DHS, 2016b). Fusion centers also act as bridges between historical jurisdictional and discipline divisions (Klem, 2016). The Network attempts to evaluate, integrate, and make sense of information, which may originate from a partner in the intelligence community concerning an international terrorist organization overseas (Gardner, 2017). At the same time, these fusion centers are charged with collecting and analyzing reporting emanating from a domestic law enforcement agency regarding a localized extremist group. These organizations execute these functions with the intent of bolstering our national security from a regional and state vantage point in the furtherance of public safety efforts. Unfortunately, the Network has experienced problems that could be indicative of challenges related to fusion center integration with the national security strategy. In this study, I strived to discover and understand phenomena that may be impacting this integration.

In this chapter, I will offer an overview of the body of knowledge concerning fusion centers, outline the theoretical foundation for the study, and discuss work that has provided an understanding of factors that impact organizational integration. In this literature review, I will provide a background on the topic and highlight major themes that have emerged surrounding Network operations based on works conducted by

seminal researchers and theorists looking at fusion centers and public policy development. Materials in this chapter will be grouped into broad categories and sections in order to provide a logical flow of the content to aid in the understanding of the current knowledge of this field of study.

The first portion of this chapter will open with a review of the theoretical framework used in this study. I highlight information here in an attempt to provide the background and origin of MSF to include major propositions and assumptions of the framework and show how MSF has been previously applied in research. This will be followed by content focusing on historical perspectives of national security, terrorism policy, and factors that led to the creation of the Network. In this section, I will provide a foundation and context of the national security realm and the environment that led to the establishment of fusion centers.

I will then move the conversation towards studies and analysis that have examined aspects of fusion centers, intelligence activities, and law enforcement operations. I organized these sections of the literature review by recurring topics mentioned in works that address implications of operations, orientation, value, and governance associated with fusion centers. Additional emphasis was placed on representing different perspectives about challenges and strengths associated with fusion center operations in this area of the review so as to highlight and delineate the competing views on this topic. The final portion of this chapter will consist of some materials that describe aspects of organizational integration, some of which leverages findings from

studies conducted on organizations other than that of the Network such as for-profit institutions.

The body of work relevant to the research consisted of a variety of studies conducted by government, academia, and private institutions as well as advocacy groups. Some of the broad categories of study have focused on the Network itself, domestic intelligence processes and practices, and information sharing in the intelligence and law enforcement communities. Other angles of inquiry have centered on organizational aspects of security entities as well as the impacts of government law enforcement and security policy. Emphasis of many works focusing on the Network have examined the implications of fusion center operations on individual rights and liberties, performance of the Network, and contributions to national security and homeland security initiatives. While there has been much study on the topic that has contributed to the debate and discourse surrounding domestic intelligence, national security, and homeland security initiatives, there appeared to be a gap in the literature that attempts to discover and understand what factors are impacting the integration of the Network into national security efforts.

### **Strategy of Literature Research**

The literature I used in this examination consisted of primary, secondary, and tertiary sources from a variety of authors. I also used gray literature content consisting of government reports and conference proceedings in order to provide the additional context on the topic of study (Florida Gulf Coast University Library Services, 2005). Search and

evaluation techniques suggested by Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2008) were implemented to aid in assessing the relevancy and reliability of documents.

I employed search techniques similar to Bui's (2014) strategy, which suggested initial broad topical term usage followed by narrowing of phrases to aid in obtaining specificity (pp. 53-61). Key words such as *fusion centers, domestic intelligence, information sharing, privacy, civil rights, civil liberties, intelligence analysis, intelligence fusion, 9/11 lessons learned, law enforcement, National Network of Fusion Centers, terrorism, first responders, homeland security intelligence, intelligence community, organizational integration, intelligence integration, organizational culture, organizational leadership, intelligence policy, law enforcement policy, military intelligence, terrorist incidents, fusion center success stories, interagency partnerships, organizational collaboration, intelligence turf wars, public policy development, agenda setting, multiple streams, policy creation, policy priority*, and other associated terms and/or phrases as initial search phrases to gather sources that consisted of peer-reviewed articles, academic textbooks, published dissertations, published theses, and government publications . Electronic databases and search engines such as Google Scholar, Political Science Complete, SocINDEX, Sage Publications, ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, Homeland Security Digital Library, and others were used to gather a majority of materials. In addition to the academic search platforms mentioned, I also sought information from publicly available online sources, such as news organizations and third party advocacy websites. Government publications were gathered from websites sponsored by the owning government organizations, such as DHS, DOJ, FBI, CIA, BJA,

National Fusion Center Association (NFCA), various individual fusion centers, Library of Congress, GAO, Congressional Research Service, Offices of Inspector General, and others.

I also used a literature mapping technique similar to that described by Creswell (2008) early in the process in an attempt to identify potential gaps in the literature that may have been overlooked (pp. 33-34). This mapping technique consisted of grouping literature into general categories, first focusing on types of source organizations, then by the angle of inquiry and/or focus of the pieces as they related to the Network and intelligence processes. This initial process was helpful by providing a general tool to initially organize the data.

Lastly, I also implemented a snowball sampling strategy, using references from initial sources to discover other potential pieces of relevant literature, to round out the strategy (see Illenberger & Flotterod, 2012). This technique consisted of identifying source materials used in other studies concerning the research topic and assessing these documents for relevancy to this study. Literature discovered during all of these processes was further analyzed for relevancy and organized into categories by topic and type. I placed a heavier emphasis on the most recent pieces to ensure an appropriate sample of current work in the field. This technique has been used in a variety studies and has been noted to provide increased benefits in research in the areas of efficiency and thoroughness (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Stivala, Koskinen, Rolls, Wang, & Robins, 2016). The literature search phase was considered complete when my assessment found that topic saturation was achieved as determined by repeated themes presented in the

works. Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2016) described saturation as a point where recurring codes, topics, themes, and subjects are continually cycling through the research process causing me to assess there was a limited likelihood of unique materials left within the body of knowledge or that exists to be derived from the population.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the theoretical underpinning for this research was extracted from a classical public policy theory based on the works of Kingdon (2003). Kingdon sought to understand and highlight influential factors that impact decision-making in governmental policy, programs, and initiatives. The MSF describes the elements at play in such decision-making situations that set policy agendas and priorities (Kingdon, 2003). This agenda-setting process results in policy outcomes, which often orient organizational direction, determine and frame agency goals, provide parameters for strategic planning, and ultimately direct procedure (Kingdon, 2003). Simply put, Zahariadis (2014) explained that MSF attempts to offer explanations as to how public policy is created, established, and amended under conditions in government that are described as being ambiguous (p. 25).

### **Overview and Key Framework Propositions**

Some of the foundational principles of MSF appear to be based on earlier works of theorists and researchers who were also looking at aspects of decision-making and choice that also had implications on public policy. McGuigan (2015) noted related elements of Cohen's et al. (1972) garbage can model of choice in Kingdon's framework. The garbage can model describes organizational decision-making where vision and

preference is vague, participation in process is varied, and choices are made based on exposure to unrelated problems (Sager & Rielle, 2013, p. 4). MSF built upon principles of the garbage can model such as the acknowledgement of ambiguous decision-making environments coupled with assumptions that external and internal factors influence decisions at unknown rates of interaction (Sager & Rielle, 2013). Kingdon's MSF moved the garbage can model of choice discussion into the public policy realm.

MSF recognizes that decisions are based on an aggregation of combinations of different forces that are independent of one another but retained sensitivity to context of topic (Kingdon, 2003). MSA supposes a decision-making environment where there exists a litany of views concerning a given phenomenon (Kingdon, 2003). Kingdon (2003) described government entities as organized anarchies where participation is ever changing, technology is uncertain, jurisdictional boundaries are confused, and command intent is unclear. Primary assumptions of the framework are that individual attention is serial, while systemic processing is parallel, decision-makers are subject to significant time constraints, and that each influencing factor is independent of each other (Zahariadis, 2014).

This framework categorized and described these influences as three streams: problem, politics, and policy (Kingdon, 2003, p. 197). Knaggard (2015) explained that the problem stream described a societal problem or specified interest in addressing and/or creating change (pp. 451-452). The politics stream, which is painted by national mood or party ideology, evolves by the changing of participants such as through the movement of executives, election processes, et cetera (Wie-Yusuf et al., 2016, p. 231). The policy



stream, which is reliant on the value proposition, technical feasibility, and availability of resources, consists of a multitude of ideas and initiatives about various topics (Zahariadis, 2014, pp. 33-34). Similar to Bryson's (2011) description of identifying a champion to implement goals in strategic planning, Kingdon (2003) also explained that policy entrepreneurs are integral to the coupling of the streams and pushing objectives through the policy window to increase the likelihood of a policy outcome. The intersection of the three streams tied to a fleeting moment of opportunity permits the implementation of policy.

### **Applications of Framework**

MSF has been widely used and referenced in examinations focusing on public policy. In some cases, the framework has helped describe why certain initiatives took root, while other examinations attempted to use MSF as a set of guidelines to assist in targeting data collection. A great majority of those applying MSF appear to apply concepts of the framework in a manner originally intended by Kingdon (2003). In this subsection, I will provide a brief review of MSF use and application to demonstrate the current relevance of the theory.

Wie et al. (2016) used MSF to describe the political landscape surrounding policy implications concerning the climate change and environmental legislation debate. This study relied on many of the principles described in both the politics and problem streams described by Kingdon (2013). MSF has also been used as a lens for study on the Network itself (e.g., R. Evans, 2013). Study concerning the evolution of fusion center open source application policies was executed using some of the standards described in

MSF (R. Evans, 2013). R. Evans (2013) found MSF useful for articulating factors that influenced priority decision in these Network policy applications because it helped simplify different stages of the process. Some studies have merged elements of MSF with other frameworks to understand decision-making processes. McGuigan (2015) applied elements of MSF with the theory of free market efficiency to interpret and describe the National Institute of Health's (NIH) development of public access policy for government funded research. In the case of this research, McGuigan focused on the problem stream portion of the framework to help explain implications of relevant open access law as it is related to problem identification associated with NIH access policies.

Kingdon's (2003) theory has also been utilized to describe the rationale for historical governmental priority shifts and/or program evolution. Kusi-Ampofo, Church, Conteh, and Heinmiller, (2015) used MSF to describe the evolution and operations related to healthcare in Ghana. This study reviewed monetary policies, healthcare priorities, and access procedures to healthcare for citizens, coupled with administration changes, public sentiment, and specific political events that led to an overhaul of the healthcare process. Concepts of MSF, specifically explanation of the factors that helped create a "window of opportunity," were used to describe why and how healthcare processes evolved (Kusi-Ampofo et al., 2015, p. 196).

In other cases, MSF has helped categorize factors that contributed to organizational decisions of law enforcement entities that were considering privatizing components of their operations. White (2015) examined initiatives involving police organizations in the United Kingdom. The study recounted how budget policy

contributed to leadership decisions to privatize certain aspects of law enforcement operations (White, 2015). MSF helped frame how public sentiment was impacted by media coverage of the issue (White, 2015). The streams described in Kingdon's (2003) framework provided context into how the initiative became politicized to a point that precluded any effort to privatize operations (White, 2015).

### **Rationale and Relevance of Framework**

As evidenced by the examples provided in the above sub-section, MSF is a widely recognized theoretical framework with applications that can support describing structural forces, internal factors, and interactions in an organization's environment that influence policy and decision-making. Because of this, MSF was applied to help with the study's discovery and understanding aspects of the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy. MSF provides structure and definition of concepts that permit exploration of the problem statement, supported the purpose of the study, helped answer the research questions, aided in the categorization of data, and helped strengthen the analysis processes to make sense of the phenomena at play.

This framework has been found to be applicable in many qualitative studies (e.g., Weiner, 2011), which have often focused on policy analysis, discovery of factors impacting decision-making, and operational integration with policy. Brydi, Swinburn, and Sacks' (2016) meta-synthesis study focusing on the application of theory further supported the relevance of MSF use in qualitative research. They noted that MSF had been routinely applied in qualitative studies that examined aspects of obesity prevention (Brydi et al., 2016, p. 4).

Zohlhofer's et al. (2015) study on the use and feasibility of the framework found exponential increases in scholarly references and use of MSF since its inception in the 1980s. They found that in many cases academic works often used elements of the framework over application of MSF in its entirety (Zohlhofer et al., 2015, p. 413). MSF has also been examined and analyzed for its applicability for use in describing different units of analysis. Boswell and Rodrigues (2016) found that MSF was a sound framework with significant utility in the policy arena, but suggested that other theories from organizational sociology could help support the factors that affect the convergence of the streams (pp. 507-508).

MSF was found to be very meaningful for use in this study and offered adequate alignment with all the essential elements of this research. This was based on the versatility of the framework. Cairney and Jones (2016) described MSF as being able to support broader research on various topics noting its use in over 12,000 academic publications. This framework acted as a lens to interpret data collected from participants. This approach also assisted with describing and categorizing processes, codes, and themes identified during the analysis portion of this research study. The framework was also used to support the organization and management of concepts and ideas derived during research, and interview questions were heavily informed by the principles of the approach. In his research applying this theoretical framework, R. Evans (2013) claimed that MSF helped simplify phenomena and variables that influence decision processes (p. 3).

### **Historical View of National Security**

For most of the nation's history, the security of the country was often measured by our evaluation of other foreign actors. The national security apparatus viewed potential threat vectors through a lens, which often resulted in assessments that the most significant threat to the U.S. was from external forces operating in foreign lands that were potentially impacting our national interests abroad. This historical sentiment was also noted by Carafano and Rosenzweig (2005) who explained the United States focused on factors of foreign power. Emphasis was often placed on the intentions and military capabilities of nation states. Priorities tended to have a laser focus on economic leverage on the global stage, military force projection, and diplomatic relations. This is not to suggest that no attention was paid to domestic security threats, but federal focus was commonly directed overseas and often viewed the arms of national security as the military and the intelligence services working and focused abroad.

The general approach to strategic security efforts was bifurcated at the point where geo-political boundaries dictated the limits of U.S. territory. Morton (2012) described U.S. policy in this area as divided into the categories of domestic and international security. He explained that organizational responsibilities, operations, and focus promoted “borders-in” and “borders-out” approaches to security (Morton, 2012, p. 6). Morag (2009) similarly pointed to this policy stance and described it as a U.S. view of security in terms of “home games” and “away games” (pp. 4-6). These views were based on historical strategic threats that emanated from foreign powers.

Terrorism was not introduced to the U.S. on 9/11. The Nation has a long history of domestic terrorist events. Some of the notable historical incidents were the Oklahoma City Bombing and the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [START], 2010; Porteus, 2007, p. 28). According to a University of Maryland study on terrorism, the U.S. experienced 250 domestic attacks between 1995 and 2000 (START, 2016). Quinn's (2016) quantitative study on terrorism in New York City similarly noted hundreds of terrorism incidents in the city alone during the period spanning from 1975 to 2015. Quinn also found the rates of incidents were significantly lower after 9/11 than in previous years (M. Quinn, 2016). In spite of this history of terrorism domestically, concentration of efforts still remained overseas. This is likely due to the fact that domestic terrorist attacks by individuals and groups were viewed more as a law enforcement problem. This view had been coupled with the perception that these types of actors had not historically demonstrated the ability to create havoc on a global scale or at a level that could greatly impact a developed nation.

### **Historical Counterterrorism Policy Environment**

In spite of relatively massive defensive and offensive capabilities, elements that comprised the U.S. national security apparatus operated in an independent fashion for decades. Some of this was tied to reasons mentioned in the previous section related to the view of the threat. Other reasons were due to legal mandates and fear of public perception of governmental overreach. Mission dominance and turf wars also contributed to barriers of integration of efforts. Gardner's (2014) study that identified

differences between traits of organizational culture in law enforcement and intelligence communities also suggested another potential factor that contributed to these impediments.

The *9/11 Commission Report* highlighted a now well publicized interpretation of legal mandates that were commonly referred to as “the wall” and stated that this may have contributed to compartmentalization of information (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004, pp. 78-80). This stemmed from investigations into what were deemed unauthorized activities conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in previous decades (Lowenthawl, 2012). Lowenthawl (2012) claimed that these mid-1970s inquiries created a foundational change in the conduct of domestic intelligence and how organizations collaborate (p. 24). The Church committee hearings and report found that the FBI’s counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) was unlawfully disregarding individual privacy protections (German & Stanley, 2007, p. 14). The response to these findings was met with an avalanche of oversight, scrutiny, and calls for transparency regarding intelligence and law enforcement operations and activities (Lowenthawl, 2012, p. 24). Subsequently, the FBI began to limit the sharing of information between parts of its own agency along with external community partners working National security missions. The arrest of Zacarias Moussaoui in August of 2001 is one example of these legal impacts where even FBI executives were not notified of his arrest until 9/11 in spite of the belief that he was involved in terrorist activities (Shenon, 2008, pp. 138-139).

Authorities and structure were painted by counterterrorism policy as well. The issuance of Presidential Security Memorandum 30 (PSM-30) by the Carter administration

in the late 1970s represented an attempt to formulate a national strategy for this threat (Morton, 2012, p. 39). This policy potentially fed into Morton's (2012) borders-in and borders-out approach when it designated organization leads for counterterrorism. PSM-30 identified the Department of State (DOS) as the executive agency for terrorism incidents occurring overseas and the DOJ as the chief for domestic terrorism.

The 1990s, which were marked with higher profile terrorist incidents, caused the Clinton administration to reconsider the counterterrorism strategy in the vein of centralizing control under a singular body. The initial draft of Presidential Decision Directive 39 (PPD-39) promoted the National Security Council to maintain control of some of the government's counterterrorism efforts, but this was met with fierce resistance from both the FBI and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA; Morton, 2012, p. 49). Amendments to PPD-39 and the final release of the policy did not seem to address the fissures and gaps between international and domestic counterterrorism efforts as many organizations still understood there were marked "lanes in the road" regarding organizational responsibilities.

Additional impacts to counterterrorism policy and operations were due to budgetary constraints. Organizations were forced to compete for dwindling appropriations that still favored mission focus on traditional threats. Morton (2012) argued that the greatest threats from terrorism were still believed to be tied to nation-states (p. 59). This fed into perceptions by national security organizations that they had to demonstrate their value by concentrating their efforts against these types of threat actors. Sims and Gerber (2005) provided the example of Desert Storm to illustrate this



point. They explained that this conflict divided the intelligence focus because organizations oriented efforts in support of military operations and subsequently resulted in further budget limitations to civilian intelligence community organizations (pp. 44-45). Over time these same entities were forced to curtail operations in areas around the globe creating increases in coverage gaps. The CIA's pull out from lower priority embassies for instance, negatively impacted DOS' activities in those specific regions (Sims & Gerber, 2005, p. 45).

The attacks on 9/11 ultimately focused the lens on U.S. security and resulted in the unification of these previously separate security efforts. These events also foisted the term homeland security into the vernacular of the average citizen. While the scope and boundaries of homeland security are still currently being debated by scholars, government decision-makers, and practitioners, according to McEntire (2009), security efforts now appear to be employed with the understanding that the current threat does not adhere to political boundaries (pp. 7-8).

### **Implications of 9/11 on National Security**

As mentioned previously, the events on 9/11 were a catalyst for a tremendous shift in public policy and reorganization across the government. Analysis of the factors that allowed al-Qa'ida operatives to infiltrate the U.S. and largely go undetected, revealed a litany of issues that were previously unknown or ignored such as those mentioned in previous sections. Policy, law, and regulations were crafted to address these identified shortcomings and focused on national and homeland security (Library of Congress, 2002). Examples of notable works in this area were the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act, the

National Security Strategy, and the Homeland Security Act, which established the (Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Mahan & Griset, 2013, pp. 318-319; Carafano & Rosenzweig, 2005, p. 57; McEntire, 2009, pp. 146-147). While these and other efforts were considered monumental and addressed areas such mission focus, collaboration, integration, and unity of effort, these governmental movements were still oriented at the federal level.

It was not until a few years after the attacks that it appeared policy and priorities began to consider information sharing between all levels of government. The issuance of an executive order titled *Strengthening the Sharing of Terrorism Information To Protect Americans* clearly called for the intelligence community to better integrate its information sharing procedures with partner organizations as well as sub-federal agencies and stakeholders (Executive Order [E.O.] No. 13356, 2004). The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA) supplemented elements of E. O. 13356 and created a path for the establishment of the Information Sharing Environment (ISE) (Justice Information Sharing, 2013). The ISE (n.d.a) was charged to assist organizations such as DHS and the FBI in the formulation of processes and procedures for sharing information with SLTT stakeholders as well as adjacent federal government organizations.

The result of this wholesale restructuring of the community and issuance of policy supporting increased sharing of information and whole of government collaboration sparked what was to be a massive cultural shift in the national security arena. This marked a new era for the law enforcement and intelligence disciplines where it was

understood that the threats faced by the nation would and should be met by initiatives based on a unity of effort. In essence, no one agency or organization has the ability to defeat the threat. Cohen (2015) argued that the increased counterterrorism policy prioritization coupled with positive movement toward inter-agency collaboration and information sharing had greatly strengthened homeland defense.

### **The Birth of the National Network of Fusion Centers**

During this period of federal government scramble and reorganization, SLTT governments were working to strengthen their response and recovery capabilities and were considering protective and prevention measures. Some of the many focus areas for these jurisdictions dealt with integration of information and operations in an effort to bridge the gaps and fissures between intelligence activities and law enforcement investigations. Trust between many organizations, especially those existing at different levels of government, was lacking in some areas. Worry of another 9/11 and motivation to ensure that a like event did not happen on “my watch” was pervasive in the security community and may have helped overcome some of the existing turf, trust, and confidence issues.

The overarching concern of terrorism created a space where there was a belief that collaboration was required to address these new threats. Hocevar, Jansen, and Thomas (2011) discussed how this concept of a common “felt need” has been associated with organizational collaboration initiatives. In the spirit of defending against a common enemy, the concept of fusion centers took off.

Fusion centers represented the first of SLTT initiated activities aimed at tackling the terrorism threat and facilitating information sharing and dissemination (Graphia, 2010, p. 6). The central theme of fusion centers was rooted in the beliefs that inter-agency collaboration was key to enhancing investigative capabilities and awareness of the threat. In short form, two (or more) heads (agencies in this case) were better than one. These multi-agency organizations were intended to also be able to provide early warning of impending attacks by the identification of indicators of nefarious activities (Harbisher, 2015, p. 474; Hoffman, 2015).

Independently, jurisdictions began establishing these organizations, which were often led by prominent law enforcement agencies in the concerned region. State law enforcement organizations formed fusion centers, which had responsibilities covering the entire state and major urban areas created similar task forces that focused on regional and metropolitan areas of operation. As more of these agencies came on line, they began to self-organize into informal regional partnerships, such as the consortium known as the Southern Shield, which consisted of fusion centers from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Hawtin, 2007). Eventually these fusion centers federated nationally to become the Network (DHS, 2013a).

Guided by foundational documents, which offered a framework for reference and templates for organization, these fusion centers began a maturation process that focused on capability and policy development. The Network was also supported by federal funding, training, and guidance often provided by DHS and the Bureau of Justice

Assistance (BJA; DHS, 2016f). By the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, the Network had shifted from individual organization establishment to efforts that included fusion center maturation and integration into the national and homeland security framework.

Currently numbering 79, the Network has elements that are based in a majority of the Nation's states and territories with some fusion centers focusing on specific metropolitan areas or regions of states (NFCA, n.d.a). These organizations are engaged in activities that focus on items of national and homeland security relevance (House, 2013). Fusion centers specialize in the collection, analysis, investigation, and dissemination of information with a nexus to these topical areas.

Studies have revealed that fusion centers often have slightly different focus areas and mission orientation at times. A Senate (2012) report found a variance of mission focus and a diverse set of priorities that differed in parts of the Network. This variance has often been labeled as concerning and at odds with what was believed to be the intended focus of fusion centers: terrorism. Others have noted that the Network supports broader intelligence-led policing (ILP) efforts supportive of preventative public safety efforts (Chermak et al., 2013, p. 214). Fusion centers have been lauded for successes that have contributed to homeland defense such as the Alabama Fusion Center's (AFC) support to the Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) efforts in combating transnational drug trafficking organizations, the Central Florida Intelligence Exchange's (CFIX) collaboration with DHS to identify and apprehend foreign nationals involved in child pornography, and the South Dakota Fusion Center (SDFC) and the North Dakota State

and Local Intelligence Center's (NDSLIC) work that uncovered links between individuals involved in criminal activity with a DHS investigation concerning international money laundering (DHS, 2015b). Some examinations have looked at the form and function of the Network and have suggested that the fusion center model be applied in other security initiatives such as Bruneau's (2016) study of security efforts in central America. Other reviews have pointed out instances where the Network has provided information of limited value and has engaged in operations that encroached on individual liberties (Rosenberg, 2016, pp. 179-180). Other studies have also sought to measure the effectiveness, the implications of policy on operations, and determine how different aspects of organizational culture and structure have influenced the Network (Carter & Chermak, 2012; Coffey, 2015; Gardner, 2015; Harper, 2009).

### **Network Tie into the U.S. National Security Strategy**

Schertzing described many of the misconceptions and confusion that has surrounded national security and homeland security and explained that these terms provide overarching frameworks that categorize various mission areas that concern public safety (Laureate Education, 2009). Recent U.S. administrations have attempted to combine these two concepts and have attempted to integrate homeland security and national security councils (Laureate Education, 2009). The U.S. national security strategy itself, is a government document that highlights strategic threats faced by the country and provides broad guidance on how the administration intends to mitigate and diminish these threats. A. Quinn (2015) explained that U.S. national security strategies have historically centered on three overarching themes identified as the "security of the territory and

people of the United States, security of the economy and American ‘way of life’, and the spread of liberal values and government abroad” (p. 2). Fusion center operations directly tie into both of the security elements described above. While the strategy document represents the central tenants of the national security strategy, for the context of this study, the strategy refers to the latest National Security Strategy document issued in 2015 as well as other associated policies that address aspects of the U.S. government’s strategic plans to enhance public safety through national and homeland security initiatives (Obama, 2015).

As mentioned in the previous sections, the historical views of national security, which focused on external threat actors that were the nation-state level entities have evolved to encompass asymmetric threats such as substate organizations like that of terrorist organizations as well as domestic threat actors. The current strategy addresses traditional military initiatives, homeland security endeavors, counterterrorism efforts, through a litany of other objectives that concern aspects of the economy, public health, and climate change (Obama, 2015). The Network’s collective mission and responsibilities intersect with aspects of the U.S. national security strategy specifically dealing with the reinforcement of homeland security. Priorities described in the strategy underscore information sharing, countering violent extremism in the homeland, general counterterrorism, disrupting organized criminal enterprise, and other items with an emphasis on the whole of community approach through engagement of all levels of government (Obama, 2015, pp. 8-9). The Network, working with relevant federal agencies, is central to the country achieving success with these domestic objectives.

While mainly focusing on foreign policy aspects of the U.S. national security strategy, Lenczowski (2016) argued that U.S. security can be bolstered through broader engagement across government and by the sharing of information. Domestically, the Network is best poised to bring together disparate disciplines as well as public and private entities outside of the capital. As described throughout this manuscript, fusion centers by definition consist of federal, state, local, tribal, territorial, and even private sector partners. Their primary activity involves the sharing of information horizontally and vertically.

Recent presidential executive orders (currently unnumbered) provide a glimpse at the current and future direction of U.S. national security strategy. These documents highlight security priorities that also intersect with aspects of fusion center responsibilities such as illegal immigration, counterterrorism and violent extremism, organized criminal enterprise, human trafficking, domestic crime reduction, domestic public safety, as well as threats to U.S. public safety officials (Trump, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e). While these orders have authority over executive agency actions and no formal authority over non-federal organizations, fusion centers may have the placement and access to support these priorities.

### **Network Operations Impact on Individual Rights and Liberties**

Intelligence activities executed by the Network are generally angled toward preventing nefarious actions and discovering potential threat vectors before they occur. These operations also strive to identify hazards that could impact a target or asset, and provide information that indicates developing trends, tactics, and techniques that are, may



be, or could be, employed against national interests. In the case of the Network their priorities could range from a local issue through a catastrophic event such as 9/11. Fusion centers help anchor the Nation's domestic intelligence efforts in the law enforcement realm (as opposed to traditional foreign intelligence focused organizations) in a manner consistent with Crumpton's (2005) recommendation, which helps protect civil liberties.

The preventative nature of this mission requirement regularly calls for the examination of topic that has not been clearly defined at the initial point of inquiry. Tromblay (2015) described the intelligence process as relying on vague information where domestic intelligence organizations, which included fusion centers, were being challenged in the conduct of their security operations (pp. 241-242). Amoores (2014) study on risk and threat calculations highlighted the difficulties of intelligence analysis, such as that conducted to combat terrorism. Questions and problems confronted by analysts often confound precise prediction of events (Amoores, 2014, p. 424-426). Work in this forward leaning analytical environment necessitates inquisition into individuals and activities to formulate an assessment of the issue by the Network staff.

This is similar to efforts of individuals in the Intelligence community who often rely on unstructured and incomplete data to formulate assessments. The use of intuition, insight, and even leaps of faith are common tools applied in analytical thinking (Gerber, Wong, & Kodagoda, 2016, pp. 173-174). It is these murky functions of the Network, which are preventative in nature and rely on objective judgments that are often challenged by privacy advocates.

## **Constitutionality and Lawfulness**

Network operations have implications to individual P/CRCL due to the nature of analysis and investigations that often concerns domestic activities conducted by citizens. The Network activities fall within the broader national debate that concerns the need for both privacy and security described by Fox and Cross (2015). Unlike a majority of the intelligence community that is charged with looking outside the borders the nation, the Network's main focus is on identifying individuals residing in the homeland who may represent a threat to public safety and/or national interests. This borders-in approach to intelligence operations raises the chances that individuals being investigated are U.S. citizens or other categories of persons entitled to provisions and protections provided by the U.S. Constitution. The concept of individual rights and liberties are based on the democratic principles such as those identified in *Federalist Paper No. 51*, which is often viewed as arguing for securing the rights of the people (Pandich, 2007, p. 148). This and the accompanying documents have often been used as a lens to interpret the U.S. Constitution and have even been cited in opinions by the Supreme Court (Corley, Howard, & Nixon, 2005, p. 332). The provisions of the First Amendment are often held up as a defense against domestic intelligence activities, especially those that are involved in the collection, sharing, analysis, and dissemination of items deemed suspicious (U.S. Const. Amend I)

The nature of the fusion centers' mission could involve the probing of a citizen because of suspicious circumstances or other analytic pointers that suggest nefarious activity is possible. This inquiry may be conducted even before that individual is known

to have conducted illegal activity. In fact, the Network's heavy support of the collection of suspicious activity reports is demonstrated by training conducted in this area by 77 of 78 fusion centers according to a 2013 government study (GAO, 2013a, p. 29). Monahan and Regan (2012) found that information on individuals was routinely collected and processed by fusion center staff in advance of wrongdoing and questioned the legality of these activities and the accuracy of subsequent intelligence reporting (p. 304). Monaghan and Walby (2012) expressed concern that these entities had also expanded beyond their legal mandates and reported similar findings of Canada's fusion element (pp. 146-147).

There have been arguments that law enforcement and the justice system have long since employed similar predictive activities. Guthrie-Ferguson (2012) referred to these types of prophetic examples as predictive policing. He suggested that in many contexts this approach is supported by the U.S. Constitution, which the courts permitted action on prior to a known crime through the principles of probable cause and the execution of search warrants (Guthrie-Ferguson, 2012, pp. 362-363). In essence, the Network's operations are adjacent to Bullock's (2013) and Budhram's (2015) descriptions of community policing, which aims to identify and address wider issues impacting the community as opposed to traditional reactive crime reduction policing techniques. Price (2013) voiced concern about these activities and explained that law enforcement organizations as well as the Network were operating along loose and different interpretations of reasonable suspicion. In the same vein, he found that that suspicious activity reporting process was ambiguous at best, and potentially created a space for unconstitutional practices (Price, 2013, pp. 12-14).

Other examinations have challenged these and other notions about the lawfulness of Network activities. Findings in some areas have noted Network activities that have used unconstitutional techniques such as profiling (Constitution Project, 2012, pp. 9-10). German and Stanley (2007) expressed concern about the government intruding on constitutionally protected activities. Network operations have been cited as creating fears of government overreach into constitutionally protected activities of the citizenry. Willis' (2009) analysis of one fusion center's annual terrorism threat assessment in 2009 resulted in claims that operations executed by the center were one example of "overzealous police intelligence activities." He asserted that the assessment was based on the fusion center's views that First Amendment protected activities by student and minority groups were cited as potential threats to the state (Willis, 2009, pp. 2-4). Still, foundational policy for fusion centers has had a heavy emphasis on P/CRCL protections in an effort to ensure Network operations are within the scope law.

The *Fusion Center Guidelines* and the *Baseline Capabilities* documents represent the policy framework that the Network has been required to adhere to in order to be in compliance with federal standards and be eligible to receive DHS and other federal government funding (Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative [Global], DHS, & Bureau of Justice Assistance [BJA], 2006; 2008). Government studies, such as the DHS annual assessments of fusion centers, have evaluated the Network against criteria set forth in the guidelines and capabilities policies (DHS, 2012). These assessments have determined year over year improvements in fusion center efforts to address P/CRCL concerns such as the creation of individual privacy policies, the vetting of these policies

with the federal government, making policy available to the public, implementing redress procedures, and appointments of a privacy officer at each center (DHS, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a). As of the 2015 assessment, all of the assessed fusion centers had implemented procedures for P/CRCL compliance review of all analytical products, which noted an increase of 47% from the 2013 report (DHS, 2016b). Approximately 79% of the fusion centers were actively conducting formal P/CRCL outreach.

The federal government's policy efforts concerning suspicious activity reporting (SAR) defined categories of behaviors and activities that are indicative of preoperational indicators of terrorist activity. The establishment of the Nationwide SAR Initiative (NSI), of which the Network is an active participant, was intended to provide a mechanism where organizations could contribute information to support analytical and investigative processes (Institute for Intergovernmental Research, 2016). The functional standard for SAR was created to outline a framework for reporting of information and define what constitutes a suspicious activity. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the tenants of the functional standard (PM-ISE, 2015, pp. 42-51). This process was based on review of previous terrorist incidents and existing federal privacy guidelines and law. The functional standard for this initiative requires the redaction of certain elements such as personal identifiable information of the SAR before information can be shared between organizations (PM-ISE, 2015, p. 17). There are also requirements for periodic reevaluation of SAR to provide feedback and determine current validity of the reporting (PM-ISE, 2015, pp. 11, 15). The above-mentioned policy documents underscore the priority that government entities have viewed P/CRCL to be.

Table 1

*Defined Criminal Activity and Potential Terrorism Nexus Activity*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>
Breach/Attempted Intrusion	Unauthorized personnel attempting to or actually entering a restricted area or protected site.
Misrepresentation	Presenting false or misusing insignia, documents, and/or identification, to misrepresent one's affiliation to cover possible illicit activity.
Theft/Loss/Diversion	Stealing or diverting something associated with a facility/infrastructure.
Sabotage/Tampering/Vandalism	Damaging, manipulating, or defacing part of a facility/infrastructure or protected site.
Cyber Attack	Compromising, or attempting to compromise or disrupt an organization's information technology infrastructure.
Expressed or Implied Threat	Communicating a spoken or written threat to damage or compromise a facility/infrastructure.
Aviation Activity	Operation of an aircraft in a manner that reasonably may be interpreted as suspicious, or posing a threat to people or property.

*Note.* From PMISE. (2009). Information Sharing Environment functional standard suspicious activity reporting version 1.5, pp. 29-30.

Table 2

*Potential Criminal or Non-Criminal Activity Requiring Additional Fact Information During Investigation*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Description</u>
Eliciting Information	Questioning individuals at a level beyond mere curiosity about particular facets of a facility's or building's purpose, operations, security procedures, etc., that would arouse suspicion in a reasonable person
Testing or Probing of Security	Deliberate interactions with, or challenges to, installations, personnel, or systems that reveal physical, personnel, or cyber security capabilities.
Recruiting	Building of operations teams and contacts, personnel data, banking data or travel data.
Photography	Taking pictures or video of facilities, buildings, or infrastructure in a manner that would arouse suspicion in a reasonable person.
Observation/Surveillance	Demonstrating unusual interest in facilities, buildings, or infrastructure beyond mere casual or professional interest such that a reasonable person would consider the activity suspicious.
Materials Acquisition/Storage	Acquisition and/or storage of unusual quantities of materials such that a reasonable person would suspect possible criminal activity.
Acquisition of Expertise	Attempts to obtain or conduct training in security concepts or capabilities such that a reasonable person would suspect possible criminal activity.
Weapons Discovery	Discovery of unusual amounts of weapons or explosives that would arouse suspicion in a reasonable person.
Sector-Specific Incident	Actions associated with a characteristic of unique concern to specific sectors, with regard to their personnel, facilities, systems or functions.

*Note.* From PMISE. (2009). Information Sharing Environment functional standard suspicious activity reporting version 1.5, pp. 29-30.

In spite of these efforts, individuals have communicated in arguments, studies, and legal filings continued questioning of the constitutionality of these programs and activities of, which the Network is heavily involved in. Court filings have claimed that governmental definitions of suspicious activity were undefined and had not demonstrated significant value to counterterrorism efforts (Gill, Prigoff, Razak, Ibrahim, and Conklin v. Holder and Paul, 2014). Regan et al. (2015) expressed similar sentiments and explained that SAR relies on subjective analytical judgments, which are influenced by individual bias and have led to racial, political, and/or religious profiling (p. 745). Bjelopera (2011) also cautioned that SAR reporting could lead to duplicative reporting and/or the unfocused collection of information that is irrelevant to terrorism (pp. 15-16).

The debate over the legality of Network operations is not likely to come to a close in the near term. The government's efforts to further secure the homeland seems to have considered constitutional protections through every step of the process as evidenced by significant policy addressing such and mandates requiring Network adherence. Findings and recommendations have expressed concerns in these areas where a clear and concise answer is not possible.

### **Implications of Information Sharing and Dissemination**

Information sharing, which is one of the core functions of fusion centers has been feverishly debated. Recommendations from studies following the 9/11 attacks underscored concerns about information sharing between organizations and levels of government (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). Over compartmentalization of intelligence was assessed as contributing to the limited



distribution of reporting, such as a National Security Agency (NSA) cable that could have helped identify one of the individuals involved in the 9/11 attacks (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004, p. 417). The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (2004) also recommended the recognition and sharing of information from non-traditional intelligence community partners, such as public sector immigration and customs organizations, which have vast information holdings that could support national security efforts. Peled (2016) examined governmental initiatives since 9/11 that were oriented towards increasing information sharing across the homeland and intelligence communities. He viewed fusion centers as an example of one of three approaches that have been executed to bridge the divide in this arena (Peled, 2016). Peled's description is supported by government marketing of fusion centers, which has continually emphasized the Network's placement in the information sharing strategy for the United States (DHS, 2016, p. 25).

Fusion center staff appeared to understand this as one of the central functions of their operations. From the National perspective, emphasis was placed on information sharing and the aggregation of different types of data sets as evidenced by the highlighting of these concepts in foundational guideline and capability documents (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2006; 2008). Masse and Rollins (2007) described the potential value of fusion centers as being able to integrate information from various sources and disseminate to partners in a manner that has not previously been done. They explained that these organizations act as central figures in information sharing at subfederal level (Masse & Rollins, 2007, pp. 1-3).

The sharing of information between organizations, which are engaged in topics of relevance to national and homeland security matters, helps equip organizations with knowledge and awareness of incidents, trends, activities, and threat actors operating in other jurisdictions. It is this process that was found lacking between security organizations prior to 9/11. A Senate (2012) study that consisted of interviews of fusion center personnel and stakeholders of the Network found deficiencies still existed in this area. Vidal's (2013) case study examined the barriers impacting information sharing between local law enforcement agencies in south Florida. Findings from this examination described how individual relationships, funding, security clearances, and federal information exchange practices are central items that affect this sharing process (Vidal, 2013).

Evaluation of intelligence reform also highlighted that many efforts to bridge information sharing gaps were exercised, oftentimes dealing with the development of various classified and unclassified systems for use by the organizations involved in international and domestic security operations (Givens, 2012). This emphasis on system development, which resulted in numerous innovations, was found to be largely ineffective; Givens (2012) explained that many of these electronic databases and systems were designed independently and lack interoperability (p. 64). A qualitative study looking at information sharing gaps in the first responder community noted continued deficiencies in the dissemination of information that was related to training, partnerships, and underscored interoperable communications (Baker, 2013). The study did note significant improvements since the attacks on 9/11 and explained how fusion centers

were created and have been functioning in a manner to address the gaps (Baker, 2013, pp. 68 and 73).

System deficiencies have been noted in other works as well, which also pointed out gaps in public policy that potentially have contributed to this. Waterman and Wang (2011) found that in spite of policy efforts like that of the ISE deficiencies remain. Waterman and Wang explained that current law and policy have not equipped the government to enforce and regulate technical and procedural capabilities and standards of information sharing systems especially those owned by sub-federal organizations such as fusion centers (pp. 1-2).

Interoperability has been cited as a significant challenge to many operations (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). Most of the focus and concern has been tied to verbal communications between first responders engaged in tactical missions (Faulhaber, 2007). Because of this, institutional goals in this arena have centered on initiatives that deal with emergency communications, such as a segment of DHS that manages critical communications and standards (DHS, 2016e). Emphasis in this area has resulted in the implementation of policy, governance, and the development of technology and government investment totaling approximately \$4 billion during the decade following 9/11 (DHS, 2011a, p. 44). Less focus appears to have been placed on connectivity between organizational case management systems owned by individual agencies.

Beyond systems, the Network moves information along lines that are congruent with relationships and stakeholder partners. Barron et al. (2016) found that the

Network's efforts to share information have demonstrated a marked improvement in this area. They found that fusion center initiatives such as the National Mission Cell (NMC) was evidence of the Network's focus on targeted threat issues that are aligned with federal security priorities (Barron et al., 2016, p. 10; ISE, n.d.b).<sup>2</sup> The NMC is based on developing a cadre of centers and individuals that are specialized on specific items of interest. The NMC appears to be in-line with Walsh's (2010) findings that efficiencies and quality of intelligence are increased when entities specialize their operations. Abold, Guidetti, and Keyer (2012) similarly argued that the Network's analytical value could be realized through analytical specialization by permitting a richer understanding of topics of relevance. Specialization allows individual entities to develop a deeper understanding of a target or topic of interest and can contribute to an economy of force by allowing a partner organization to concentrate its resources on another topic (Walsh, 2010, pp. 6-8). This benefit is only realized if there is a high level of trust and sharing of information between entities.

While information sharing is viewed by many organizations as a process that can bolster awareness of nefarious activities between organizations and help provide data that

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<sup>2</sup> The National Mission Cell (NMC) consists of individuals identified within the Network, which focus solely on issues concerning counterterrorism as opposed to other individuals within the Network that may address elements that range from traditional criminal activity to terrorism. Products, processes, and topics specifically addressed by the NMC were identified as priority areas of concern by components from the Network, FBI, DHS, and the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment.

can support investigations, some parties have found negative aspects of what is believed to be a culture of wholesale dissemination. Jones (2011) discussed concerns that have stemmed from the distribution of information to entities with no relation to the originating information (p. 181). O'Neil (2008) explained that while many parts of the Network had not established seamless relationships with entities such as private sector organizations, many fusion centers produced and disseminated products to non-government organizations on a regular basis (pp. 1-2). O'Neil further argued that there was no evidence that information collected by or provided to private sector entities, was utilized or retained in an unlawful manner (p. 3). Fisher (2015) argued that the integration fusion centers into nation security efforts supports the defense of the nation, but requires improved communication between entities. She further claimed that consideration for collaboration with non-government organizations, private firms, and even some aspects of society, would provide the all-source information model that is required to combat the contemporary terrorist threat (Fisher, 2015, pp. 201-202).

The sharing of information itself is not necessarily viewed as a negative process even by privacy advocates. Price's (2013) examination of implications of Network operations and law enforcement intelligence activities found deficiencies in procedure and recommended clarifying policy and ensuring adequate oversight to make certain that information could be appropriately shared and collected (p. 5). There appears to be a general understanding that fusion centers and law enforcement in general needed to move away from compartmented information holdings or risk another event like 9/11. In her study that focused on collaboration between law enforcement and intelligence

communities, Gardner (2015) concluded that increased information sharing is required between these disciplines for any chance of the Nation to keep pace with the evolving threat dynamic (p. 6). Similarly, Joyal (2012) found that 53% of Network staff interviewed believed that increased sharing of information across jurisdictions and disciplines positively contributed to operations and improved the ability to conduct investigations (pp. 364-365).

The overall concern in this area centers on what type of information is being shared and who it is being shared with. Studies have questioned the policies and guidelines that govern these practices and have often surmised that the Network is not applying requisite internal controls to ensure only the necessary information is provided to stakeholders and that data is not pushed to organizations that are not legally allowed to retain it. In their study, Regan and Monahan (2014) assessed that many of the policies that highlight the procedures for collaboration between organizations lacked details to underscore the scope and boundaries of interactions between organizations (p. 484).

In general, literature concerning information sharing tends to recognize that collaboration between security entities is necessary for an effective security framework. Commentary and findings in this area seem to be dominated by what is perceived to be mass dissemination of unvetted information to partners that are not within the traditional security landscape such as private sector. Other government partners, who are focused on external defense and security issues such as the military and a majority of the Intelligence community agencies, are restricted by legislation and executive orders limiting domestic operations and providing intelligence oversight. These concerns put

the Network in a difficult place because one of their main charters is to integrate and distribute information to partners in a manner that puts an emphasis on the “need to share” said information as opposed to the legacy cultural norms in intelligence and law enforcement that centered on “need to know.”

### **Implications of Limited Transparency**

Intelligence agencies and many parts of law enforcement organizations are known to operate in secret spaces. There are several logical and widely known reasons for this. First and foremost, these organizations want to maintain the edge or perceived advantage over the adversary. Tradecraft and capabilities need to be jealously guarded in order for these entities to remain effective. These institutions have to take great care to not telegraph their intent and targets to ensure operational security. Safeguarding information about operations aids in providing safety for the officers and increases the chances of favorable outcomes of the operation. Protection of sources and methods enables the agency to maintain the placement and access to the information it needs to carry out its mission requirements. For these reasons and others, transparency is a challenging concept for those organizations supporting security and intelligence activities.

As an organization that provides many public and government services in an overt capacity, the Network does provide generalized information about itself. The National Fusion Center Association ([NFCA], n.d.), which represents the 79 fusion centers has supported marketing and outreach efforts for the Network. The NFCA has attempted to coordinate the message of the Network and communicates the organization’s interests

and direction at both public and private venues. During 2012 testimony to the House, the NFCA President described the extent that the Network supports National efforts by advancing investigations and supporting analysis relevant to the homeland (Sena, 2012). The President further asserted that fusion centers were keys to national preparedness and stated that P/CRCL protections were integrated into Network operations (Sena, 2012; DHS, 2011a; 2011b).<sup>3</sup>

Other efforts to provide transparency of operations have been pursued by the federal government and individual fusion centers alike. Some parts of the Network have allowed tours and interviews to be conducted by outside organizations in an effort to explain their roles and dispel concerns about their activities. One example of such was the reporting about a request and approval for visit to a fusion center by the John Birch Society, a right-wing political group, which supports constitutional protections (Capo, 2009). Some fusion centers have permitted media interviews and visits to provide information to the public such as a press interview report on the fusion center in Guam (Kuam News, 2015). DHS has provided a wealth of information about fusion centers on various websites and discussion boards (DHS, 2014b). Government reports and assessments have also been made available to the public via executive and legislative

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<sup>3</sup> The National Preparedness Goal is defined by the mission areas of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery (FEMA, 2015; DHS, 2011b; DHS, 2015c). While the Network can and has supported each mission area, fusion centers involved in intelligence and law enforcement operations focus more heavily on the prevention and protection side of the spectrum.



branch websites (Bjelopera, 2013; DHS, 2015a; GAO, 2013a; Rollins, 2008). Individual fusion centers have also established public-facing websites that provide organizational overviews and explanation of responsibilities (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, n.d.; New Hampshire Department of Public Safety, 2016; State of Oklahoma, 2016). Klem (2016) noted these messaging efforts, but suggested that an integrated strategic marketing plan based on lessons learned in industry would benefit the Network by potentially dispelling misconceptions about operations and intent (pp. 153-156).

In spite of this, and other messaging about the Network, Carter et al. (2016) mixed-methods study looking at the self-reporting of fusion centers about their capabilities, relationships, and information sharing processes, found that parts of the Network were under-communicating in these areas. They noted that this was not suggestive of wrong-doing, but was surprising given public scrutiny about their operations (Carter et al., 2016, pp. 346-347). Dahl (2011) highlighted the discourse that surrounded the privacy versus liberty debate and recognized some of the limits to transparency that domestic intelligence organizations, including fusion centers, employ. He also noted that while transparency is necessary for operations, limited information and concern about oversight exacerbated the concern held by advocacy groups (pp. 4-5).

Network activities and programs that fusion centers actively participate in have been accused of being shrouded in secrecy, which has fed into concerns about the impact of operations on the citizenry. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argued that some programs that support counterterrorism efforts should disclose information about

these initiatives and increase visibility to outside organizations (ACLU v. FBI, DOJ, & NSA, 2011).

The debate over transparency and protection of secrets is unlikely to be settled, and like the conflict over privacy and security, the discourse on this topic could be viewed as healthy for a democratic society. These discussions help to keep the pendulum moving and ensures that it does not get stuck on one side of the spectrum or other, which would cause significant risk to the nation. Carafano and Rosenzweig (2005) outlined the concept of “calibrated transparency” where a blend of judicial review, legislative oversight, administrative auditing, and other proxy review mechanisms were mandated to examine and publish findings on security efforts in order to safeguard security methods and capabilities while ensuring adherence to the United States’ democratic principles, which included protections for individual rights and liberties (pp. 124-125).

### **Implications of Joint Operations**

The Network’s ability to collect information from a wide array of resources and stakeholders has been noted as concern in literature. The practices executed by the Network that involve the integration and sharing of information has been claimed to have presented risk to individual rights on the level of those actors desiring to conduct terrorist operations against the Nation (Harbisher, 2015, p. 475). This concern remains in spite of DHS’ (2016b) findings that a vast majority of the Network had conducted regular privacy compliance reviews (p. 16). These points of worry have also been echoed in other studies that have argued that lack of accountability and oversight of the Network has led to ambiguous interpretations of individual P/CRCL protections in spite of evidence of

policy guiding these protections (Regan & Monahan, 2014, p. 485). At the same time, complex threat vectors such as individuals conducting malicious cyber attacks against infrastructure have been noted as areas where security is lacking because of the lack of sharing of information and collaboration between entities (Skopik, Settanni, & Fiedler, 2016, pp. 154-155). Joint operating environments are one of the cornerstone principles of fusion centers and are often used as part of the marketing strategies for the Network. Ferrandino (2014) examination explained how the evolution of policing strategies, technology, organizational structures, et cetera have rendered earlier strategies of collaboration obsolete and/or ineffective. This study also pointed out that fusion centers' network structure indicated that joint/interagency constructs provided the ideal operating frameworks for these organizations (Ferrandino, 2014, pp. 60-61). Table 3 highlights the number of fusion centers that are physically collocated with another agency or in many cases multiple organizations as of a 2015 survey (DHS, 2016b, p. 5).

Table 3

*Collocation of Fusion Centers with Other Entities*

<u>Description of Partnering Organization</u>	<u>Number of Fusion Centers</u>
Total of Fusion Centers Collocated with one or more partners	69
State, county, or city law enforcement	40
State, county, or city law enforcement intelligence unit	28
State, county, or city emergency operations center	21
State, county, or city homeland security agency	19
State, county, or city emergency management agency	20
FBI (field offices, JTTFs, and/or FIGs)	12
State, county, or city fire service	13
State National Guard	12
High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area	10
Real-time crime center	11
Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) border intelligence center	3
RISS Node and/or RISSafe <sup>TM</sup> watch center	7
Other fusion center	4

*Note.* From DHS. (2016b). 2015 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final Report, p. 5.

Unifying operations across different agencies, especially those that are non-law enforcement, have been viewed as both a necessity by some and a risk to privacy by others. From a view point of an individual attempting to conduct analysis and/or advance a homeland security or counterterrorism case, interaction with different organizations and

disciplines may be viewed as potentially beneficial. Hocevar et al. (2011) expressed the challenges of interagency collaboration and claimed that successful efforts in this area promote an increase in social capital (p. 3). Smith (2011) noted that interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration were keys to the success of the fusion centers that were examined in his study (p. 81). A qualitative study focusing on information sharing and trust within the Network found that there has been a culture shift in the discipline that now recognizes the value of interagency relationships and collaboration (Joyal, 2012). The same study found that only 45% of Network staff that participated in the study believed that relationships have been significantly enhanced since the pre-9/11 era (Joyal, 2012, pp. 364-365). This strengthening of relationships between organizations is promising, but continuous effort in further developing and maturing these relationships is still required. Barron et al. (2016) noted continued gaps in integration between organizations and recommended increased focus on relationship building and consideration of co-location (p. 11).

While fusion centers are comprised of a majority of organizations that are characterized as law enforcement, greater emphasis has been placed on collaboration with what is sometimes called non-traditional partners. This phrase refers to the pre-9/11 era where information was more likely to be compartmentalized between individual law enforcement in addition to organizations that were not carrying out traditional investigative or intelligence functions. Examination of information sharing practices has offered recommendations that have argued about the value that inclusion of different partners into the intelligence process can bring. Carter and Gore's (2013) study

explained that conservation officers could support these homeland security efforts and result in force multiplication for instance. Brady (2015) argued that the post 9/11 era was met with a common understanding by many individuals working within the national security realm that counterterrorism efforts are more of a universal effort across government disciplines. The evolving threat requires security efforts that involve specialized expertise from different subject matter experts (Brady, 2015, p. 5).

DHS (2016b) found that fusion centers have embraced the multidisciplinary approach to their missions and have increasingly involved these “non-traditional” partners into their operations. As of 2015, out of the 78 designated fusion centers at the time, 61 had incorporated the fire service, 45 partnered with emergency medical service (EMS), 48 had integrated public health/health care, and 54 had blended emergency management representatives into their operations (DHS, 2016b, p. 10). Examination conducted in parts of the field has also argued that multiple disciplines participating in operations can support more relevant information products and help ensure data validity for a research study.

### **The Fire Service**

The fire service was an early adopter to fusion centers and perhaps a likely partner due to historic relationships between law enforcement and this field. This discipline’s understanding of the value of joint operations is evidenced by its works such as the development of the disaster management standards that contributed to the establishment of National Incident Management Structure (National Fire Protection Association, 2016; DHS, 2008). Heirston (2010) discussed the benefits and risks of integrating the fire

service into intelligence operations. He noted that fire service personnel are often the first responders to many incident responses and can act as sensors for fusion centers also noting that these individuals are already under an obligation to report suspicious activity to relevant investigating agencies. (Heirston, 2010, pp. 1-3, 7). Consistent with Heirston's beliefs in the benefit of fire service participation, an Appendix discussing the integration of this discipline into fusion center operations, was released by the government to encourage movement in this direction (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2010c). The fire service could essentially act as additional staff that experiences different parts of the community where law enforcement may not always be able to observe and/or assess.

### **Emergency Medical Service**

While an expansive discipline, EMS is often associated with emergency medical technicians that respond to calls for service involving medical crisis. Kemp (2014) asserted that EMS should play a greater role in fusion centers because it would support both the EMS mission as well as that of the Network. He claimed that EMS' expertise on medical threats could be leveraged by the Network and support analysis (Kemp, 2014, pp. 1-2). Komansky and Barishansky (2014) also found that EMS participation in fusion center operations could contribute to the identification of emerging health hazards. They cited examples of instances where individuals tied to nefarious activities in different jurisdictions were identified due to collaboration between EMS entities and fusion centers that would not have otherwise been detected (Komansky & Brishansky, 2014, pp. 55-56). The technical expertise possessed by these professionals could help fusion centers identify phenomena that may be undetectable by traditional law enforcement and

intelligence staff. There have also been critical incidents of events such as natural disasters where fusion center participation has been attributed to helping response and emergency management coordination efforts (Hood, 2015, p. 8).

### **Public Health Service**

In matters of public health, threat vectors that have the potential to impact large portions of the population are sometimes naturally occurring events, but not always. There has been evidence of nefarious actors that have attempted to weaponize biological agents in order to induce mass panic for instance. McEntire (2009) provided an example of how a naturally occurring disease such as hoof and mouth disease could be used in a terrorist attack (p. 296). The public health discipline is likely to be the first discipline to recognize the presence of a biological-related event. Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola (2014) explained that this sector has capabilities in monitoring that would observe a rapid increase in unexplained illnesses or other indicators warning of an ongoing biological event (pp. 59-60). These abilities and expertise should be leveraged by the Network, and threat information that is suggestive of nefarious actors who are interested in or intend to conduct a biological attack, could be consumed by the public health sector to support their operations.

This potential intersection between terrorism and natural events has been argued as a point for the integration of public health into law enforcement operations such as those conducted by the Network. In their study of the 2001 investigations of the anthrax attacks, Butler, Cohen, Friedman, Scripp, and Watz (2002) found that increased collaboration between these two disciplines would strengthen bioterrorism planning and



response (p. 1155). Similarly, the Global, DHS, and the BJA (2011) released policy guidance that discussed the value of the public health's involvement in Network operations. Carter and Rip (2012) found that nearly 80% of fusion centers shared actionable information to partners in the public health and health care arena (p. 589). In spite of this, they claimed that further efforts are needed to integrate the health service with the Network (Carter & Rip, 2012).

### **Emergency Management**

The emergency management discipline consists of other partners that could support the Network. McEntire (2009) described these professionals as the integrators of activities related to the reduction of vulnerabilities to hazards and the recovery from disasters (pp. 12-13). As central coordinating bodies for their jurisdictions, emergency managers support joint planning and collaboration for every part of their job. The Network's efforts to identify the threat and assess the probability of catastrophic incident can support emergency management's responsibilities such as those described by Canton (2007), which include conducting hazard analysis and assessing the potential impact of different categories of hazards should they occur (pp. 137, 148-149) At macro-level, emergency management coordinates response and recovery operations and fusion centers coordinate information and intelligence, which logically suggests the necessity of a strong relationship between entities.

The release of guidelines that addressed the collaboration between fusion centers and emergency operations centers signaled the understanding of the sometimes overlapping responsibilities between entities engaged in the all-hazards environment and

the utility of integrating with the emergency management discipline (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2010b). Arguments for the integration of these disciplines have described a theoretical event where a fusion center may have come across information about a threat that could result in a critical incident or mass casualty attack. If shared with emergency management professionals, the information could allow preparations for incident response and recovery prior to the incident, thereby supporting efficiency to operations.

The Network appears to have identified the advantages of this collaboration as evidenced by the collocation of 26% of fusion centers with emergency management organizations and 55% of Network having emergency management represented on its governing body (DHS, 2016b, p. 5, 10). An investigation by the DHS Office of Inspector General ([DHS OIG], 2011) claimed that integration between these disciplines greatly enhanced preparedness. They did find that this integration was directly impacted by the center's focus areas with those that took an all-hazards approach to be more likely to have higher instances of collaboration with emergency management than those focusing on criminal and/or terrorist activity (DHS OIG, 2011, pp. 9-10).

### **Military Services**

The military has long been the backbone to the Nation's security efforts. Largely focused on geo-political and defense issues abroad, the armed services which are organized under the Department of Defense represents the United States' largest organization involved in National security initiatives. Bullock et al. (2016) explained that the military supports homeland security efforts through deterrence and regional stability (p. 21). The *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review of 2014* also describes the

importance of the military to homeland security such as through its support to enhance cyber security and ability to backstop civil authorities during incidents that overextend the capacity of state and local organizations (DHS, 2014c, p. 86). Looking at an information sharing partnership of interagency collaboration between the military and the Network would appear to be a logical and lawful endeavor. Approximately 15% of the Network was collocated with elements of the state National Guard as of 2015 (DHS, 2016b, p. 5).

Many points have been raised that have cautioned the collaboration between these two entities. Taylor and Russell (2012) argued against the participation of the military in Network operations. They explained that this integration has caused a confusion of roles between law enforcement's traditional responsibilities and what have historically been military responsibilities (Taylor & Russell, 2012, p. 185). Potentially contributing to the confusion is what Rosenberg (2016) described as ill-defined and unclear relationships between the military and fusion centers (p. 180). Marks' (2014) research assessing fusion center collaboration also noted that relationships with the military were viewed as questionable in some cases (p. 45). Masse, O'Neil, and Rollins (2007) also pointed out that increased data access and collaboration between fusion centers and the federal government has also been viewed as a process that has federalized the Network (p. 56). These examples and other studies commenting on the military involvement in the Network often argue federal restrictions against military intervention in domestic activities. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 is routinely cited in defenses against military participation within the Network. Additional factors that may contribute to a

narrow view of this relationship could be related to points brought up in Jaccard's (2014) article that discussed the perceptions of and the impact of the militarization of police agencies.

### **Nongovernment Organizations**

Collaboration with non-governmental organizations in information sharing practices has been viewed as a grey area where personal information is believed to be unlawfully exchanged between organizations. Taylor and Russell (2012) expressed this sentiment and explained that increases in collaboration with private sector businesses and organizations are of increased concern for violations of privacy. They explained that these relationships have increased the data holdings of the centers and empowers them with unequalled amounts of public and private information on individuals that may not necessarily be involved in criminal activities (Taylor & Russell, 2012, p. 191). Monahan (2010) similarly cautioned in his findings that increased information access and the aggregation of information as a result of joint operations can create a substantial amount of data on an individual. Price (2013) noted similar partnerships between fusion centers and private entities and claimed that lack of consistent reporting guidance has resulted in the collection of information on individuals who were not involved with nefarious activities (pp. 18, 20).

Other views and actions have heavily encouraged and supported the integration of fusion centers with the private sector. The first national strategy for the Network produced in 2014 through collaboration of various state, local, and federal government organizations plainly stated that fusion centers were designed to interact and support

various entities, which included the private sector (NFCA et al., 2014, p. 3). Other federal foundational documents such as the revised version of the *National Criminal Intelligence Sharing Plan* underscored the intent and necessity of Network integration with the private sector (BJA, 2013, p. 4). These and other policy documents and reports reflect the government's view that there is and should continue to be a role for the private sector in Network operations and that information exchange between the two entities positively supports the homeland defense mission.

Some arguments have pointed out that a vast majority of critical infrastructure, which are of particular targeting interest to certain terrorist organizations, are owned and operated by private sector organizations (Peled, 2015, p. 678). Examples of critical infrastructure could be a power plant that supports electricity to a region, a water treatment facility that provides potable water for a city, or even a key transportation hub that supports mass movement of the populace in an area. Coffey (2015) found that the Washington Regional Threat Analysis Center had established a robust liaison network of dozens of private sector partners as part of its operations (p. 41). D. Evans' (2013) study focused on information sharing and management of the intelligence cycle. This examination looked at past critical incidents to inform future incident management (D. Evans, 2013). Fusion centers were noted as supporting information sharing between organizations in an effective manner, but were inconsistent in practices in support of private sector entities (D. Evans, 2013, p. 25). A. Stone (2015) claimed that some reporting of nefarious activity would only be available through established relationships with private sector partners (p. 37).

### **Orientation of the Network**

The Network's establishment and federal interest in its operations stemmed from the national prioritization of security following the attacks on 9/11. The scramble during this time frame to move all available National resources in the direction of the defense of the homeland caused an eye to be cast on state and local capabilities and initiatives that might bridge some of the security gaps. Villemez (2011) noted that more than 100 pieces of legislation, which were associated with aspects of homeland security, were passed in the years following these attacks. Beyond policy noted by Manhan and Griset (2013) that resulted in the creation of organizations such as DHS in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 or the increases in the use of investigative tools identified in the U.S.A. Patriot Act other initiatives attempted to integrate information sharing between levels of government and established funding to encourage sub-federal agencies to support national security efforts.<sup>4</sup> A. Stone (2015) claimed that the original emphasis on these efforts was intended to be a concerted focus on items related to terrorism (p. 38).

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<sup>4</sup> The Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, commonly referred to as the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act, provided greater authority for tracking and interception of communication for law enforcement and intelligence purposes. This legislation also loosened restrictions on the sharing of information between law enforcement and intelligence services and expanded powers concerning the criminal penalties for, the surveillance of, and the detention of individuals involved in domestic and international terrorism.

### **Fusion Center Mission Focus**

Some examinations have evaluated the priorities of the Network and have found a migration of the mission away from what is commonly believed to be the original intent of the centers. A Senate (2012) study confirmed that early views of fusion centers were understood to be focused on counterterrorism measures supportive of federal security efforts. In a review of fusion center mission statements, they found that 25 of 62 centers recognized terrorism as part of their responsibilities (Senate, 2012, pp. 93-96). Similarly, Carter (2015) found that 52% of fusion centers participating in his study had a mission that encompassed responsibilities beyond terrorism (p. 529).

During Coffey's (2015) study attempting to measure the effectiveness of fusion centers, he recognized that many parts of the Network were engaged in activities that were related to traditional criminal activities and other areas of inquiry that were not necessarily associated with terrorism (p. 6). The House (2013) similarly found that many fusion centers were engaged in operations that were not necessarily focused on terrorism. They claimed that focus on activities beyond terrorism enabled the Network to be of relevance to other federal agencies not charged with counterterrorism missions (House, 2013, pp. 10-11). Findings that have attempted to explain this migration of mission have suggested that pressures to be of value to their individual jurisdictions, limited terrorism activity, and resource constraints (time and skills) have likely influenced the mission shift (Regan & Monahan, 2013).

The focus on all-crimes and/or all-hazards has been met with feverish debate. All-crimes generally refers to a focus on a wide range of criminal activities from what

could be considered low-level traditional crime through terrorism. All-hazards encompasses terrorism and all-crimes approaches, but adds elements of what is normally viewed as emergency management focus areas such as natural disasters to the mission scope. Literature in this area has argued that broader mission focus increases the value of fusion centers to a broader array of stakeholders. Other views have suggested that criminal activities precede terrorist events where attention to criminal activities can increase the chances of identifying nefarious activities earlier in the operations cycle.

Sena (2012) argued this same point, explaining that criminal activity and terrorism are related and compartmentalization of the two is would create a gap in security (p. 4). A focus on other elements beyond terrorism was viewed as a force multiplier and of greater support to public safety by several individuals interviewed by Mary (2011, pp. 2-3). Table 4 represents self-reported information from the Network concerning fusion center mission focus provided as part of a 2015 survey. During his analysis of international terrorist groups and organized criminal enterprises, Dishman (2016) noted the increasing collaboration between criminal and terrorist actors. Terrorist organizations, such as al-Qa'ida, al-Shabbab, Hezbollah, and others, were noted as routinely engaging in criminal activities ranging from low-level crimes such as robberies through drug trafficking in order to fund operations and advance their cause (Dishman, 2016, p. 136-137, 139-140). Barron et al. (2016) identified the value of information from state, local, and private sector entities on various topics and discussed the importance of federal engagement to support state and local law enforcement efforts (p. 15). Support to efforts outside of terrorism is also in line with organizational cultural norms. The first



responder community is accustomed to supporting all sorts of incident response efforts. Traditional crime, naturally, and/or technological disasters are commonly viewed as having the ability to impact a community in ways similar to terrorism. Hood (2015) pointed out that fusion center participation in Hurricane Katrina and Ike efforts helped increase response rates and positively supported coordination efforts (p. 8).

Table 4

*Fusion Center Mission Focus*

Mission	Percentage of the Network
Counterterrorism	96.1
All-crimes	96.1
All-hazards	76.6

*Note.* From DHS. (2016b). 2015 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final Report, p. 9.

On the other end of the spectrum, this migration of mission has been viewed negatively in some reporting. Concern has been raised that fusion centers have experienced what is referred to a “mission drift,” which has created focus problems for these entities (Constitution Project, 2012, p. 19). Others have described this as “mission creep,” suggesting aimless wandering and/or aggressive action in support of power grabs to support relevancy (German & Stanley, 2007, p. 6; Monahan & Palmer, 2009, p. 682; Monaghan & Walby, 2012, p. 137). Price (2013) agreed, explaining that this expansion of mission has caused terrorism to become a secondary issue for many of these organizations (p. 9). These findings have also suggested that Network staff does not view terrorism as their responsibility or their performance measures are not tied to this mission

set. Alignment of performance metrics has led to some studies that have attempted to better define performance measurement for the Network. Hoffman's (2015) study also looked at aspects of performance measurement in the information sharing environment. This study looked at New Jersey State law enforcement agencies, which included the New Jersey Regional Operations and Intelligence Center (NJ ROIC). Hoffman pointed out that the ROIC supported information sharing, analysis, and training, but found that customer feedback was necessary for the development of performance metrics. K. Stone's (2014) examination of the North Central Texas Fusion Center (NCTFC) is one example of study that has attempted to dissect fusion center operations for best practices. Findings highlighted elements of NCTFC operations that could be used as performance measures that could be used for the evaluation of the Network.

Building upon the idea that terrorism is often viewed as a secondary responsibility in some organizations, Regan and Monahan (2014) highlighted some participant statements from their research that claimed that some police executives do not care about terrorism and potentially view this as a federal issue (p. 482). McQuade (2016b) found that immediate investigative needs significantly impact the direction of fusion centers. At the same time, they could possibly limit the potential of a major deviation from historical norms, which in the case of fusion centers that are heavily comprised of law enforcement professionals, is strongly linked to traditional crime (p. 6).

Carter's (2015) evaluation of the usefulness of information received and provided to fusion centers revealed a variety of sources of information and types of information that was found of value to Network staff many sources of which were unlikely to provide

information related to terrorism (p. 529). These assertions have bled over into other comments that have questioned the overall effectiveness of the Network (Peteritas, 2013). Many of these points consider the possibility that the terrorism threat is so complex and fluid that the best approach to countering this vector is a singular focus on the issue. Specialization in this area would create a cadre of professionals that are theoretically more adept at thwarting this problem. These arguments may not consider the blend of tactics that terrorist organizations have been found to be involved in that often include traditional criminal activities.

Other works that have pointed out concerns about the Network's evolving mission have viewed this mission expansion as an inevitable threat to individual privacy and liberties in the same vein as the above-mentioned section. Network staff has been accused of policy shopping to evade P/CRCL protections by adopting convenient guidelines and regulations from partnering agencies (Germany & Stanley, 2007). Similarly, R. Evans (2015) noted the transition of the fusion center mission and pointed out that some of the concerns related to P/CRCL claims of lack of oversight for fusion centers creates the potential for mishandling of information (pp. 53-43, 56). These concerns are again tied to the common belief that the Network was established to combat terrorism. These worries are exacerbated by the views that the Network will continually expand the mission due to what is perceived as a lack of a clear boundary. The lack of trust in Network operations and leadership's intentions was explored by Craven, Monahan, and Regan's (2015) examination of trust dynamics between government organizations, to include fusion centers, and the public.

## **Value of the Network**

Every organization, regardless of what the function is or who the customers are, is required to provide goods and or services to its stakeholders. In order to increase the chances of that entity's survival, the organization needs to be considered of value by the same constituency. In the case of the Network, these elements are rather nebulous and often times difficult to define. Fusion centers' engagement in operations, analysis, investigation, and dissemination of information, supports some of the key takeaways from reviews of processes and security structures that were executed after 9/11 (DHS, 2014b; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). Government entities have conducted a litany of assessments on the progress and effectiveness of the Network and have noted marked increases over previous years (DHS, 2012; 2013; 2014a; 2015a; 2016b). Other academic works have examined the performance and challenges of the decentralized environment of the Network (Marks, 2014). Furthermore, literature has questioned the value and need of fusion centers with some study findings that have described fusion centers using terms such as "wasteful" and "ineffective" (McQuade, 2016b, p. 5) .

### **Analysis**

Intelligence activities executed by the Network are generally angled toward preventing nefarious actions, discovering potential threat vectors before they act, identifying hazards that could impact a target or asset, and understanding developing trends, tactics, and techniques that are or could be employed against National interests. In order to execute this mission, intelligence is required to drive operational decisions.

Like that of the Intelligence community itself, the heart of the Network and value to stakeholders is directly tied to its ability to conduct analysis.

The Network's currency is quality analysis, which is derived from pieces of information that analysts pull from the sea of data available to fusion centers in the form of intelligence reports, incident reports, bulletins, open source information, etc. Much of the information is often unrelated, incomplete, and unstructured. Heuer (1999) explained that intelligence analysis is rarely achieved from complete knowledge or datasets. He stated that sources routinely provide ambiguous data and reporting to analysts, which contributes to an operating environment with a high level of uncertainty (Heuer, 1999, pp. 31-32).

Again, like that of analysts in traditional intelligence agencies, Network analysts work in this opaque setting where expectations for products could be unreasonable. At times, assessments of intelligence and judgments concerning the value of intelligence products, have been viewed as poor due to factors that related to tactical precision, strategic warning, and political will (Dahl, 2013). Pressures to provide definitive analysis to guide decision-makers also may be stymieing the Network's efforts to produce alternative analysis, which may expose unique factors and flaws of other agencies' analysis. Anderson (2015) found that concerns about conducting analysis that may be considered out of the main stream of thinking has limited production on items that may be viewed as more creative and risky.

Amoore (2014) explained that disparate data that is often loosely linked can confound the analytical process. Amoore also stated that intuition and ingenuity are

common tools used in the field that help advance analysis (Amoore, 2014, pp. 426-427). In the end, judgments need to be made based on experience, available data, past trends, and understanding of the intentions of the threat actor. Fragmentary data that is often available, coupled with adherence to probabilistic science, limits the ability of conducting predictive analysis (Amoore, 2014, p. 425). The Network is challenged due to its position at the intersection of mission needs that require its services to be relevant and responsive to tactical operations and its strategic decision-making. Dahl (2013) pointed out many of the difficulties that have been experienced by intelligence services who have attempted to negotiate the requirements for both strategic and tactical intelligence requirements.

The diverse customer base of the Network also poses risks to the perception of the organization's value. The varied disciplines that support and consume fusion center products have separate and distinct needs and equally unique determinants of value. Public health personnel, for instance, may have interest concerning the impacts of the opioid epidemic. Wagner, Bovet, Haynes, Joshua, and Davidson's (2016) study concerning the effects and outcomes associated with law enforcement's initial treatment during a response to drug overdoses highlights information that would possibly be of relevance to the public health sector. Hamilton's (2015) examination of ballistic protection for first responders due to the increased rates of violent encounters by those such as fire service personnel could suggest that intelligence dealing with officer safety concerns may be a requirement for this discipline. Dean's (2016) study on violence against fire fighters also underscores the same point.

There are numerous additional examples of discipline-specific information needs. The emergency medical service field, which could provide data to help target illicit drug use according to Hibdon and Groff's (2014) study, may be interested in information, indicators, and warning concerning what DuTeaux (2012) described as the emerging threat of chemical suicides that have resulted in harm to the responder. A security director from a private sector organization that owns and operates critical infrastructure may be solely concerned about information about their specific asset. That same director could also desire information about security incidents and trends related to adjacent organizations that are tied to that specific critical sector to determine if similar events have or could impact their property.

The diverse information requirements faced by the Network are also highlighted by different sections and focus areas within a discipline. A narcotics squad for a police department would likely be more interested in information related to drug trafficking over threat assessments related to special events. Another part of the same department that focuses on force protection and crime reduction may prefer to see products from a fusion center that deals with infrastructure vulnerability and/or property theft trends. Federal partners such as the FBI and DHS have specific subordinate offices and components that may hold information related to terrorism and suspicious activity concerning critical infrastructure in a higher priority bracket than lower-level criminal trends observed by a fusion center. Other branches of the FBI and DHS may be interested in transnational gang activity over terrorism trends.

These expansive requirements could be contributing to some of the assessments and studies that have questioned the value of the Network because fusion centers may be attempting to be everything to everyone. Some studies have found that fusion centers have focused too much on being just a central clearing out for information and need to continue to build capabilities that can enable to them to provide actionable intelligence consumable by their stakeholders (Cilluffo, Clark, Downing, & Squires, 2012). In other cases the need for the Network in its entirety has been questioned due adjacent security efforts. Mayer's (2016) study on domestic intelligence capabilities recommended that DHS and DOJ consolidate the Network under other existing structures that focus on counterterrorism missions. He claimed that fusion centers have not demonstrated any meaningful value regarding the National effort to combat terrorism and should be folded into the Joint Terrorism Task Forces (Mayer, 2016, pp. 1-2).<sup>5</sup> A Senate (2012) report based on the examination of the Network argued that fusion centers have not demonstrated meaningful contributions to federal counterterrorism efforts and questioned the analytical capabilities focus of these centers.

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<sup>5</sup> The Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) are FBI owned multi-agency organizations based throughout the United States associated with FBI field offices and resident agencies. These organizations specialize in the investigation of international and domestic terrorism related activities. The JTTF are comprised of federal, state, and local representatives from the law enforcement and the intelligence disciplines.



Some charges described analytic products that provided no information of use to customers (U.S. Senate, 2012). Other findings, which touched on earlier mentioned points of the Network's migration to all-crimes and all-hazards mission focus, described analysis that related to general criminal activities, human trafficking, and narcotics trends, all of which were cited as little relevance to the overall counterterrorism mission (Senate, 2012, pp. 26-39). At the same time, the Network has been noted to bring capabilities to the overall security efforts that would normally reside at the level of traditional national security agencies, namely the FBI, DOD, DHS, and other intelligence community organizations. In one examination of domestic intelligence analytic practices Cox (2012) claimed that fusion centers filled the void between SLTT law enforcement organizations and national security agencies by helping to provide a strategic analysis capability to these local entities (p. 4). Cox's (2012) statement appears to reflect fusion center product consumer sentiment as voiced during a 2015 customer satisfaction survey, which targeted a litany of organizations representing a variety of different disciplines that received fusion center products (DHS, 2016b, p. 13). The vast majority of participants responded with favorable rankings of information received from the Network. Table 5 highlights the results from this survey.

Table 5

*Fusion Center Product Satisfaction Survey 2015*

<u>Question</u>	<u>Agree/Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Disagree/Strongly Disagree</u>
Fusion center products and services are times for my mission needs	79.30%	14.50%	6.20%
Fusion center products and services are relevant	84.90%	11.60%	3.40%
I am satisfied with fusion center products and services	74.30%	16.70%	9.00%
Fusion center products and services influenced my decision making related to threat response activities within my area of responsibility	70.90%	19.10%	9.90%
Fusion center products and services resulted in increased situational awareness of threats within my area of responsibility	86.00%	7.70%	6.30%
Fusion center products and services are unique (information or service that could not be obtained through other means)	71.30%	20.30%	7.60%

*Note.* From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2016b). *2015 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final report*, (p. 13). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/2015-fusion-center-assessment>

These judgments about the analytic value of the Network often appear in the body of literature in a context that suggests this challenge is solely tied to fusion centers and not necessarily associated with other organizations involved in intelligence analysis. Dahl (2013) described similar concerns expressed by consumers and decision-makers in reference to analysis conducted by the Intelligence community. MacEachin (2005) highlighted problems with Intelligence community generated analytical processes, which

have historically put a premium on strategic analysis that often has been confounded by cognitive bias and group think (pp. 116 -117). Heuer (1999) described the factors that contribute to cognitive bias and how these elements can and have impacted intelligence analysis throughout the Intelligence community (pp. 111-146).

As mentioned earlier in this section, Abold, Guidetti, and Keyer (2012) discussed some of the benefits of specializing in analytical topics that the Network could leverage. Because parts of the Network are based in different operating environments it is logical to assume that different threat actors impact these areas at different rates. Partner organization interests and intelligence priorities differ between organizations and a fusion center's focus that is commensurate with those regional needs would likely result in the generation of products that are of higher relevance to that center's stakeholders.

Coffey (2015) described how the Washington Regional Threat Analysis Center (WRTAC) organized its analysts along specific functional areas that addressed priorities for its area of operations. The WRTAC relied on analysts that developed subject-matter expertise in these focus areas in order to better serve its constituency (Coffey, 2015, pp. 40-41). Services described by the Idaho Criminal Intelligence Center (ICIC) included coordination of information concerning drugs, which indicates that illegal drug use and trafficking in the state is viewed as a priority topic (Idaho State Police, 2013). Likewise, the Mississippi Analysis and Information Center (MAIC) highlighted one of its key focuses concerning its support to the protection of critical infrastructure based in the state (Mississippi Department of Public Safety, 2015). These differing orientations are linked to concerns and requirements identified by the stakeholders of the centers and could

denote areas of expertise that can be leveraged by the federal entities to compliment national efforts.

Initiatives to “focus the analytical lens” and increase the value of analytical products have been considered and attempts have been made to put them into action. Policy such as *Intelligence Community Directive 203* was published to codify analytic standards and tradecraft for finished intelligence products (Office of the Director of National Intelligence [ODNI], 2007). While this specific policy was directed towards formal Intelligence community agencies, the Network has attempted to apply many of this community’s standards into practice where applicable. Similarly, the release of the *Common competencies for state, local, and tribal intelligence analysts* provided foundational guidance for fusion center analytical development (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2010a). Unlike *Intelligence Community Directive 203*, the *Common Competencies* document was drafted for and coordinated with members from SLTT organizations (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2010a; ODNI, 2007).

Analytic training programs that range from generalized analysis processes to specialized topical areas have been established and/or made available to Network staff. Led by DHS via the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), analytical training curriculum sponsored by federal and sub-federal organizations underwent a multi-agency review process to ensure that courses adhered to analytic standards and were aligned with requirements set forth in the Common Competencies guidelines (FEMA, 2016a; Global, DHS, & BJA, 2010a). These courses were accredited by FEMA and made available to the Network to support fusion center training. Some of the many

examples of analytical training are the DHS Basic Intelligence and Threat Analysis Course, Foundations of Intelligence Analysis Training, and Suspicious Activity Reporting Analysis, which aimed to create a cadre of analysts versed in analytical tradecraft commensurate with the traditional Intelligence community analysts (FEMA, 2016b). In many cases, fusion centers themselves promote, provide, sponsor, and execute, training for their internal staff and external stakeholders.

The Louisiana State Analytical and Fusion Exchange ([LA-SAFE], 2010) offers regular access to suspicious activity reporting training for its partners. Like LA-SAFE, the Southeastern Wisconsin Threat Analysis Center ([STAC], n.d.) provides suspicious activity training as well as threat, exercise, and other briefing and training offerings. Rosenberg (2016) discovered that Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC) was involved with a litany of training covering various topics. The NCRIC offered training ranging from technical aspects of investigations to analytical programs and appeared to include engagement with private sector entities (Rosenberg, 2016, p. 181). According to the 2015 Annual Report, the Network collectively invested \$9,569,566. in training and exercises related to enhancement of competencies in this area (DHS, 2016b, p. 7). The continued movement to enhance analytic relevancy and personnel expertise appears to be in alignment with goals highlighted in the Network's National Strategy (NFCA et al., 2013, p. 12).

In spite of the significant focus and investment on developing sound analytical processes and tradecraft, studies have found analysis was lacking at times. Chang's (2015) examination of the Network that focused on developing a maturity model for law

enforcement stated that there was actually a trend in the Network of a limited training for those charged with analytical duties. Some of these training deficiencies were noted to be related to the purchase of analytic software platforms by fusion centers where formal system training was ignored or not provided (Chang, 2015, p. 114). Pherson and Sullivan (2013) found that fusion center production has been criticized for poor quality and consisting of information that was processed with limited analytical rigor (p. 309). This was also noted by Tromblay (2015) who stated that the federal government has had limited success in obtaining information and analysis from the Network that specifically addresses intelligence requirements (p. 247).

Concern about the quality of analytical products was also attributed to the Network's focus on traditional criminal activities and often described as too focused on tactical products (Taylor & Russell, 2012, p. 188). In some cases, fusion center products have been judged to be unhelpful, vague, and lacking analytical thoroughness. Participants in one study claimed that in general, the Network's production was uninformative and was not timely (U.S. Senate, 2012, p. 40-42). Some findings have also attributed these shortcomings to poor oversight practiced by DHS (O'Harrow, 2013). Still, these findings appear to be slanted towards a view from a perspective of a robust federal organization, which may have in-house organic capabilities to conduct deeper analysis. Cox (2012) pointed out that the Network can potentially increase the strategic analytic capabilities of a local law enforcement agency that may only be able to conduct analysis at the tactical level. This stems from a high operational tempo that exists due to daily lower level criminal activities occurring in said jurisdiction (p. 4).

Some of this could be explained by the reactive nature of many law enforcement operations. The drive to solve and close cases is obviously linked to activities that have already occurred. Products based on or recounting past events are often intended to provide situational awareness for other stakeholders. One participant from Joyal's (2012) study explained that the traditional law enforcement responsibilities and systems were not necessarily positioned to support predictive analysis, but explained that progress in this area is currently ongoing (p. 364).

### **Duplicity**

Related to the questions of analytic value and original contribution to the security strategy is the debate on the uniqueness of fusion centers. Organizations and task force structures at the federal level that focus on the counterterrorism mission have been performing operations and analysis for some time with some existing prior to the formulation of the Network. The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF) are distributed throughout the U.S. in 104 cities and comprised of over 500 state and local agencies and 55 federal organizations (FBI, n.d.). These organizations are the primary federal law enforcement construct that focuses on investigations concerning terrorism. The DHS Office of Intelligence and Analysis ([I&A], 2016) has vast analytical capabilities with many of its analytic divisions focused on terrorism analysis. Programs such as the I&A Fellows Program and the National Counterterrorism Center's (NCTC) Joint Counterterrorism Analysis Team (JCAT) provide detail opportunities for SLTT partners to work within the Intelligence community on missions concerning terrorism and National security efforts (I&A, n.d.; NCTC, n.d.). These and other initiatives focusing on

national and homeland security efforts have caused those studying the Network and the broader field of security to question the need for fusion centers. Policy and decision-makers considering budgetary constraints have also wrestled over the cost to benefit ratio.

Some works have argued that the Network's existence is degrading federal efforts such as the JTTFs and claimed that fusion centers often provide redundant products and services to the security community (Mayer, 2016, p. 4). Duplicity of services has been noted in other studies as well where products were cited as having been republications of past analytical pieces and contributions to security efforts were viewed as minimal (Senate, 2012). A GAO (2013b) report concerning domestic field-based intelligence and investigative organizations, which included fusion centers, found 91 and 32 instances of overlap between security organizations concerning analytical activities and investigative functions. The report claimed that the examined entities were not held accountable for coordinating activities and appeared to be disjointed in security efforts (GAO, 2013b, pp. 20, 26, and 33). Tromblay (2015) claimed that the independent development of individual fusion centers has contributed to a duplication of effort in the field. He argued that the Network's creation would have benefited from top-down enterprise level development (p. 244).

### **Network Structure/Governance/Accountability/Oversight**

As mentioned in the background portion of this study, the Network consists of 79 independently owned and operated fusion centers. A vast majority of these entities have an executive agency that is part of the law enforcement community. Each fusion center



was required to achieve and maintain specified critical operating capabilities (COCs) and enabling capabilities (ECs) that were outlined in the Baseline Capabilities and Fusion Center Guidelines documents (Global, DHS, & BJA, 2006; 2008). The Network was originally measured against these benchmarks during the 2010 DHS Baseline Capabilities Assessment (DHS, 2016a). Entities that were able to achieve passing rating for COCs and ECs became federally recognized and were subsequently considered part of the Network. These federally recognized centers were then eligible for federal funding, primarily through DHS, but other grant programs that support law enforcement and security initiatives were also available to these fusion centers at that point. Tables 3 and 4 provide descriptions of the COCs and ECs (DHS, 2014a, pp. 59-66).

Table 6

*Critical Operating Capabilities*

<u>Capability</u>	<u>Description</u>
COC #1—Receive	The ability to receive classified and unclassified information from federal partners
COC #2—Analyze	The ability to assess the local implications of threat information through the use of a formal risk assessment process
COC #3—Disseminate	The ability to further disseminate threat information to other state, local, tribal, and territorial entities within their jurisdictions
COC #4—Gather	The ability to gather locally generated information, aggregate it, analyze it, and share it with federal partners as appropriate

*Note.* From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2014a). *2013 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final report*, (pp. 59-62). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2013%20National%20Network%20of%20Fusion%20Centers%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Table 7

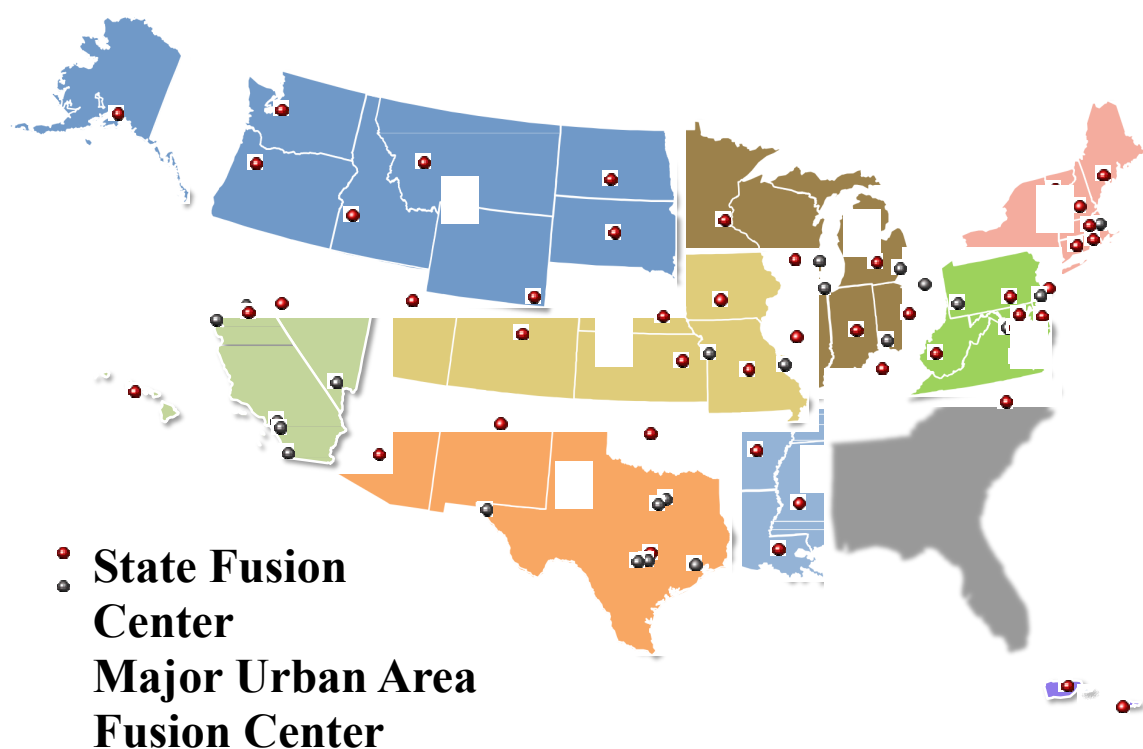
*Enabling Capabilities (EC)*

<u>Capability</u>	<u>Description</u>
EC #1—Privacy, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberty Protections	The ability and commitment to protect the privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties of all individuals
EC #2—Sustainment Strategy	The ability to establish and execute a sustainment strategy to ensure the long-term growth and maturity of the National Network
EC #3—Communications and Outreach	The ability to develop and execute a communications and outreach plan
EC #4—Security	The ability to protect the security of the physical fusion center facility, information, systems, and personnel

*Note.* From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2014a). *2013 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final report*, (pp. 63-66). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2013%20National%20Network%20of%20Fusion%20Centers%20Final%20Report.pdf>

DHS (2016d) separated these fusion centers into categories of “primary fusion centers” and “recognized fusion centers” (para. 3, 4). Primary centers were identified by the state or territorial chief executive with recognized centers being regionally focused entities often associated with a major urban area. These designations may contribute to the common misconception that a recognized center works for or under the supervision of the primary center when in reality each center falls under the regulation and guidelines of that owning jurisdiction. Figure 1 graphically depicts locations for the 78 federally recognized fusion centers that comprise the Network (DHS, 2016d). Not pictured in this graphic is the Wyoming Information and Analysis Team (WIAT) whose designation

brought the total strength of the Network to 79 fusion centers. The WIAT is the most recent addition to the Network and was identified by the Governor for Wyoming as the state's primary fusion center in May 2017 (Mead, 2017). See Appendix A and B for the formal organizational names for both of the primary and recognized fusion centers that comprise the Network.



*Figure 1.* Map of the National Network of Fusion Centers.

The state of Texas provides a good template to explain the relationships between primary and recognized centers. The Dallas Fusion Center (DFC) works under the purview of the Dallas Police Department (2016), the Austin Regional Intelligence Center ([ARIC], 2016) falls under the direction of the Austin Police Department, the Southwest Texas Fusion Center (SWTFC), based in San Antonio, is organized under the San

Antonio Police Department (City of San Antonio, 2016). The other recognized fusion centers in Texas fall under their respective local executive agencies as well. The primary fusion center for Texas is the Texas Joint Crime Information Center (TJCIC) and is operated by the Texas Department of Public Safety (2016) which works in partnership with the above-mentioned fusion centers in the state by collaborating with other out of state fusion centers.

Another point to note is that the TJCIC is not responsible for directly funding any of the other centers, although the state may provide such funding as part of interstate initiatives. The TJCIC is also assessed independently from the other Texas-based fusion centers during the DHS annual assessments (DHS, 2015). Federal funding eligibility is thereby determined by the ARIC, DFC, SWTFC, and TJCICs individual assessments. In essence, fusion centers maintain a type of individual sovereignty, which is derived from the entity's executive organization. This sovereignty is based on where their parent agency's sit within the governance structure whether it be state, local, tribal, or territorial. Morton (2012) described the concept of independent organizations working collaborative efforts in support of homeland security in much the same way that the Network operates (pp. 233-243).

Oversight and accountability issues noted in some literature could potentially be contributing to limiting the understanding (by external parties) about the reasons for the decentralized organizational structure of the Network, the need for limits to transparency on some Network aspects, and/or unsuccessful marketing of fusion center. Perceptions and findings that have suggested that fusion centers have and continue to operate without

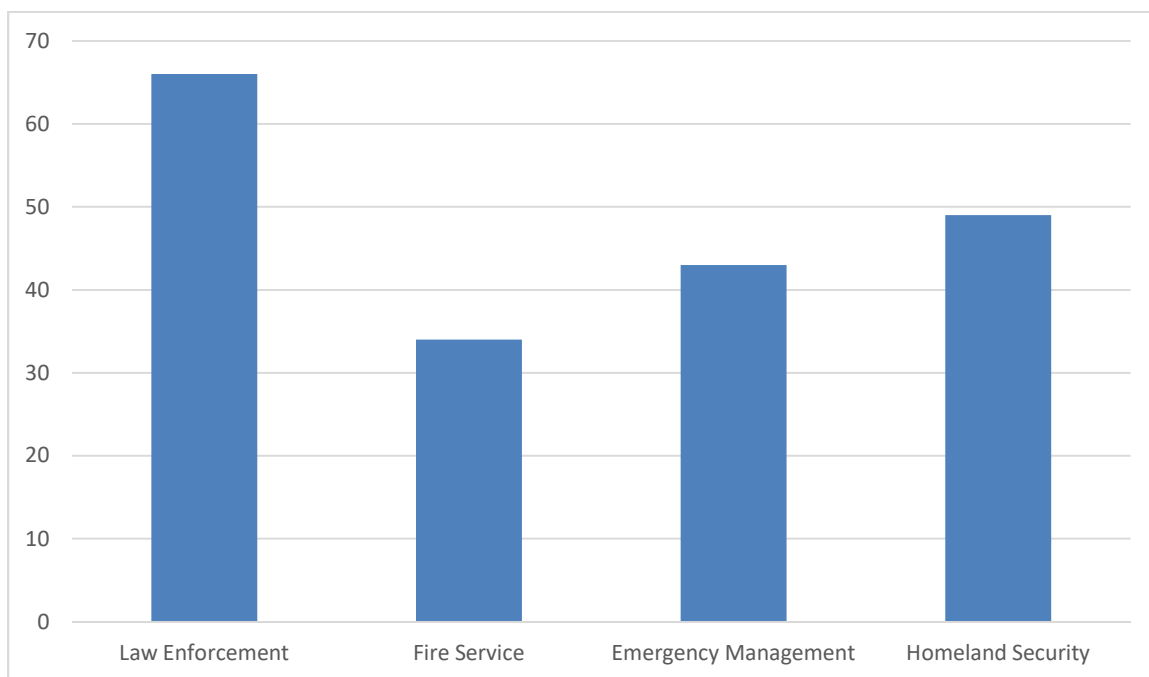
regulation, process, and supervision is problematic for fusion centers. An image of the Network that consists of a view that domestic intelligence operations are being conducted without checks and balances has contributed to limited trust in these government organizations.

Common questions, concerns, and findings in this area discussed procedures and policies that were not enforced or were rife with gaps that allowed participants in the Network to evade accountability requirements. Also noted were governance bodies, which lacked formal authority over the fusion centers that they were meant to govern. Lack of guidelines for minimum oversight requirements has contributed to fears about overzealous collection and surveillance missions conducted by the Network (Monahan & Palmer, 2009, p. 628). Graphia's (2010) examination raised concern that procedural reviews that were being executed by fusion centers were largely done through internal processes, which brought into question the validity of any of these processes (p. 34). Regan et al. (2015) expressed alarm about agreements between partner organizations, which were found to be based on unstructured requirements and lacked requisite specificity for understanding that permitted staff to evade accountability procedures. (pp. 749-750). A. Stone (2015) similarly noted that the Network has operated with loose guidelines that needed enforcement through organizational maturity (p. 36).

The lack of complete uniformity between fusion centers could also be contributing to perceptions that the Network is completely unstructured and operating in the "dark." The Network's relatively hasty establishment in the years following the 9/11 attacks were found to be factors to the dramatic differences between individual fusion

centers (Pherson & Sullivan, 2013). Katz (2015) pointed out that policy was often executed in an independent manner and was rarely guided by a strategic plan or coordinating effort (pp. 3-4). The contrast between the Network and long-existing federal organizations has also been noted as a policy consideration that has not been considered for fusion centers. Pherson and Sullivan (2013) pointed out that many federal agencies have had decades to develop policy, procedure, and governing guidelines while the Network has had a relatively short amount of time to develop in a similar capacity (p. 313). According to the model highlighted by DHS (2016b), a vast majority of the Network was considered in the highest maturity rating category during the time period covered by the 2015 assessment.

That being said, many fusion centers operate under the guidance of governance structures and bodies. Many of these governance bodies are comprised of a mix of executives from different disciplines that is reflective of each fusion center's individual make-up. DHS (2016) found that 74 of 78 fusion centers had a governing authority that consisted of representatives that were separate and distinct from the fusion center's parent organization (p. 10). It may be important to note that this most recent finding is slightly lower than the 97% of centers that had a formalized governance body during the previous year's examination (DHS, 2015; 2016b, p. 10). Figure 2 depicts the number of fusion centers that have multidisciplinary representation within their governance bodies. In all cases, fusion centers appear to exist and function under some form of government authority, where that executive organization has some form of legal operating authority and/or mandate.



*Figure 2. Multidisciplinary participation in fusion center governance. From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2016b). 2015 National Network of Fusion Centers: Final report, (p. 10). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/2015-fusion-center-assessment>*

### **Organizational Integration**

Elements impacting integration are relevant to all types of organizations.

Whether an institution is small or large, is considered public or private, or employs a centralized or networked model, organizational success depends on the integration of operations, technologies, culture, and vision. As evidenced by study findings in the field, the Network has been struggling with issues concerning integration. Some of these findings may have potentially resulted in the misalignment of policy, competing priority objectives, and different individual fusion center views of their role in the National security framework.



Integration is defined by seamless and efficient business processes that enable the entity to reach its organizational goals. Essentially, integration of Network with the national security strategy depends on its ability to achieve symmetry between the internal and external factors impacting, driving, and pressuring the security process.

Organizational integration is an important element that needs to be examined and understood due to its potential influence on the Network's survival. Many of the factors that impact this area and that are relevant to fusion centers have actually been found in study focused on industry. Riley, Klein, Miller, and Sridharn's (2016) quantitative study that examined organizational integration and information sharing found that internal organizational integration was related to an entity's ability to share information across a network and maintain agile and adaptive processes (pp. 965-968).

These issues could stem from leadership, cultural, political, policy, and perceptual factors. Review of studies focusing on corporate integration have revealed that alignment of operational procedures, organizational culture, technology, and unified staff motivation are necessary for integration, but present some of the greatest challenges to the process (Smeets, Ierulli, & Gibbs, 2012, pp. 2-3). Technologies also play a crucial role in this process as well and require infrastructure that is interoperable. Introduction of new capabilities that can supplement existing operations has been found to be a factor that impacts integration of intelligence operations as well (See, 2015, pp. 47-48). Gotz (2015) argued that operations and management approaches have been impacting Network integration.

## **Leadership**

Often times leadership is noted as a factor that can impact integration. O'Connor, Melbourne, and Layfield (2015) argued this point in their article discussing the integration of operations and intelligence activities noting that leadership planning and engagement was necessary for achieving integration. Northouse (2016) highlighted various forms of leadership styles and pointed out that contemporary research in the field of leadership has focused on processes of leadership that influence individuals and organizations to achieve common objectives (p. 4). As suggested by its moniker, the Network is a decentralized structure that is comprised of dozens of individual organizations. This structure presents difficulties in analyzing individual leadership traits and types with respect to the Network in its entirety due to the 77 different chains of authority and numerous position levels that represent leadership and executive staff.

Studies concerning private sector organization's relationships between executives and subordinates have pointed out the importance of these associations to the entities' success (Prince, 2014, p. 26). The difficulty in clearly pin pointing the impact of leadership and management aspects is tied to the variance of structure and approaches amongst the Network. Carter and Carter (2009) have highlighted these differences. Gosz (2015) found that the differing models of management and leadership practices executed over the different parts of the Network have contributed to integration issues, but suggested targeted approaches that blend management models focused on goals, constituencies, processes, and system-resources could enhance effectiveness of fusion centers. This recommendation is aligned with Eversole, Venneberg, and Crowder's

(2012) assertions that multi-faceted approaches of management can support organizational effectiveness and integration. Future study comparing fusion center leaders could illuminate how these elements have affected the Network by measuring their level of integration and performance.

### **Organizational Culture**

The culture of an organization can also be another factor that influences integration. In its simplest form, organizational culture refers to an entity's values, beliefs, and practices that form the framework that binds the group. Schein (2004) explained that there were three levels of organizational culture that consisted of basic underlying assumptions, espoused beliefs, and organizational artifacts (p. 26). Study in this area has found that alignment of organizational culture and norms with strategic goals increases the probability that the entity will meet or exceed identified objectives (Heckelman, Unger, & Garofano, 2013).

Ekwutosi and Moses (2013) asserted that many entities do not consider organizational culture in strategic planning processes. They further claimed that this has been found to limit progression and outcomes for the organization (Ekwutosi & Moses, 2013). This sentiment has been expressed in other studies as well (Zalami, 2005). Eversole et al. (2012) also argue that factors concerning organizational culture are directly related to the effectiveness and integration of institutions.

Gardner's (2014) examination of the intelligence and law enforcement communities, which included fusion centers, highlighted some of similarities and differences between these disciplines. The study found that the intelligence community

had a more involved culture than that of law enforcement (of, which fusion centers fall into), but recommended that both communities needed to increase their adaptability to internal and external environmental factors (Gardner, 2014, pp. 143-144). Zota and Oana (2016) claimed that a breakdown of organizational cultural barriers was required for organizations involved in the intelligence process in order for the intelligence community to fully exercise information sharing (p. 691).

### **Conclusion and Justification**

This exhaustive review of literature consisted of a variety of source materials ranging from primary through gray works addressing historical perspectives in the security field, the state of discourse concerning fusion centers, as well as items covering the importance and challenges of organizational integration. The body of knowledge has been supported by examinations conducted by government organizations, academia, advocacy groups, and nonprofit organizations representing a full range of viewpoints on this topic. Recurring and repetitive themes identified during the research process marked the saturation point and subsequent endpoint for collection of prior research for this study.

The literature review provided context and contrast of differing points of view that covered the value proposition and arguments for greater support to the Network as well as areas of operations, which were believed to be beyond the intended scope of fusion centers (Cilluffo et al., 2012; German & Stanley, 2007; Mayer, 2016).

Other activities and incidents associated with the Network were also perceived as threats to constitutional rights and liberties by some individuals, while at the same time, were

cited as demonstrations of enhancements to security for the homeland (House, 2013; Price, 2013; Regan & Monahan, 2014). Principles of management, governance, and organizational structure have been the focus of some review with recommendations offered to support leading and directing the Network (Coffey, 2015; McQuade, 2016b). Other examinations have attempted to understand the intelligence analytical process with some findings revealing best practices, ongoing initiatives, and dynamics that are impacting this area (Abold, Guidetti, & Keyer, 2012; McQuade, 2016a). Policy analysis has also been a subject of study concerning the field with findings ranging from determination of robust policy concerning fusion centers to recommendations for better coordination of policy initiatives across the Network (R. Evans, 2013; Klem, 2014; Pherson & Sullivan, 2013).

This literature review described the scope and depth of work completed to date concerning the Network and helped illuminate gaps in this field of research that are present at this time. Study findings and recommendations (e.g., Barron et al., 2016, p. 11; Vidal, 2013) described items that suggest that the Network has experienced challenges related to its integration with the U.S. national security strategy. Some of these factors hindering integration could be caused by disjointed policy as noted by Katz (2015), governance structures that are not best positioned to support a Network structure as suggested by Ferrandino (2014), unique local investigative and political factors as argued by McQuade (2016b), or brought up in the field of work on this topic.

Currently there appears to be limited to no research that has attempted to specifically identify and understand what factors exist that are influencing the Network's

integration with broader security efforts. The angle of research for this study directly addressed this gap through engagement with individuals working within the Network. Participants for this study were best positioned to provide unique insight into these matters of integration. The next chapter of this study will address the methodological components of this examination of fusion centers to include detailed review of data collection procedures, analytic techniques, population and sample description, as well as ethical considerations.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Introduction**

Prior research focusing on fusion centers indicated the Network has experienced challenges with integration into the U.S. national security strategy as I discussed in Chapter 1 and as evidenced in detail in Chapter 2 of this study. The body of work in this field has not addressed or attempted to identify factors that have implications on this operational alignment. In this qualitative study, I sought to discover and better understand the phenomena impacting the integration of the Network with U.S. national security efforts through the exploration of perceptions gathered from participants represented by Network leadership and staff members. My findings and recommendations offered from this examination will contribute to the discussion and extend the body of literature that addresses domestic security and intelligence policies, decisions, and operations.

In this chapter, I will provide the overall methodology that was applied for this research project. Procedures and rationale for the methods of conduct will be offered in this section for further evaluation of the study itself. I will open this portion of the chapter a review of the purpose of study, explanation of the central phenomena, and identification of the chosen research tradition. The role of the researcher will be outlined next, also providing information on my relationships to participants and the techniques that I used during the study for the management of bias. Potential ethical issues will be highlighted and when applicable, methods used to address or mitigate these issues will then be cited.

I will also describe the population, sample descriptions, sample size, and recruitment methods to provide a thorough understanding of the participants in the research. Next in the chapter, I will provide information concerning the instrumentation used during the data collection process. Finally, details about the data analysis plan and discussion of trustworthiness will be offered for consumption to demonstrate assurance of the quality of data.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

As I detailed in Chapter 1 and referenced in portions of Chapter 2, in this study I employed a qualitative design through a phenomenological approach. The use of a qualitative design for this research was influenced by several factors ranging from my personal philosophical worldview to ensuring elements of the study were in alignment with all of the study's components. The central focus of this examination was oriented on the discovery and understanding of factors impacting the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy. My inquiry was driven by three main RQs, which were answered through the collection of data during interviews with research study participants that worked within the scope of Network operations for at least 1 year. The central RQs for this study are detailed in the following subsection.

#### **Research Questions (RQs)**

RQ1: What factors influence the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy?

RQ2: What barriers impact the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy?



RQ3: What circumstances contribute to the criticisms voiced about fusion centers?

An influential factor for this study stemmed from my personal philosophical assumptions, which are associated with social constructionist and phenomenological worldviews. Patton (2015) described social constructionism concepts as reality being understood through individual and collective perceptions (p. 120). Galbin (2014) further explained this view was based on external relationships and interactions between individuals. This concept is oriented toward a desire to understand how external forces influence or are related to an individual's personal view of the world or phenomena (Galbin, 2014, pp. 82-83). Essentially, individual interpretation is established through the fabrication of socially-constructed frames (Reichert & Zielke, 2008). Philosophical perspectives that are associated with phenomenological assumptions, which also influenced this study, were beliefs that individuals have both subjective and objective experiences that influence meaning. Rooted in this perspective is the importance of understanding the Network through lived experiences of those working and governing fusion centers, which was necessary to answer the RQs for this study.

These assumptions supported and have often been associated with qualitative research studies. This philosophical orientation also emphasized gaining a deep understanding of phenomena and ascribing meaning to these elements. Ultimately, these philosophical viewpoints, along with the research problem, purpose of study, RQs, and theoretical framework, influenced my angle of inquiry and design of this study.

## **Research Design**

I determined a qualitative approach to be most appropriate for this study due to several factors. The limited availability of information concerning fusion center staff's focused on the Network's integration was one consideration in the decision for this design. The difficulty of accurately measuring data that were based on perceptions was another factor. The lack of current relevant data was also suggestive of the exploratory nature of this study and bolstered my determination that this study should be considered original research. My additional rationale for the employment of this approach was tied to the purpose of the research, where I intended to gain a thorough understanding of the phenomena. Gill (2014) pointed out that qualitative methods are best positioned to extract rich data through observation to obtain a deep understanding of the research topic. This method also provided alignment with the relevant components of the study and complimented my philosophical assumptions mentioned in the previous subsection.

A qualitative approach permitted me to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena, which centered on the Network and factors of integration. The qualitative data collection methods that I applied in this study were based on participant interviews, which provided a logical technique for acquiring the original data being sought in this study. This collection method was further supported by the understanding that the desired information was not available elsewhere and could not necessarily have been observed directly or indirectly in a natural environment. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, I determined a qualitative method to be ideal because it permitted me to discover the factors and variables that may not have been considered prior to the data

collection process of this study. This approach also allowed me to ask follow-up questions in order to obtain a better understanding of the information and/or gather more details about concepts communicated by the participants.

The philosophical assumptions I stated previously in the chapter established alignment with an approach and methodology that sought to collect information from a small number of individuals who had experience working within the Network for at least 1 year. My primary strategy of inquiry for this study was through a phenomenological design. This design strives to gain a deep understanding of the nature of individual experiences (Patton, 2015).

Creswell (2013) similarly described research using this design as helpful with discovering, describing, and understanding lived experience from individuals (p. 76). The type of problem being experienced by Network staff, expressed in Chapter 1, was best addressed through this design because the RQs could be answered during the data collection phase. This process also permitted this collection to occur in a manner where the participants could describe their personal experiences working within the Network and provide me with their perspectives on operations and factors that they had perceived as impacting fusion centers.

### **Central Phenomenon**

The central phenomenon that I explored during this study can be described as the Network itself, specifically factors impacting the entity's integration with the U.S. national security strategy. Patton (2015) explained that phenomenological approaches oriented toward organizations aim to “capture the essence of program participant's

experience” (p. 116). I captured perceptions and beliefs about factors impacting the integration of fusion centers with the U.S. national security strategy communicated by participants through an interview process consisting of open-ended questions. This strategy of inquiry was relevant to this study because of my personal belief that capturing data about the participants’ past experiences and how they interpreted those experiences were necessary for the discovery and understanding of the aforementioned factors impacting integration.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I was involved with all aspects of this inquiry from the conception stage through the final execution and write-up. These aspects ranged from the decisions about and implementation of the research plan through the analytical processes and generation of findings. As is the case in many qualitative research endeavors, I was also the primary collection tool for this study. Data collected for this examination were harvested using in-person and telephone interviews with participants. I conducted all participant interviews and the interpretation of the captured data was processed solely by me.

### **Personal and Professional Relationships (Reflexivity)**

Reflexivity refers to disclosure of personal information about the researcher to support transparency and ideally increase the credibility of the study (Patton, 2015). This concept emphasizes communicating a researcher’s relationship to the central topics of the inquiry and disclosure of background information that may could influence study findings (Patton, 2015). In the spirit of this concept, it is necessary to provide

information concerning some background facts that identify the researcher's work with and association to this topic of study.

I should be considered part of the culture group that the participants of the study fall into due to my professional responsibilities, which are associated with and adjacent to the mission of the Network. I currently work within a federal government organization that has generally viewed fusion centers in a favorable light and has been involved in the building of capabilities for fusion centers over the past decade. My parent agency could also be viewed as a public entity advocate for the Network due to its collaboration with and support of all of the fusion centers since their inception.

It is likely that at least some of the study participants had a prior direct or indirect professional relationship and/or knowledge of me due to my work in the field for over several years. I have also previously studied topics concerning intelligence and national security and may have had personal perceptions and beliefs about intelligence organizations, security procedures, operations, policy, and activities based on these prior professional experiences. None of the individuals chosen for participation in this study held positions where I had any type of formal authority, power, or direct influence over performance evaluations, employment, and/or administrative procedures impacting work functions. All individual participants were aware that there was no compensation or favors provided for participating in the study nor were there any negative consequences for declining participation in the study.

### **Management of Bias and Ethical Issues**

In this study, I took precautions to avoid the actual or perceived influence or bias of examination findings. The first step was to attempt to identify the sources of potential bias. Along this line, it was also important to restate my professional experience in the national and homeland security realm as well as my professional association with an organization that has advocated for the Network. In this capacity, I had personally experienced the evolution of policy, organizations, and practices in law enforcement, intelligence, and security operations. Working within this arena, I had formulated opinions on certain aspects of security and worked to ensure that personal opinion did not taint the collection of data nor the analytical process. This was done by self-reminders during review of my analysis and findings as well as by having third-parties review for evidence of bias. Research bias was also avoided during the formulation of the literature review by ensuring that there was a wide representation of perspectives, opinions, comments, and findings about fusion centers from a variety of sources reflected in the manuscript.

I designed the interview questions to be open-ended and neutral in an effort to mitigate perceptions of a slant nor lead participants. Interview protocol was informed by materials gleaned from the review of literature as well as concepts described by the theoretical framework. Member checking procedures were also employed to increase the confidence in the accuracy of the data. Participants were offered and encouraged to review data collected by me to ensure information was characterized correctly as a quality assurance measure.

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

Individuals working within the Network fall into what could be considered a finite population. According to government reporting, 2,479 individuals support fusion center operations in some capacity (DHS, 2016b, p. 6). This number does not reflect several hundred partners from federal government organizations who work directly with the Network as well (DHS, 2016b, p. 10). The population is comprised of individuals from federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial levels of government, many of who work within the public safety and first responder disciplines.

A majority of Network staff are employed by a law enforcement entity. The population is made up of individuals with backgrounds and expertise in various disciplines such as public health, emergency management, emergency medical services, fire service, military, law enforcement, transportation, intelligence, immigration, security, et cetera (DHS, 2016b). Less than one percent of the population works within the private sector (DHS, 2016b, p. 6). These individuals represent organizations that operate and manage critical infrastructure facilities throughout the country and largely consist of security officers. Across the board, the population ranges from individuals with limited experience in the field, who were recently hired, to those people who have worked for decades in their discipline. Approximately 20% of population identified their primary duties as investigative, 38% described their primary functions as analysis, with the remaining individuals having primary responsibilities in other areas such as management, training, liaison, et cetera (DHS, 2016b).

### **Participant Selection: Strategy, Size, Recruitment**

I employed a purposive sampling method to gain participants for this study. Sometimes referred to as selective or subjective sampling, this technique permitted me to select candidates for study participation based on individual characteristics of the population. Samples generated through this manner are considered non-probability samples. This method relies heavily on the researcher's personal judgment that the selected participants met criteria that was relevant to the examination itself. Purposive sampling has been described as a technique, which when applied correctly, can result in information-rich participants of high value to a study while preserving and/or minimizing the use of resources (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2015, p. 525).

**Recruitment.** The selection process was initially implemented through the use of professional network contacts. As discussed earlier in the chapter, my professional background permitted personal associations with individuals in the Network. This offered the potential for access to individuals working within the Network. Direct communication with fusion center staff via telephonic and electronic communications was also employed aided in part through the use of contact information provided from NFCA and DHS.

I coupled purposive sampling methods with those of snowball sample techniques and quota sampling. Snowball sampling has been used successfully as a recruitment and selection strategy in other studies (e.g., Agi, 2016; Gardner, 2014) and has been viewed as a viable technique for acquiring different participants or even sources of information (Illenberger & Flotterod, 2012). This method attempts to use existing relationships to



establish other associations. In other words, individuals who met the study sample criteria during the initial selective sampling determination process were asked to recommend other individuals that they believed would be good candidates for the study.

These recommended individuals were then evaluated by their professional position and their time working within the Network to determine if they meet minimum criteria for selection. Those individuals not meeting the criteria were no longer considered to be potential candidates for the study. Quota sampling also allowed the selection of individuals that represented key categories of criteria such as those individuals who held leadership positions for instance. Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, and Nigam (2013) explained that quota sampling helps with obtaining representation from desired population categories to ensure highly valued population characteristics are present in a study sample. Those assessed to be viable candidates will then be contacted directly.

The decision to blend these sampling techniques was heavily influenced by each method's allowance for the identification of participants that were judged to have experiences that would provide an informed perspective on Network operations and how what factors impacted integration. This process also helped with the efficient identification of candidates in an effort to conserve time and resources. Ultimately, purposive, snowball, and quota techniques helped me target participants that represented at least three fusion centers. This process also allowed participants to be selected from different positions.

**Selection criteria.** Selection criteria for the study was anchored on an individual's experience working for, within, and/or directly supporting the Network. Positions of leadership were of particular interest to this study as these individuals were believed to possess broader insights into strategic integration and policy making efforts/processes. At least three participants were targeted for participation from each fusion center with a minimum of three fusion centers represented in the study in order to obtain wider perspectives on the research topic. Because of this, an attempt was made to have at least one individual with leadership or governance responsibilities represented from each fusion center in the study. Three individuals in leadership positions were ultimately represented in the study

Another targeted characteristic desired from each fusion center participating in this research concerns the level of government represented by participants. Federal officials could perceive factors of integration differently than SLTT participants because their departments (such as DHS and FBI) are directly involved with the U.S. national security strategy. It was judged that federal officials represent different placement within this study because the Network's integration essentially impacts their core mission duties and responsibilities. Parent organizations from SLTT are different in the fact that statute does not directly charge these agencies with owning a national security mission set. Like that of the leadership positions, at least one participant from each fusion center who is employed by a federal organization was sought. Three federal representatives, two from Fusion Center A and one from Fusion Center B were subsequently represented in the study.

Also of interest were individuals from midlevel management involved in analysis. Senior intelligence analysts, who are charged with directing and managing analysis and production of products that each fusion center disseminates, were viewed as potentially possessing unique perspectives on fusion center operations. One senior intelligence analyst representing each fusion center agreed to participate in the study.

Lastly, individuals such as analysts and investigators make up a majority of the Network's overall staff. These individuals were viewed as key subjects for this study as they were also assessed to have a different perspective of fusion center operations. These individuals are the "work horses" for these entities and are involved in analysis, production, investigations, collection, dissemination, and other work functions that are hallmarks of fusion center operations. Four individuals in this category were represented in this research. All of the participants were known to have met the selection criteria through verification of the agency through letterhead, e-mails, and verbal confirmation from the participant themselves.

**Sample size.** Twelve individuals were originally sought to participate in this qualitative study implementing a phenomenological approach. Guest et al. (2006) argued that purposive sampling techniques have been successfully employed in research. They also noted that many qualitative studies utilizing 12 participants have been found to maintain integrity in numerous studies (Guest et al., 2006). These points have been modeled in other studies, some of which have focused on elements of the Network such as Baker's qualitative examination of information sharing utilizing purposive sampling techniques to identify 12 participants for the study (p. 7).

This number of participants has provided enough depth during interview research that has led to what has been described as data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). This concept refers to a point where limited or no new information is likely to be gained from more individuals or sources of data. This sample size was assessed to provide a high probability that would result in enough depth and representation for coding and theme generation for this qualitative study. As explained in more detail later in the manuscript, 13 participants were ultimately selected for participation to further ensure better population representation.

### **Instrumentation**

Because the information being sought for this study was unavailable elsewhere and not collectable through nonobtrusive observations, it was assessed that optimal data extraction procedures require the execution of interviews, which were estimated to last approximately 45 minutes. This primary approach for the collection of data for this study was through the conduct of semi-structured interviews for all participants in the study. The interview protocol used for this study, further described in Appendix C, was produced and influenced by tenants of the framework as detailed below in this section. Each interview consisted of one interviewee and every collection opportunity was initiated, recorded, and conducted by me. The ideal setting sought by the researcher was a neutral setting away from the participant's office, however participants were permitted to identify the preferred location of interview execution since I was required to travel to different locations for subject participation. Walden University interview

guidelines were strictly adhered to during this study with the specific protocol being designed by the me.

**Procedures A.** The raw data for this original research study consisted of information collected through in-person and telephone interviews with participants. These collection sessions had a targeted duration of approximately 45 minutes, but participants were allowed to continue as long as the interviewee permitted, which ended up being the case in all instances as each interview went well past the assessed duration. Participants were informed of the targeted duration prior to their consent. Information was captured through the use of field/interview notes, that I constructed during the interview process. Data were obtained through the use of an audio recording device to be transcribed at a point in time after the interviews. I then manually transcribed all of the data that was collected electronically. This method was employed after a few unsuccessful trials with computer-aided transcription software. Participants were given the option to decline audio recording however none of those participating in the study chose to decline recording.

**Procedures B.** The target collection period for the participants was during a single interview session. Each study participant was asked if they would permit me to contact them at a future time additional information was needed, clarification of responses, or follow up was required. Like that of the initial interview session, participants were reminded that they could decline the additional session if they were requested for such by the researcher. I explained that follow up could be conducted by phone, electronic communication, or in-person as determined by the nature of the

information requirements. Exit procedures for participants during the data collection period of the research consisted of summarization of the study intent as well as a reminder of the principles of the informed consent documentation that they received during the recruitment process.

### **Data Analysis**

Thorough review of data collected during the interview process is required of this phenomenological study. Because the data being collected was unstructured and required interpretation, multiple levels of coding was conducted to assist in the generation of patterns and themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) described this process/technique as first and second cycle coding. They explained that during initial coding, information is assigned to broad “chunks” or categories; the second cycle coding process utilizes these identified partitions of data to further refine the information into patterns and themes (pp. 73-87). All coding was manually conducted without the use of computer aided software. While many computer-aided software programs provide a range of analytic tools, my prior research experiences where I utilized like platforms confounded my personal analytic processes and caused me to feel farther from the data. My personal prior experience using computer-aided software in other studies also resulted in missing some details in the data. This overlook of the some aspects of the data created gaps in coding and theme generation and has led me to have a higher confidence in manual review of research data.

Initial examination of the data used open coding techniques to generate first-level codes as an aid in categorization and general organization. This process involved the

careful review of interview transcripts, field notes, and/or recordings. During the first cycle, data was coded using a blend of descriptive, in vivo, and evaluation coding techniques. Miles et al. (2014) generally described these techniques as applying codes through the summarization of data by basic response topics for indexing, identifying key or common phrase or word usage, and by merit, worth, and/or significance respectively (pp. 74-76). The multiple cycle coding process was found to be beneficial for the analytical process. This technique allowed me to further refine the identified codes and link codes together that were originally thought to be separate concepts. Ultimately, this process was found to better support the indexing and organization of the data collected from participants.

Selective coding was then employed next, which was focused on the examination of relationships between the categories of the first coding segment and helped in the generation of general patterns. This process then led to theme generation, which examined the identified codes and relationships between the codes to determine if they can be further described and/or categorized. Table 8 reflects potential priori themes that were derived by me during analysis of the background literature on this topic of study. Particular attention was given to the prospect of cross-cutting themes, which were identified by their relevance to a vast majority or all of the individuals participating in this study.

Table 8

*Potential Priori Themes*Priori Theme

Organizational Structure (Regan et al., 2015)  
 Mission Priorities (Carter, 2015)  
 Funding (Vidal, 2013)  
 Training Objectives (Abold, Guidetti, & Keyer, 2012)  
 Jurisdictional Restrictions (Monahan & Walby, 2012)  
 Data Integration (Givens, 2012)  
 Relationships (Fisher, 2015)

*Note.* Derived from multiple sources listed above.

Constant comparative analysis, which consists of reviewing previously collected data and comparing it to newly acquired data was employed as well. This process aided in adapting the collection approach during the interview phase of this study through lessons learned from previous interviews. This technique also informed me earlier in the study when additional recruitment of participants was necessary to gain information relevant to the research.

These codes and themes were then analyzed for association with and relevance to the research questions. Synthesis and eventual explanation of items observed were interpreted by concepts described in the MSF specifically looking to see relationships between participant responses and the three streams. As briefly described below, interview questions, specifically Categories III and IV, focused on perceptions of integration, policy processes, organizational influences and opinions about factors that are impacting this integration. These were compared to concepts described by MSF and particular attention was paid to identify any association with the tenants of Kingdon's



theory. Category III questions, highlighted in Appendix C, were directly tied to and heavily influenced by the central concepts described in MSF.

I anticipated that the segmentation of the interview protocol, which I designed specifically for this study, into three general categories would help parse out data for comparison, evaluation of responses, and analysis of responses for association with MSF. Initial interview questions identified as Categories I and II and highlighted in Appendix C were oriented toward collecting data that could help identify variables to help generate categories for comparison that focus on descriptive and biographical features of the fusion center and individual respectively. Some examples of these variables are based on fusion center association, rank, position, discipline, level of government, time in service. Category III interview questions, also specified in Appendix C, focus on policy processes and priorities were informed from concepts described by the MSF and were also directly associated with specific RQ. The next set of interview questions, identified as Category IV questions in Appendix C, focus on organizational relationships, fusion center integration, and factors believed to impact fusion center integration. Like those of Category III, questions in Category IV are associated with relevant RQ for the study. The interviewer prompted participants when needed with specific examples of adjacent organizations and activities such as the JTTF, DHS, DOD, and/or other organizations in order to illicit a more specific response. The final set of questions were centered on the participant's beliefs and understanding of factors that are impacting integration.

Discrepant cases or interview responses that could be considered “outliers” were viewed as potentially significant or meaningful contributions to this specific study.

Divergent perceptions were examined and evaluated within the results section of the final manuscript. These potential discrepant responses were assessed as possibly representative of other perceptions experienced in the broader population since the sample size for this study was limited and participants only represented only three fusion centers in the Network.

### **Data Collection Management**

Management of data is significant for all study designs. Information collected during this study will be stored in an encrypted electronic storage device. Hard copy recording of information from interviews and field notes were transcribed into electronic form with physical copies being destroyed upon transcription. Audio recordings were created in digital format for electronic storage as well. Information from the study was also be backed up and placed on an external hard drive in an encrypted format in order to mitigate the chances of data loss should the primary storage device fail or become damaged. I will securely maintain all information, including audio recordings and transcripts, pertaining to this examination for a minimum of 5 years in accordance with Walden University requirements.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order for qualitative research to be assessed as of value to a field of study, examinations need to demonstrate a high degree of academic rigor and quality. Due to their interpretive nature, qualitative studies could be considered to be more vulnerable to issues impacting trustworthiness. As expressed in other sections of this study, every effort was made to increase and ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

When possible, mitigation efforts were put in place and executed in order to diminish threats to the accuracy of study findings. In cases where negative aspects could not be avoided, such as some of the factors impacting this study's reliability, these elements were identified and brought to light in a transparent manner for evaluation by the audience. Due largely to the design of the study, trustworthiness for this study should be considered through the lens of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility/Validity (Internal)**

Validity deals with producing sound results through the appropriate use of tools and procedures (Leung, 2015). Validity/credibility in qualitative examinations is often threatened by individual participant and/or researcher bias. While participants for this study consisted of individuals from different organizations, geographic locations, and with different experience levels from different disciplines, participant similarities could raise the possibility of bias trends of the sample population. Each study participant worked within the public safety and security realm in some capacity. Individual participants for this research study were determined to all be formally involved with law enforcement and intelligence communities in line with the studies selection criteria. Participants who were from or supporting these communities could be subject to some form of culture group bias or general worldview that could influence the data. As mentioned previously, I have been associated with this population as well and could have been subject to similar bias. Disclosure of my personal background and relationship to this topic of study was provided earlier in this chapter in a manner to boost reflexivity.

The validity/credibility of findings were bolstered through the employment of techniques such as member-checking, negative case analysis, clarification of researcher bias, rich description, and triangulation. Study participants were strongly encouraged to review data collected during the interview process as part of member-checking procedures. Each participant was provided draft materials in support of this concept and encouraged to provide comment. They were also asked to respond with corrections or confirmation of the data gathered. This helped increase the confidence in an assessment of the quality of data. Negative case analysis techniques, when applicable, was used to disclose disconfirming information. Researcher bias was disclosed in previous sections of the study by detailing my professional responsibilities and philosophical assumptions. The most significant technique which will be applied will be triangulation. Themes and codes will be identified and deemed significant to the study when they are corroborated by multiple sources. Similar information provided by multiple study participants and discovered during executions of past studies was determined to have a significant value rating.

Credibility is also determined by assessing the integrity of and data used in the study. In order to establish credibility for this study, beyond the measures mentioned in the validity section, data saturation was sought. Individual interviews were concluded when I assessed that the probability of capturing new data during the collection phase was low. The sample population was also expanded beyond the original target number of 12 to 13 participants in an effort to support the concept of saturation. Interview questions that guarded against misleading any of the participants and were supportive of truthful

responses from study participants were used to gather authentic responses from interviewees. The interviewer also reiterated to study participants that there were no wrong answers or specific desired outcomes of the study.

### **Transferability/Validity (External)**

O'leary (2004) explained that transferability refers to study findings that can be applied or are relevant in other contexts beyond the originating study. Transferability in this research was supported through the employment of techniques described by Maxwell (2013) as seeking to harvest data that is "rich" and detailed (pp. 126-127). In-depth description was provided in writings recorded in field notes. I evaluated these items for relevancy for inclusion into final study findings when it was determined that the captured information would assist in assessing transferability. This process helped ensure that interviews were varied and detailed enough to provide a complete picture of the phenomena from the perspective of the participant. This technique was assessed to also assist other researchers in determining applicability of this study to other research settings and contexts.

While the transferability in qualitative studies is more of a fluid process, Miles et al. (2014) explained that there are additional ways to help make the case that a qualitative study is transferable such as through description, confirmation of prior theory applications, and study replication. Limits of the sample selection and notice of characteristics that are discovered to not be represented in the participant pool were highlighted. Assessments of transferability were explicitly stated with details concerning my justification of such. Comments were also provided later on in the manuscript

concerning suggested settings where the study's findings could likely be tested further in future research.

### **Dependability/Reliability**

Reliability refers to acquiring similar research results through the replication of a study. Quantitative studies utilizing experimental designs are essentially required to have high reliability ratings in order to maintain credibility. Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias, and DeWaard (2015) explained that this concept concerns the accuracy of the instrumentation related to variable errors (p. 135).

The interpretive principles of qualitative studies often do not achieve the same level of reliability (Leung, 2015). The reliability of this study is not considered to be extremely high because data to be collected is subject to individual participant impressions, which would likely vary between individual sample populations. Another factor that likely degrades the reliability rating for this study concerns environment and timing. Individual perceptions are significantly influenced by the passage of time as well as the general atmosphere. Examples of external events and factors that could influence fusion center staff study participant responses might be a significant uptick in terrorism attacks in the United States and/or major policy decisions that greatly alter the current funding environment for the Network.

The use of techniques and procedures that consist of the implementation of multiple collection instruments were employed to increase the reliability/dependability of study results. The use of electronic audio recording devices, field notes, memos, and reflective notes were considered to support the cross-validation of the data collected

during the interview phase. Member checking procedures were assessed to also enhance the dependability of the study as well.

### **Confirmability/Objectivity**

Objectivity and/or confirmability is situated with the concept that perceptions from study participants in their natural setting are accurately represented in a study (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). The interpretive nature of qualitative designs places risk to this element since bias and subjectivity could impact confirmability. Additional methods and techniques were employed in this research study to support a reasonable assessment that neutrality has been maintained during the execution of this study especially during the collection phase.

Peer review and consultation were employed to identify areas of researcher bias and/or misrepresentation of data. As discussed in previous sections of this manuscript, detailed accounts of methods and procedures provided a 360 degree view of the execution of the study. To the best of my ability, I maintained awareness about personal assumptions and was very mindful about how prior experience could taint evaluation and interpretation of the data. Consideration of rival conclusions was also given throughout the research process.

Study data will also be maintained for at least a period of 5 years after the conclusion of study. Miles et al. (2014) explained that the retention of study data made available for potential reanalysis by others can support concepts of confirmability. If applicable, data may be provided to external researchers for audit and/or research

purposes in accordance with Walden University's Institutional Review Board guidelines upon request.

### **Ethical Procedures and Participant Protections**

Ethical concerns and considerations are central to every research study regardless of the design or topic. Ethical standards promote confidentiality and safety for participants while also supporting the accuracy of research. Creswell (2013) explained that while ethical concerns are often linked to the data collection phase of research, there are ethical considerations and practices that should be given and executed at each phase of the research process (p. 55). Because of this, I endeavored to ensure that practices were employed during this study with the intent of producing a study with findings that have the highest degree of ethical integrity. Participants, which are at the heart of this examination, were provided protections through sound procedures such as the use of informed consent and measures that adjusted practices as needed to recognize sensitivities.

**Participants.** Each participant was provided an overview of the research project as well as an explanation of the my professional background. Subjects were provided informed consent documentation, which was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board in May 2017 (#05-11-17-0565637). Documentation provided to participants highlighted individual rights and privacy protection procedures. These forms also detailed the sponsoring institution, explained the research sample selection process, outlined general expectations of the participants, and attempted to highlight potential risks that could be associated with participation in the study. Interviewees were



also asked if they had any concerns with participating at the time of the interviews resulting in zero expressions of reservations from the participants.

These individuals were informed of the purpose of the study and reminded that study findings will be published and available to others in academia and/or other researchers. Confidentiality assurance measures were also highlighted, explaining that personally identifiable information will be masked to the greatest extent possible, with individuals being identified only with the expressed approval from participants. I stressed in documentation and verbally throughout the interview phase that participation in the study is strictly voluntary. They were informed that participation or non-participation would have no negative impacts or specified rewards other than the advancement of knowledge in this topic of study. There were no direct or implied incentives offered, hinted at, or provided to individuals participating in the research study.

Fusion centers associated with participants were not disclosed in study findings or anywhere in the manuscript. General descriptors of the fusion centers were highlighted in study results in manner to provide requisite description of the characteristics of the organization. Likewise, identifying participant information was not linked to their associated employing agency. Additionally, participant agencies were not highlighted in the manuscript as another level of privacy protection.

Additional measures taken in this study, which are in line with Janesick's (2011) ethical guidelines for qualitative studies, were also implemented in this examination. Participants were offered the opportunity to review draft materials associated with their

individual interview as part of member checking procedures, which allowed their personal evaluation of the data collected. This review and offer to provide drafts of the study in its entirety provided further participant assurance that information relevant to the context of their response was captured as well as ensured that I did not accidentally add information that was not actually said. Ultimately, accuracy and privacy protections were at the forefront of my mind during the execution of each phase of the research study in an effort to uphold the ethical standards in academic research.

**Data analysis and interpretation.** Integrity of the research process involves ethical considerations during the analysis and interpretation of the data. After the collection phase, during the matrixing and coding process, individual names were disassociated from the participant responses. Individual data was identified by alphanumeric pseudonyms at the onset of the analytical and interpretation phase prior to coding. This allowed for a reduction of potential researcher bias and/or preconceived assumptions which could have tainted findings as well as increased information protections. As described in the data management section of this chapter, information was converted to electronic format (when necessary) and stored on two separate secured electronic storage devices. The data were also stored in an encrypted format to prevent unauthorized access to the data from nonapproved individuals and/or data leakage. The accuracy of findings is one of the seminal requirements for gaining and maintaining relevance of the study. Study findings, results, and recommendations were devoid of erroneous data sets, falsification of responses, and exaggeration.

## Summary

The topic for this study centered on aspects of integration of the Network within the context of broader national security efforts executed by the U.S. government. I intended for this inquiry to respond to gaps in prior research concerning fusion centers that were further described in this and previous chapters. This examination aimed to employ a qualitative design utilizing a phenomenological approach to address RQ that attempt to understand and discover what factors that were impacting the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy. The approach and design were chosen based on evaluation of the theoretical framework, RQ, and other tenants of this study due to their alignment with these segments of the research. Information sought in this study was currently unavailable in other existing data sets that are associated with the Network and data collection through the conduct of interviews was assessed to be the ideal collection strategy to acquire the desired information of relevant to this examination.

Thirteen individuals were selected through purposive sampling from a finite population to participate in this study. Participants consisted of officials employed by federal, state, and local organizations who had responsibilities in fusion center functions and/or decision-making. Participants were recruited by e-mail and phone through publicly available contact information, professional networks, and individual participant referrals. Those interested in participating were provided information outlining the study purpose and intent, their individual rights, assurance of confidentiality, and intent of the publishing of research findings.

The semistructured interviews were conducted in-person and via telephone with myself and one participant. Interview protocol utilized open-ended questions that I had intended to use in order to extract perceptions, beliefs, and opinions about Network integration. Data underwent multiple levels of coding to establish themes and patterns relevant to the study's angle of inquiry. Multiple measures were taken to provide evidence of trustworthiness of the study such as member checking techniques and triangulation.

Data collection and study implementation were conducted after review and subsequent approval in accordance with Walden University's research requirements. These requirements consisted of concurrence from committee members, committee chair, program director, university research reviewer, and the Institutional Review Board to ensure the relevancy of research and adherence to ethical standards. This multilayered approach to study approval and review established the potential value and structural integrity of this study.

In the next chapter of the study, I will detail the results of this examination. In this chapter, I will highlight what I found during the data collection segment of the study and provide narrative descriptions to aid and explain my findings. Tables and figures will also be provided to help illustrate the results. Discrepant cases were identified to ensure full disclosure of information harvested. I will also describe patterns and themes that emerged during the analytical process in order to detail the analytical results and how these results relate to the theoretical framework of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

In this qualitative study, I assessed the factors impacting the integration of the Network with national security efforts. Prior research and literature on the Network has focused on different aspects of fusion centers with a heavy emphasis on operational impacts to individual rights and liberties, general performance and effectiveness as well as the structure of the Network (e.g., Carter et al., 2016; Coffey, 2015; J. Gardner, 2017; Taylor & Russell, 2012). In this study, I strived to address a research gap in this field, which was assessed as centering on aspects of the Network's integration.

The data I collected in this study focused on policy processes, priorities, organizational relationships, and perceptions of interorganizational integration for three fusion centers ran by state law enforcement organizations, which were represented by study participants. The data were obtained through in-person and telephonic interviews of participants that had responsibilities within those specific fusion centers and had worked in that capacity for at least 1 year. Participants held positions that represented different levels of responsibilities within the fusion centers.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the methodology used in this study, whereas in this segment of the manuscript I will detail the results of the study. In this chapter, I will also provide descriptions of the research setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis results, and offer evidence of trustworthiness. In this chapter, I will present the data obtained during this study and highlight patterns and themes.

I developed and aligned the following central RQs that guided this study with the examination's purpose and problem statements. These questions were angled towards the collection of data consisting of participant perceptions of the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy.

RQ1: What factors influence the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy?

RQ2: What barriers impact the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy?

RQ3: What circumstances contribute to the criticisms voiced about fusion centers?

### **Setting Challenges and Potential Influences**

Some of the challenges that I experienced during this study on the Network were similar to those experienced and communicated by others during their research in the field. R. Evans (2013) and Gardner (2017), whose qualitative works focused on aspects of fusion center policy and information sharing respectively, both discussed the closed organizational culture of the field. While all aspects of fusion center operations are not viewed as critically sensitive, a majority of work conducted by the Network is tied to law enforcement investigations and/or intelligence operations and activities. Network participants were very cognizant of this fact and appeared to keep considerations about operational security at the front of their minds.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, many fusion centers have been subjected to a substantial amount of criticism, which may have also deterred some fusion centers from

participating in this study. My findings, which may have been perceived as questioning the existence of fusion centers or arguing that they may be conducting unconstitutional operations, could have run against those in the Network that are fighting for increased funding and recognition. Another aspect of this study that may have impacted participation dealt with potential perceptions that some portrayals of fusion centers in other articles and studies may have been conducted following a political agenda. Works, like *What's Wrong with Fusion Centers*, where German and Stanley (2007) claimed that the Network was willingly engaging in unconstitutional activities, could have contributed to that line of thinking.

I addressed and mitigated these challenges through several actions. My background in the intelligence field helped establish some initial trust with potential participants. Providing a thorough description of the study and the research process alleviated concerns about the intentions for this project. Organizational and individual invitation letters also helped explain the scope and angle of research.

Likewise, the issuance of informed consent documents offered the participants an overview of the study and provided additional assurance that their personal information would be kept confidential. Appendices E, F, and G contain the invitation letters and informed consent forms used in the study. The letters of cooperation provided by fusion center leadership appeared to put participants at ease by providing official consent from the organization's leadership. Those that participated appeared to answer the interview questions freely and without reservations. There was no indication that study participants felt any kind of pressure, concern, or other negative feelings during the collection phase.

My existing relationships within the Network coupled with newly-established relationships during the research process also helped support the recruitment process.

### **Demographics**

Participating fusion centers were initially provided the organizational invitations. In each case, fusion center directors provided me with a letter of cooperation permitting research to be conducted. Once I received approval from fusion center leadership via these letters of cooperation, I contacted individuals who worked within the centers via phone and/or e-mail asking if they would be interested in participating. After reviewing the individual invitation letters, which provided a general background of the study, those that expressed interest in participating were then provided informed consent documents. Each participant, in turn, provided a hard copy, scanned electronic copy, or e-mail to me confirming their agreement to participate in the study. All participants reconfirmed their consent to participate at the time of each interview as well.

Individuals considered meeting the criteria for the targeted population were required to have work responsibilities involving the Network. Participants also needed to have worked in that capacity for at least 1 year. I confirmed this through Category I questions that asked interviewees about the amount of time that they were in their current fusion center position. Individuals represented three fusion centers, which each had an executive agency that could be described as a state law enforcement agency. Participant parent organizations represented state and federal government organizations from law enforcement, military, and intelligence communities.



I designated each of the fusion centers represented as the primary fusion center for their respected state as highlighted in Appendix A. The fusion centers had statewide responsibilities, which were comprised of hundreds of individual municipal jurisdictions and counties consisting of mixes of urban and rural areas. The fusion centers represented in the study had all been in existence for over 10 years at the time of study execution. Table 9 provides a snapshot description of each participating fusion center further described in text following the table.

Table 9

*Participating Fusion Center Breakdown*

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Fusion Center A</u>	<u>Fusion Center B</u>	<u>Fusion Center C</u>
Numbers of employees	~30+	~30+	~30+
Overall mission focus	all-crimes	all-crimes	all-crimes
Executive organization	state law enforcement	state law enforcement	state law enforcement
Disciplines represented in FC	law enforcement, fire service, emergency management, military	law enforcement and military	law enforcement
Levels of government represented in FC	federal and state	federal, state, and local	federal and state
Liaison officer program	Yes	Yes	No

*Note.* The numbers of employees section does not take into account other external organizational staff that do not reside within the fusion center a majority of the time.

Participants from each of the sites described their fusion centers as primarily focused on the all-crimes area of the spectrum. In general, Network fusion centers have been categorized by their mission focuses into one of three groupings: all-terrorism (primarily focusing on counterterrorism efforts); all-crimes (focus centering on criminal activities, which includes terrorism); and all-hazards (encompassing counterterrorism and crime as well as having a heavy focus on other hazards such as naturally occurring events like hurricanes, mass floods, severe storm impacts, and the like). One of the fusion centers was described as having heavy participation and alignment with their state

division of emergency management, yet day-to-day functions and focus were best categorized as all-crimes.

Each of the fusion centers represented in the study had similar internal manning strengths consisting of approximately 30+ individuals involved in center operations. This approximation was based on individuals who were permanently assigned to the primary fusion center location. Fusion Centers A and B were comprised of only state and federal representatives, while Fusion Center C had full time staff from federal, state, and local organizations. The heaviest staff participation at each of the sites was from individuals who worked for the fusion centers' executive agencies. Fusion Center A was described as having staff almost exclusively from the law enforcement discipline with Fusion Center B similarly represented but having one military analyst working full time within the center.<sup>6</sup> Fusion Center C, while primarily consisting of law enforcement officials, was described as having regular full time participation from individuals involved in the fire service, emergency management, and military disciplines. Participants from each of the centers explained that there were robust remote-relationships with a multitude of other disciplines.

While all of the centers were described as having a litany of external stakeholders and partners of which the center relied on to help further disseminate information across the state and receive information, two of the centers were described as having assigned staff in different regions of the state, with these individuals largely based in facilities controlled by the fusion center's executive agency. Personnel were also assigned to

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<sup>6</sup> Both sworn law enforcement officers and nonsworn personnel that work for an organization that is best categorized as a law enforcement agency.

relevant FBI JTTF within the state. Interviewees often described other more informal and/or operationally-based postings of personnel during significant incidents or special events for instance.

Two of the fusion centers had a formal Field Liaison Officer (FLO) Program, which is also commonly referred to as an Intelligence Liaison Officer Program or Terrorism Liaison Officer Program. One of the organizations had previously started a similar program, but staffing complications impeded the full maturation of the program. It appears that there may be a desire to reestablish the program once personnel are in place. These programs, which I described in detail in Chapter 2, represent more formalized relationships between the fusion centers and individuals from other partner organizations. Program participation often includes certification training and agreements concerning the sharing of information between representatives.

Initially, I targeted at least three individuals from each fusion center for participation in study. Additional individuals were subsequently recruited for participation to ensure multiple position levels, such as supervisors, federal representatives, analysts, and/or investigators, were represented in the study. Leadership/supervisors, criminal/intelligence analysts, intelligence officers, and investigators were represented in the population. The interview field for this study subsequently consisted of 13 individuals: three in leadership positions, three federal representatives, three senior intelligence analysts, and four intelligence analysts and investigators.

The job responsibilities represented by the sample varied. The participants described daily functions that consisted of managing the fusion center itself, supervising sections/units within the center, managing fusion center programs/initiatives, conducting investigations, executing analysis, providing training, educating stakeholders through briefings, advising senior executives in the state, as well as developing and informing policy. Some of the participant field explained that they were involved in the dissemination and sharing of information, others in gathering of information, others concentrating more on planning and direction, and most a blend of these elements. In many of the cases, participant responsibilities appeared to cover multiple job functions. For example, an investigator may have been responsible for program management, an intelligence officer may commonly be involved not only in collection, but also with analytical support, or a supervisor may also cover some functions of his/her subordinates in the event of their absence.

A total of 13 personnel consented to and participated in the study. For the sake of this study, individuals were categorized into four general groups; leadership, federal representatives, senior intelligence analysts, as well as analysts and investigators. Leadership represents fusion center directors and deputy directors whose primary responsibility is managing and overseeing fusion center operations. Three participants fell into the leadership category and represented each center. Federal representatives were individuals that worked for a federal agency who spent a majority of their time working with the fusion center and were primarily based at the fusion center. Senior intelligence analysts consisted of individuals whose primary function is conducting and

managing the analytical process, which consists of guiding product production and/or supervising other analysts. Analysts and investigators refers to nonsupervisory job responsibilities that include some or all daily tasks such as vetting of information, conducting analysis, generation of products such as bulletins or assessments, providing briefings, executing training, and other miscellaneous support functions. Four individuals from Fusion Centers A and C and five from Fusion Center B chose to participate. Table 10 highlights the breakdown of participant positions and fusion center representation.

Table 10  
*Participant Position and Fusion Center Breakdown*

<u>General position category</u>	<u>Fusion Center A</u>	<u>Fusion Center B</u>	<u>Fusion Center C</u>
Leadership	1	1	1
Federal representatives	2	0	1
Senior intelligence analysts	1	1	1
Analysts and investigators	0	3	1

Five women participated in the study and were represented at all three locations, three of which held some form of supervisory or mid-level leadership function. All five of these women had primary responsibilities in analysis. Fusion center experience of the participants ranged from approximately two years to over 10 years for an overall participant average of about 5.5 years working within a fusion center. Five individuals had worked multiple positions within the fusion center such as working as an investigator before being promoted into a leadership position or an analyst moving into a senior analyst position. One individual had work experience in multiple fusion centers. Some

of the participants had a few years of experience in their primary discipline while others had over 30 years in government service with participants averaging about 15.8 years of work experience within their respective disciplines. One of the participants had worked within law enforcement for several years before he changed organizations and moved into intelligence as his primary discipline. Table 11 provides a breakout of length of service averages between participant groupings.

Table 11

*Participant Experience Averages*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Average time in discipline</u>	<u>Average time in fusion center</u>
Leadership	~19 years	~6 years <sup>a</sup>
Federal representatives	~25 years <sup>b</sup>	~7 years <sup>c</sup>
Senior intelligence analysts	~12 years	~6.5 years <sup>d</sup>
Analysts and investigators	~6.5 years	~2 years

*Note.* All times provided by participants were approximates.

<sup>a</sup>Two individuals in this category also had work experience within the fusion center prior to promoting into leadership. <sup>b</sup>All three of the federal representatives' time in discipline totals represent combined service from multiple organizations, but all focusing on the security and intelligence disciplines. For instance one individual worked in the law enforcement field for numerous years before he began working in a federal government capacity. Two individuals had prior intelligence officer experience in the military services. <sup>c</sup>One individual in this category had prior work experience within the fusion center as a state law enforcement officer. <sup>d</sup>Each individual in this category had experience as an analyst before assuming the senior intelligence analyst role.

While all of the individuals were aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could quit at any time, each of the participants answered all of the interview

questions highlighted in Appendix C. These participants all had first person direct knowledge of fusion center operations. Each was able to provide information that helped to discover, understand, and describe their organization's focus areas, policy processes, partner relationships, as well as identify potential elements that were impacting the integration of the Network.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through interviews with participants during May and June 2017. Due to variables consisting of geographic distance, time, participant preference, and resource constraints/considerations, five interviews took place in-person and eight interviews were conducted telephonically. While they were asked about their preference, all individuals agreed to allow me to audio record the interview sessions. An Olympus (VN-541-PC) digital audio recording device was used to assist in the documenting of the collection. This recording process permitted the capturing of all participant responses without degrading my ability to manage the interview, actively listen, and to construct field notes depicting summations of the responses and the underscoring of key concepts being relayed by each of the individuals.

Third parties were not present during any of the interviews in order to support an atmosphere that participants felt safe and secure. In the cases of in-person interviews, participants decided to have the interviews take place in their private offices and private conference rooms out of convenience. Participants were aware that others in their fusion center and other representatives from other fusion centers were participating in the study



as well, but they were not made aware of specific individuals by my verbal or electronic communications such as joint e-mails or group sessions.

It is important to note that in at least one case, a participant mentioned that he/she asked his/her leadership for permission to participate so it is assumed that at least some others in the sample may have also done so as well. In another case, I noted that a participant had told a colleague that he/she participated in the study. My overall assessment was that none of the participants had any concerns or reservations about participating and felt comfortable enough about the process that they were able to speak their mind on the topics of discussion without fear of any kind of reprisal. All of the participants communicated to me that they would welcome any additional contact if the study required.

As stated previously, all individuals agreed to the terms of the consent document highlighted in Appendix D and were told about the documents tenants verbally during phone calls as well as reiterated by me at the start of the interview. All individuals provided signed and verbal consent before data collection began. Individuals were offered to review the interview transcript as well as a final draft of the manuscript as part of member-checking procedures.

The interviews were originally assessed to take about 45 minutes, but participants were not limited to that amount of time. As such, interviews timeframes ranged from approximately one hour to a little over two hours from initial greeting and engagement to the final remarks with the average time of completion for all interviews being about one hour and twenty minutes. After the completion of the engagements, the interview

recordings were manually transcribed and saved on word documents on a private encrypted computer system in support of later analysis. Participants were each asked the same questions listed in Appendix C, which were broken into four general categories.

I intended to use the Category I questions, which consisted of participant biographic information, to aid in the description and categorization of individual participants. These questions sought to have participants describe their job responsibilities, number of years in service, and position functions. This category also attempted to have the individual describe and begin thinking about the policy process in their organization as well as their role with that process.

Category II questions centered more on fusion center demographics. I believed that the questions in this segment would provide data that could describe the organization and potentially highlight areas of similarities and differences between other centers during the analysis phase. Like Category I questions, this grouping helped identify variables that might be relevant later in the study.

Category III questions focused on policy processes and priorities. These items helped detail the policy making process in the given fusion center. Other information gleaned from Category III consisted of the discovery of policy constraints, opinions about operational focus, as well as potential influencers on both policy and priorities. This category was heavily influenced by the tenants of the multiple streams framework.

Category IV questions were angled more towards the harvesting of data that concerns relationships and integration. Participants were asked to provide their impressions on organizational relationships with federal national security partners as well

as the rest of the Network. Other questions sought to discover integral components of integration and relationships as well as barriers to such.

### **Data Analysis**

As stated previously, the data elements were captured primarily through a digital recording device used during the interviews and supplemented by field notes that were taken at the time of the interviews. The audio files were transcribed and recorded onto separate word documents. Participant names were then replaced with an alphanumeric reference prior to initial coding. Information was reviewed and analyzed in an effort to identify themes and patterns in the data. First cycle coding was conducted by a higher-level review of the information to assist with generating initial codes to help organization through the rest of the analytical process; this resulted in initial identification of sentiments that appeared to be patterns. After this step, a more in-depth review of participant responses was conducted resulting in additional coding elements and the identification of more concrete themes. A blend of in vivo and evaluative coding techniques was applied during the analysis process.

Coding was viewed as an iterative process and was initiated by reviewing and comparing participant answers question by question. Initially I identified specific words that were recurring in interviewee statements. For instance, when individuals were describing fusion center operations, some of the common terms that were initially identified included: information sharing, dissemination, analysis, information hub, collection, investigations, analyzing, pass info, stakeholders, collaborative, joint, relationships, investigative support, clearinghouse, all crimes, law enforcement,

intelligence analysts, analytical, tactical support, communication, intelligence, products, terrorism, all source, criminal activity, hazards, risks, provide intelligence, public safety, training, distribution, education, briefing, assessments, suspicious activity, gangs, drugs, partners, research. These words and terms were then evaluated for apparent significance by the usage rate.

Frequency ratings were found to be only minimally helpful because they only assisted in identifying some initial codes due to wording/vocabulary variance between individuals concerning similar concepts. Subsequently I understood that frequency was not as valuable as grouping and then evaluating participant phrases themselves. Continuing on with the specific example above to illustrate this point, words and terms were grouped as in the case of information sharing, dissemination, information hub, clearinghouse, pass info, hub, and provide intelligence were generally assessed to have similar meanings. These groupings led to the formulation of concepts that aided in establishing general patterns and themes where in this case the concept of providing information to external partners was determined to be one of the central elements of each fusion center.

Overall, the simple presence or absence of some of these concepts in an individual's response seemed more meaningful than the amount of times referenced by that individual when evaluated against another individual's response that might have made a singular, but underscored statement indicating that an item was significant to them. In other words, I found that in some individuals, repetition of a concept indicated greater significance whereas in others it appeared to be a train of thought that the

individual perseverated on. In yet other cases, participants would make a one-time simple statement, but indicated that the point was very significant sometimes verbally, sometimes interpreted through body language, and/or inflection.

From this point, patterns and themes were identified across groupings of questions that were related to one another because the interview protocol was designed to have some similar or associated questions that were related to one another in an attempt to get a more complete response. An example is how individuals were asked about core missions of their fusion center, and then asked what they thought their core mission should be, followed by asking them what they perceived that their senior executives would say if asked the same question. These responses, where applicable, were aggregated to help refine the identified themes. Finally, these questions were grouped by their relevance to each of the three primary research questions for the study. Similar to the other cycles described, data was distilled into its most refined state as further described in the results section.

While the most significant items identified in this study were a result of the presence of themes and concepts noted by a majority of the research participants, unique comments and responses were distinguishable as well. These discrepant cases were presented in this study as well. These uncommon responses were highlighted and characterized in order to demonstrate a dissenting or different view. These discrepant cases were viewed as having value because they could have demonstrated perceptions that could be more widely represented in a similar study that consists of a different or larger sample size.

The rest of this section provides an overview of responses by questions and initial question groupings in a meaningful format to better illustrate the formulation of themes discovered and identified in this study. As previously described, the first and second categories of questions were more focused on background information to help understand potential relevant distinctions and differences between participants. An obvious example is identifying different position levels, fusion centers, fusion center focus, and others. A couple of questions in the first two categories helped set the stage for how participants viewed the functions of their organization and what they perceived to be the seminal focus areas.

### **Fusion Center Description**

Interview Question 2A was: Would you please provide a description of your fusion center and its operations? Participant responses to questions asking for them to describe their fusion center were generally consistent, but not without some interesting distinctions. In general, all participants described their fusion center as having a central role in the state concerning the sharing of information. Commonly referenced was a fusion centers' responsibility to be able to receive information and disseminate information to partner organizations. A descriptor voiced by several participants was the term "information hub," which suggested that the individuals view their organization as the centerpiece organization for dissemination.

Along the same lines, many of the participants seemed to recognize fusion centers as the only organization of its type and one that was best positioned to bridge gaps between all levels of government. A couple interviewees further specified this concept

and explained that federal organizations involved in issues of national security do not and cannot have the rich relationships that many fusion centers have with organizations within their areas of operations. This was believed to be due to the service orientation of the centers with their partner agencies. In one case, a participant described his center as a place for “one-stop shopping” for external agencies with regard to the submission of a request for information to the center and the center’s ability to provide detailed information back to the requestor. Many of the participants described fusion centers as a “conduit” for information that stakeholders, external agencies, and senior executives alike could leverage to gain situational awareness on a variety of topics of interest.

“Collaboration” and similar variants were other commonly used expressions to describe that fusion centers were comprised of many different agencies. These comments were also used to describe how these organizations worked jointly with a long list of other external partners as well. The common reference to collaboration in the interviews seemed to suggest that this idea could speak to part of the essence of the organizational culture.

Participants representing all three centers also referenced the fusion centers’ responsibilities in the education and training realm. Common thoughts concerning these concepts appeared to be that the Network has the ability and responsibility to identify critical topics that impact safety and security within the area of operations and should strive to illuminate these topics to first responders and if applicable private sector partners. While not presented in a derogatory fashion, there appeared to be a common belief that many local law enforcement agencies for instance, may be too bogged down in

their daily activities, be mired in tactical operations, and/or lack adequate resources to develop and implement programs of this nature.

### **Fusion Center Focus Areas**

Interview question 2E was: How would you describe your fusion center's primary focus areas? Participants described their perceptions of the fusion center's current priority focus areas. In general, answers for participants at each site were consistent within each site grouping. Each center provides support to its customer base, which includes responses to requests for service/information, special event support, analytical support, officer safety awareness, training, briefings, and investigative assistance. As well as mentioning the above, leadership responses all underscored the investigative, collection, and operational/tactical support capabilities of the center. Each of the centers highlighted terrorism as one of their primary mission focus areas, but as will be discussed later in the manuscript, there are a few factors that may be causing other focus areas to be a higher percentage of work for the Network. Like terrorism, gangs were another across the board focus area. Gangs were viewed as a community-level threat that impacted a majority of each area of operations. General criminal activities were similarly noted as a focus area by all three centers, which is not surprising given each organization's volume of work that consists of responding to general requests for information/service from allied partners coupled with each center being described as all-crimes focused organization. Table 12 below represents participating fusion center focus areas.



Table 12

*Fusion Center Primary Focus Areas*

<u>Focus area</u>	<u>Fusion Center A</u>	<u>Fusion Center B</u>	<u>Fusion Center C</u>
Terrorism	X	X	X
Violent crime			X
General crime	X	X	X
Drugs	X	X	
Human trafficking		X	X
Gangs	X	X	X
Infrastructure protection	X		
Cyber	X		

*Note.* Each fusion center may also have responsibilities in all of these areas and/or other categories, but only those noted during interviews were highlighted.

Category III interview questions aided in developing an understanding regarding perceptions about the fusion center's role within the broader national security strategy, policy processes and views and influences on direction. Category IV questions on the other hand, attempt to drive at organizational relationships, actual integration, as well as factors that impact integration and alignment of the Network. These items begin to address some components of the MSF. Questions in both of these categories, in total, were intentionally angled towards addressing elements of all three of the seminal RQs for the study.

### **Desired Fusion Center Focus Areas**

The first two questions in this category moved from what the current focus areas were for the fusion center to what were the desired focus areas of the center from the point of view of the participant and then from the perspective of senior executives.

Interview question 3A was: What do you think should be the biggest focus area for your fusion center? Why? Interview question 3B was: What do you think that executives and decision-makers senior to your position feel should be the biggest focus area for your fusion center? Why? Responses to the above questions were varied especially on the personal opinion question with limited cross-cutting consistency within fusion center groupings or position groupings. In some cases, participants explained that they may have had a biased opinion response tied to their primary job function. An example of this is illustrated by one participant whose primary focus on narcotics trafficking influenced his feeling that increased focus on drugs should be a priority for the organization. In another case, an individual working with a portfolio on extremist/terrorist issues felt that more resources should be applied in that area.

A majority of participants seemed to express beliefs that the original intent of fusion centers and the Network writ large was to address issues concerning terrorism. The general sentiment appeared to indicate that terrorism encompasses domestic and international organizations, single issue actors, and lone-offenders. Interviewees indicated that their work involving terrorism involving terrorism included the identification of emerging extremists and the vetting and investigation of suspicious activity reports.

The continued and increased focus on other criminal activities led to impressions by some interviewees that the fusion centers were migrating away from some of the principles that may have led to the creation of the Network. Many responses reflected a concern about this and a desire to redouble efforts to focus more on terrorism. That being said, most respondents recognized the importance of the all-crimes focus of the centers. There was an understanding that the fusion centers were filling a critical need for many agencies that lack organic analytical resources as well as the vast information holdings that the Network possesses and/or has access to, such as through in-house federal partners like the DHS and the FBI.

One leadership participant expressed in great detail his frustration over ever-expanding fusion center mission focus areas. He explained that fusion centers would be more effective if they were able to focus on fewer topics. This would permit a deeper understanding of target areas and enable Network staff to become true subject matter experts in their given fields. This sentiment was also expressed by some individuals in the senior intelligence analyst positions as well as analyst and investigator positions in other parts of the interview. The current state, which was described as being similar to an era consumed by thoughts that everything is priority, constrains fusion center staff from having rich expertise in certain fields and is more supportive of developing a cadre of generalists. This perception was communicated by some participants from each position category from all three fusion centers.

The relative volume of fusion center work tasks that consisted of a variety of requirements for general criminal activities, and focused on items that were described as

tactical level support, was viewed to be taxing the resources of each of the centers. Work tasks in this area were of such a magnitude because they represented routine work that partner organizations are engaged in on a daily basis. One respondent explained that this has caused a need to create a crime analysis center, which he recognized as a distinct specialty and focus area separate from intelligence analysis.

Another interviewee explained that her fusion center's criminal analysis unit was seen as the most defining feature of her fusion center over other sections that focused on more in-depth strategic analysis and/or response to threat reporting. Similarly, another individual highlighted that a significant amount of organizational resources were positioned to support requests for information, name checks, and general criminal background requests, over areas of the center that produce longer-range intelligence products and analytical assessments on more strategic topics such as terrorism. Another subject recognized the need to focus on a variety of criminal activities in support of partner organizations, but claimed that fusion center work in these areas needs to be more focused on long-term items over name checks and backgrounds.

Leadership participants felt that each fusion center was generally executing along the lines of executive leadership intent. While there were areas that some felt the senior command wanted increased focus on, other participants thought that the fusion centers were molded into a shape that fit executive expectations. Across the spectrum of participants was the belief that seniors, especially those well above fusion center level such as the Governor, cabinet officials, agency heads, and the like, strongly desired minute by minute information on developing emergency incidents.

This was generally understood as a relevant need for a decision maker with a few points of concern. There appeared to be frustration with what was viewed as an unrealistic expectation of the fusion center support capabilities, especially when the requirement was for the same level of detail for events developing in other states and even countries. Individuals articulated the feeling that they were expected to compete with news broadcast coverage of incidents. Social media posts of emerging events were also noted as complicating this issue.

One leader explained that the need for headline news level updates is one driver for the desire to establish an operations section or watch floor at the fusion center. A watch floor refers to a section that monitors incoming reporting from official channels, media segments, and/or tips from the public on a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week basis. Another leader discussed how another state government organization with emergency management responsibilities has a more robust watch center. He explained that that organization frequently supports this function, but complicates efforts with the fusion center when it comes to man-made incidents. He claimed that the fusion center is expected to possess vetted specific details on emerging incidents and some senior leaders appear to emphasize speed over accuracy.

Almost every participant expressed concern over these expectations, which at times were disruptive to operations. The increased demand for fast information on emerging events seems to have created a steady-state pressure always present in the background of fusion center operations. One analyst explained her worry over this type of activity. She stated that this has caused staff to have to stop everything and put out

general open source media information to seniors and partners. Her concern was that this puts the fusion center in the position of disseminating unvetted and unofficial information to partners who may sometimes assume that the information is verified finished intelligence. The implication was that the pressure to provide information in the form of bulletins or other products on topics that the fusion center only had knowledge on through indirect contacts and media, could subvert or call into question the fusion center's credibility.

### **Fusion Center Partner Opinions and Relationships**

The below interview questions attempted to begin to provide a frame that illuminates how participants perceive they are viewed by other organizations and how they view some of their relationships. They also offer a platform for evaluation of what factors are perceived as having some form of relevance to the development of these opinions and relationships.

Interview question 3H was: How do you feel that external entities (such as other government organizations, academia, advocacy groups) perceive fusion center operations? Interview question 3I was: What do you think influences those perceptions you just described? Interview question 4A was: How would you describe the relationship between your fusion center and federal organizations involved with national security? Interview question 4B was: For the relationship described above, what factors have positively or negatively influenced this relationship? Participants in all positions had relatively consistent responses to the first question in this section. While some comments were made otherwise, the overall comments tended to focus on two particular

groupings of external entities, those being primary customer set and privacy advocacy groups. Their primary customer, as articulated by virtually all respondents, was state and local law enforcement agencies, which was seemingly viewed as having a favorable view of the fusion center. Privacy groups appeared to be characterized as having a suspicious to antagonistic opinion of Network operations.

Government organizations, specifically state and local law enforcement agencies, were generally thought to view fusion centers in a positive light, as articulated by all participants. Interviewees believed that this was because of services provided, information access offered by the centers, perception of efficiency, and generally a force multiplier for their operations. In one case, an individual in a leadership position claimed that there were some individual organizations, which happened to be a part of non-law enforcement disciplines, which had a negative perception of the center. The belief for this negative perception was thought to be associated with the competition for grant funding within the state. One analyst and one federal representative generically described some state and local organizations, which do not support the fusion center because of perceptions that there was historical friction between these entities and the fusion center's parent organization.

Privacy advocacy groups were cited by 92% of the participants as having a blatantly negative or generally unfavorable view of fusion center operations and/or the broader Network. The term "big brother" was used by several individuals in describing the perceptions of how these organizations viewed fusion centers. Other associated terms referenced by others that they felt were used by these entities to describe fusion center

were “spy houses,” “secret squirrel,” and “spy agency.” Likewise, terms used by other participants that they felt advocacy groups used to describe fusion center operations were “violating people’s rights,” “infringing on people’s rights,” “watching everyone,” and “invading privacy.”

Participant comments seemed to suggest that the negative opinions were impacted by media coverage of the centers, written and oral criticisms from these organizations, and past allegations made from these groups about fusion centers, the Network writ large, as well as commentary and reports of this sort directed at the law enforcement and intelligence communities. Participants from all positions and with generally no distinction between centers felt that privacy advocacy organization views of the center are also influenced by political agendas as well as lack of transparency from the Network. In general, participants understood that these privacy advocacy organizations were operating along the lines of their internal organizational mission focus in support of P/CRCL protections.

Positive views of the Network, largely described as emanating from stakeholder public safety organizations and private sector entities that happened to partner with individual fusion centers, seemed to be influenced by other factors. These items seemed to be rooted in factors concerning perceptions of efficiency and providing free capabilities and access to information for partners. In the case of these organizations, participants also mentioned how partners may view the Network as providing services to external agencies especially in the law enforcement discipline.



One federal representative claimed that some agencies look at fusion centers as an efficient way of getting information. He explained how a federal agency seeking information on a specific subject of instance would have had to call, e-mail, or visit various state and local agencies, when conducting a background check in the era prior to fusion centers. Differing relationships and competing priorities might have caused some significant delays in getting information back to the requestor or often times incomplete returns. The Network provides a more streamlined approach to request information across various agencies and disciplines. Another federal participant similarly described this concept as “one stop shopping” when attempting to describe the biggest value proposition for fusion centers. Other terms that fell under the tenants of this theme described the fusion centers as “a tool for use by partners” and “a place for valuable resource access.”

Another repetitive theme that seemed to be carried across a majority of the interview questions dealt with awareness of the fusion center, its capabilities, and its distinctive and/or unique role within the public safety and national security realm. Across the board, participants made statements at different points in time that referenced this concept. Comments such as “for those that know us” and references to “return customers” were suggestive that organizations that have worked with the centers in the past, as well as those individuals that received training or briefings on these entities, were more likely to find value in the Network’s contributions.

Responses concerning relationships with organizations engaged in national security were generally consistent, but interesting. DHS and FBI partnerships were

routinely noted by all interviewees. This is not surprising because there are DHS intelligence staff permanently located at each of the three centers with two of the centers having the same DHS representatives for several years, with tenures in the same fusion centers longer than most or all other staff. Similarly, the FBI has permanent spaces in each of the centers as well. In one case, an FBI representative's full time office is within the fusion center, and in the other two cases, the FBI is in the center multiple days each week. Other federal agencies were also noted, but DHS and FBI were referenced by all of the individuals.

In some cases, past issues with federal relationships were noted, but in all of these instances the trend was described as getting better, moving in a positive direction, significantly improved, or completely rectified. The past issues of concern varied between participant responses. Some interviewees described compartmentalization of information where information was not always properly shared. In a couple cases, personality conflicts were cited and participants explained that personnel changes rectified the situation.

Direct relationships with the agencies that are a part of the broader intelligence and national security communities were largely perceived to be generally nonexistent. Nine participants out of the field explained that their connectivity was represented through their relationships with the FBI and the DHS. It is important to note that all three centers did have some remote relationships with other federal partners, but they were not considered to be regularly leveraged. This was not necessarily viewed as a negative trait. One intelligence analyst felt that her fusion center was directly connected to the partners

that it needed to be connected to in order to execute its priorities. One leadership representative claimed that he relied on his connections with the DHS and the FBI to further tie his operation into other partners on the national security side of the house similar to how federal organizations utilized the fusion center to get directly and indirectly connected at a lower level in his state. One senior intelligence analyst said that their DHS and FBI representatives in the center are the conduit to those higher-level partnerships.

These relationships were described as being influenced by several factors, some in a positive way, and others negatively. Discovering and understanding what was deemed as being important and/or impactful to fusion center relationships may help with selecting staff to represent federal organizations. These items could also help with developing strategies to develop and/or maintain strong relationships across levels of government in support of national security. Table 13 provides a snapshot of perceptions about factors important and/or impactful to fusion center partner relationships with federal agencies engaged in national security.

Table 13

*Fusion Center Federal Relationship Factors*

<u>Description</u>	<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Federal representatives</u>	<u>Senior intelligence analysts</u>	<u>Intelligence analysts and investigators</u>	<u>Raw count</u>
Close/constant contact	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	2	<b>4</b>	12
Transparency and/or integrity	2	2	<b>3</b>	3	10
Joint operations and/or common mission	2	2	2	2	8
Priority changes	2	1	1	2	6
Territory	1	2	1	1	5
Personnel changes	1	2	1		5
Access/clearances		2	2		4

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given positions. All staff from fusion centers A and C felt close regular contact was a relevant value. All staff from fusion center B valued integrity and transparency attributes.

The most significant factor that affects these relationships with national security organizations appeared to center on individual contact. All, but one individual from the sample, mentioned that close and constant/regular contact with representatives was key to building a relationship. While not explicitly stated, it is assessed that regular contact aided in the understanding of organizational capabilities and constraints (from both sides). Building trust was referenced by a majority of interviewees and also seems to be influenced by contact.

The next most significant element impacting relationships is likely influenced by contact as well. Concepts voiced by 10 participants in the field revolved around perceptions of integrity and transparency. Several individuals expressed the importance of federal partners that were viewed as open and honest with the fusion center and staff. A couple intelligence analysts separately explained that even when information cannot be shared from national security organization staff with the fusion center, it can be better understood when some explanation is provided. They each further asserted that they understood that everything cannot be shared with every individual, but it is difficult when it is perceived that intelligence may have been held simply for territory concerns or information dominance. The term “two-way street” was mentioned by several individuals at some point in the interview. This term was often used to describe the perception of the level that federal organizations made fusion center staff feel (or not) like equal partners. All staff members from Fusion Center B valued this attribute in responses.

In the same category of equal partnership was the next factor that was mentioned by just over half of the participants. Eight individuals communicated the importance of joint operations in some capacity. A leadership representative explained that routine services between organizations ranging from requests for information (RFI) to operations have often caused different parts of each organization to develop bonds and trust. An investigator asserted that individuals from different organizations that are “down in the trenches together” helps with developing an understanding of agency strength and weaknesses.

Other factors described by greater than 30% to less than 50% of the sample population listed in descending order of significance were priority changes, territory, and changes in personnel. When priorities are perceived to have shifted for an organization, this was described as disrupting organizational relationships. One individual mentioned that priority shifts have also been known to degrade individual trust. He explained that organizations with longstanding ties who are working jointly with each other begin to rely on each other's capabilities for certain aspects of the mission. When those resources are redirected this can cause a shock to the partner organization. As alluded to earlier in this section when discussing transparency and integrity, should an organization attempt to "flex" its authority over another under the guise of territorial or jurisdictional precedence, this can have an immediate negative impact on the relationship.

Another item that was voiced by individuals in leadership and federal positions dealt with personnel changeover. All individuals understood that changeover and retention was the nature of government service due to their own experiences with personnel challenges. In spite of this, the perception of regular rotation of individuals, especially those in federal agencies, was viewed as very disruptive. One director explained that that his organization had a poor relationship at one time with a federal agency that took a few years to build into a meaningful partnership. A short while after that point, there was a personnel change within the organization and extended position vacancy caused the fusion center to have to start over with the organization in the realm of partnerships. An investigator mentioned that some routine changes can also cause a fusion center to get fatigued and may decrease motivation for staff to attempt to build

rapport with the organizations. When there are changes in leadership this can be especially damaging. A leadership participant described a relationship with an entity that was every positive over a period of several years. A change in the external organization's director subsequently eroded the relationship to the point that the entity started to delay reseeding of its detailed positions to the fusion center.

Another item that was referenced by about 30% of the sample group dealt with access to information. A higher concentration of federal representatives referenced this category more than individuals in other position groupings. Comments here focused on the limitations of database access for fusion center partners, issuance of security clearances, and levels of security clearances. Individuals commented that while there has been great improvement in this area there is still significant disconnects.

### **Fusion Center's Role in the National Security Strategy (NSS)**

The next questions in this category focused on perceptions about fusion center operations with regards to the national security strategy. These questions had more implications with the initial primary research question for the study, yet had relevance to all three research questions. National security strategies were described by participants as some of the broader strategic objectives that are associated with national-level defense and homeland security.

Interview question 3C was: Can you describe your opinion of the fusion center's role with regards to U.S. national security strategies? Interview question 3D was: Do you feel that fusion centers should have a primary responsibility to implement U.S. national security strategies or to state or local security priorities? Why? All participants agreed

that fusion centers, and by extension, the Network, had some form of responsibility to support the NSS. Several individuals noted that they understood the original concept for fusion centers was potentially to support the NSS through a focus on terrorism. Only one participant described a fusion center as having a significant role in the NSS however. In this case, the participant, who was in a position of leadership, explained that fusion centers are “where the rubber meets the road” recognizing that the Network is in more direct contact with the first responder community and the public. He further explained that information on a terrorist in the homeland would potentially be collected by a fusion center long before the federal government was aware.

Another leadership category respondent felt that fusion centers play a small role in support to the NSS, but there are instances where that impact is significant. He used an example of a disrupted terrorist cell operating within his fusion center’s area of operations. In this case intelligence activities conducted by the fusion center identified the cell, which was previously unknown to the federal government. This information was subsequently shared and turned into a large scale joint federal investigation resulting in the arrest of several individuals involved in the plotting of an attack.

All other participants felt that fusion centers played a small role in NSS. A common theme surrounding this belief centered on fusion centers’ focus on traditional criminal activities. The sentiment seemed to be related to thoughts that lower-level activities only contribute minimally to NSS. One senior intelligence analyst stated, “I do think we have a role like supporting Intelligence Information Reports so information can be gathered, but it is a small role, but an important one nonetheless.”



Several individuals stated that the Network offers an information bridge between levels of government that allows for federal organizations to access information from other state, local, and private entities. There was also a belief that fusion centers provide unique data and intelligence to the federal government that could be useful to strategic national endeavors. A couple federal representatives and analysts described joint collection efforts between DHS and the fusion center, which has resulted in the production of Intelligence Information Reports<sup>7</sup> as examples to direct support to the NSS. Table 14 provides the breakdown of opinions of about fusion centers' contribution to national security objectives.

Table 14

*Fusion Centers' Contribution to NSS*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Small role</u>	<u>Small with potential for significant</u>	<u>Significant</u>
Leadership	1	1	1
Federal representatives	3		
Senior intelligence analysts	3		
Intelligence analysts and investigators	4		

<sup>7</sup> Intelligence Information Reports commonly referred to as IIRs are federal intelligence community humint intelligence products that are used to highlight and disseminate raw information between elements in the U.S. Intelligence Community.

When asked about opinions as to whether the primary priorities of the fusion center should be associated with NSS, or to state and local objectives, responses were largely skewed towards state and local priorities. Only one respondent, who was an analyst, said that a fusion center should primarily align its operations based on NSS. The rationale provided was related to the idea that the Network's formation was based on national security needs. The participant did claim that the state and local priority focus for fusion centers was based on executive agency ownership, which is below federal government for all fusion centers in the Network. This sentiment was back by a participant in a leadership position who plainly stated, "Our first obligation is to (state law enforcement agency and state emergency management agency names purposely redacted), our partners, and the priorities of the Governor."

A couple interviewees provided answers that either indicated a balance of priorities or a want in theory that the focus should be on NSS. Individuals answering in this manner communicated their recognition that most centers operated within the scope of state and local priorities. One senior intelligence analyst explained that balance was possible, but only when NSS were completely aligned with governor or other state executive priorities.

The vast majority of participants felt that state and local objectives should shape fusion center operations and not federal requirements. One theme dealt with funding and partner support. Many individuals thought that the agency that provides the majority of funding for the organization, which is a state entity in each of the fusion centers represented in this study, was a main driver. If the federal government wanted more

control they would have to provide a higher level of resources and funding to increase the likelihood of direct NSS focus.

Another point, which was expressed by several individuals, was that a higher level of focus on NSS would likely have an adverse impact on stakeholder participation. The thought here appeared to stem from the belief that more strategic production and dissemination of information would be of limited value to what participants believed was their core customer set: other state and local government organizations. The fusion center partners such as other state and local law enforcement agencies and other public safety organizations were viewed as part of the life blood of the center. While not necessarily stated as such, participants seemed to understand that anything that could potentially diminish public and private partnerships with the fusion center would result in a negative impact on the fusion center's operations. One analyst explained that each fusion center area of operations has very unique needs and focusing on strategic federal objectives might not make sense or be relevant in some jurisdictions.

A couple participants that fell into the federal representatives' category put some of the responsibility on the federal government themselves. The individuals felt that government representatives such as DHS or FBI partners have the duty to identify information relevant to the NSS and figure out the correct process to get it to where it needs to go. One individual claimed that it was a federal responsibility to educate and train fusion center staff on NSS priorities in order to facilitate the flow of relevant NSS information. An analyst expressed a similar opinion, but also explained that the federal government has defined lanes concerning elements of the NSS and used the JTTF

concept as an example. The implication seemed to be that the federal government owns the NSS and thereby has the responsibility to figure out the best means for collecting relevant information associated with it. Table 15 highlights views of fusion center primary responsibilities.

Table 15

*Opinions About Fusion Centers' Primary Responsibilities*

<u>Position</u>	<u>To national security objectives</u>	<u>To state and local priorities</u>
Leadership		<b>3</b>
Federal representatives		<b>3</b>
Senior intelligence analysts		<b>3</b>
Intelligence analysts and investigators	1	3

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position.

### **Fusion Center Policy and Priority Processes**

The next questions dealt with perceptions about processes related to policy and priority decisions for the organization. I had intended that these questions would aid in the gathering of information on internal decision making patterns within each center. Responses helped paint a picture of how decisions were generally made and aided in identifying what potential influencers impact the generation of policy and/or determination of the direction of the organization.

Interview question 1F was: Can you describe your role in policy making within your organization? Interview question 3E was: Can you describe how policy decisions

are made for your fusion center? Interview question 3F was: How are mission and operational priorities determined by your fusion center? Interview question 3G was: How do external influences impact policy and priority decision making for your fusion center? Interview question 4D was: How would you explain your feelings about how fusion center integration with the U.S. national security strategies influence opinions about your fusion center or the Network by external parties?

**Individual roles in policy making.** Participant responses concerning their individual roles in policy making was relatively consistent between fusion centers across positions. Leadership described a higher level of involvement in all aspects of policy, federal representatives leaned towards an advisory role, senior intelligence analysts largely explained their responsibilities consisted of informing and recommending policy, and intelligence analysts and investigators generally claimed less responsibility in this realm, but at times providing subject matter expertise. Leadership explained that they had an active part in developing, establishing, informing, updating, determining, processing, and researching policies depending on the specific policy type with more leverage over items that directly and solely impact the fusion center.

Federal representatives, in many cases, stated that they were not directly involved in aspects of policy making, but responded in a manner that can be described as an indirect role in the policy making process. This appeared to be in the role of advising on some policies that had implications on national security and intelligence activities. One interviewee described how he supported the development of a policy concerning cyber security and analysis operations within the center by educating staff on external

organizations working in the field and describing aspects of similar federal policies.

Another individual claimed that he had been asked to review different policy drafts and was asked for input and clarification on how other fusion centers have handled similar issues.

The other two categories of participants clearly stated that they are not decision makers or signatories for organizational policy. Senior intelligence analysts described how their roles are used primarily as subject matter experts to inform policy. In spite of these responses, two individuals provided direct examples and one provided an indirect example of when they participated in the crafting and updating of policies. Intelligence analysts and investigators described their responsibilities in this realm as consisting of helping to inform policy as it applies to their specified focus area in the center.

**Policy and priority process.** All individuals recognized that a majority of organizational policy was dictated from senior leaders within the executive organization as well as from external executives from other agencies, as in the case of a formalized governance board, cabinet officials presiding over the fusion centers' parent agency, and even the governor of the state. A vast majority of the respondents described their perception that a majority of the time, policy was generally a top-down process, where directives came down from higher levels; that was not to say that input or recommendations could not percolate up.

In the case of one fusion center, all respondents regardless of position category stated flatly that policy decisions came from above the fusion center. A majority of the federal representatives stated that the top-down approach was not necessarily viewed

negatively by the fusion center or themselves. They further suggested that this process provided the entities with direction and command intent.

Ironically, there was evidence expressed in respondent comments that suggested that there were established processes and permissions to generate policy within the fusion center and to introduce such above the fusion center. A majority of participants representing all position categories from two fusion centers described their center's internal policy and priority decision making processes as highly collaborative. Both leadership participants from these centers explained their practice of using concerted efforts to engage all levels of the fusion center into aspects of the process for items that specifically dealt with fusion center issues. Comments appeared to indicate that unlike a majority of other units in their parent agency, the sections comprised of the fusion center consisted of a variety of different specialties and disciplines where input from subject matter experts was heavily relied upon.

Mission and operational priorities appeared to have similar process track at times, but there appeared to be a greater expression of decision making ownership within the fusion center of priorities over policies. While leadership participants explained that elements above the fusion center still impact priorities, they seemed to believe that they had a greater amount of say in the direction of the center. This increased decision making authority was believed to only be realized as long as it was messaged to and perceived by higher executives as within the scope of organizational mandates and overarching executive priorities. In general, other position categories of participants seemed to feel less empowered to influence priorities, although many examples were

given that fusion center leadership was inclusive and receptive to opinions of lower staff at the center.

**Influencers of policy and priority decision making.** Perceptions about elements that impact policy and priority decision making were extremely important to understanding factors that are potentially impacting the Network's integration. Likewise, responses here were relevant to the tenants of the MSF. Several of the items identified cannot be independently isolated exclusively but should be viewed as overlapping in some areas. Table 16 highlights the codes used to interpret data related to policy, priority, and integration influencers, as well as the correlated raw totals. It is important to note that these influencers were also found to be directed related to items that influence the integration with the national security strategy.



Table 16

*Policy, priority, and integration raw totals*

<u>Influencer</u>	<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Federal Representatives</u>	<u>Senior Intelligence Analysts</u>	<u>Intelligence Analysts and Investigators</u>	<u>Raw Count</u>
Crisis incidents	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	13
Perceived problems	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	13
Partner needs/reporting	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	13
Organizational policy and mandates	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	3	12
Agenda/politics	<b>3</b>	1	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	11
Existing executive agency priorities	2	2	1	<b>4</b>	9
Media coverage	<b>3</b>		3	3	9
Public outcry	2	1		<b>4</b>	7
Adjacent fusion Center Influence		2	2	2	6
funding	2		1	2	5
Federal requirements	1	1		2	4
Current resources	2			1	3

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position. Cross-cutting elements notwithstanding, the additional agreed upon values consisting of all individuals in a fusion center were site A and B for current policy and/or mandates and site B for executive agency priority

There were several cross-cutting concepts that all participants addressed or alluded to in some capacity during their responses to interview questions. Similarly, there were various points that were communicated by a majority of the interviewees. Equally interesting were a couple areas that were noted as receiving limited mention on items that the I assumed would have higher impact ratings during the data collection phase of this study. The three items that had a unanimous direct and/or implied value rating in responses concerned emerging incidents, perceived problems or failures, and partner needs/reporting (largely understood as requirements from partner organizations at state and local governmental level).

***Cross-cutting.*** As referenced earlier in the manuscript, participants felt that fusion center operations and direction were very sensitive to emergency incidents or developing situations of magnitude. Examples provided by interviewees included items such as an active shooter event. Other references cited incidents such as a massive data breach as a result of a malicious cyber attack against a government agency, an armed conflict threatening life and/or property, a mass riot, as well as a developing terrorist attack. In these and other cases, the fusion center was described as being called upon to first articulate the significance of the event to executives and stakeholders, and often, to provide some form of direct support to the crisis situation.

Also mentioned across the board by participants concerned partners needs/reporting. Recurring requests for support on certain items or dealing with specific activities drove priority changes within the organization. Increases in reporting on similar topics appeared to feed into the perceived problem area, and at times, caused the center to

evaluate its expertise in that area. One individual in a leadership position explained how he focused fusion center efforts to identify partner standing information needs. The fusion center tasked its staff and its external liaison staff to conduct deliberate outreach to partner organizations in specific areas of the state in an attempt to identify the greatest threat vectors of concern for those agencies. This resulted in a shift in at least a portion of the fusion center's operational priorities to ensure there was more alignment with these partner requirements. Out of the three cross-cutting items, this item appeared to be the most significant based on participant responses that often mentioned stakeholder requirements, requests for service, and volume of reporting.

Perceptions of problems with current policy, misalignment of priorities, and/or the perception of an increased risk of a threat of some sort, was also viewed as a central driver. Fusion center protocol that was assessed as being weak or inadequate to address an issue often led to a change in procedures or focus. One respondent noted that after-action reviews on fusion center activity subsequent to a critical incident response drove organizational change after center staff revealed shortcomings and suggestions to enhance a response to a similar event in the future. This factor seemed to be impacted most when there was a general consensus of an issue or gap.

In other cases, external entities that were criticized and/or received sanctions for mistakes, caused fusion center policy examination. Individuals from each fusion center separately used a policy example that dealt with social media use and conduct. At least one individual had mentioned that this increased focus on social media stemmed from privacy advocacy challenges to some social media monitoring tools. Another individual

mentioned that the executive organization felt the need to address this due to employee misuse.

Increased threat reporting on certain topics often created a sense that an item was a threat on the rise. One participant explained that there was limited concern about sovereign citizens at one point in time in her fusion center. Because of this perception there was limited to no in-house expertise or focus on this vector. Violent incidents concerning sovereign citizens, coupled with increases in reporting of encounters by partner organizations, led to priority and procedure shifts that put a higher emphasis on this topic.

***Very significant.*** Existing policy and organizational mandates were noted in some capacity by all participants except one. All positions representing Fusion Centers A and B confirmed the significance of this element. This may be no surprise because fusion centers fall under executive agencies where organizational boundaries are written into law. Two of the fusion centers are owned and operated by organizations that are considered assisting agencies. This concept was described as limiting some actions of the agency unless they are formally requested for support by an outside organization. Additional mandates either prohibit certain functions of the organization outright and/or leave organizational leadership no choice but to execute certain activities with limited leeway. In this case, these boundaries do not appear to necessarily spur policy or priority change, but rather influence what or how far change can be made.

***Significant.*** There appeared to be an overarching view that executive agendas and/or politics are often working in the background in the policy and priority arena due to

10 of 13 participants referencing this factor. In some cases participants blatantly stated that some items are politicized for unknown reasons. Some noted that agenda changes during government transitions can weaken positive strategic movement for fusion centers.

That being said, comments were also voiced by some that changes of political appointees, which equals the changing of priorities, has also lead to certain areas of growth in the centers in some cases resulting in the establishment of new sections charged with focusing on these new agenda items. In one case, a leadership participant explained that the frequent political position changes has allowed the center, at times, to continue along its current course because they lacked experience and time in position to recommend or implement change. Also noted was alignment of all state and local fusion center participants in this category, whereas the federal representatives generally felt that politics did not influence the organization in this realm.

***Important.*** Executive leadership priorities from those at the parent organization and/or governance board level were rated as important including all participants from Fusion Center B valuing this item. Like the articulated effect of executive agendas and/or politics referenced above, policy decisions appeared to be made within the framework of executive leadership priorities. This is not surprising as these priorities are likely nested under the political figures that put parent organization officials in place or at least allowed them to remain in their existing position. Fusion center policies and priorities that were viewed as out of sync with executive leadership priorities were perceived by participants to generally not be considered further, discarded in their

entirety, or adjusted in a manner where they were in compliance with these higher level directives.

The media was also valued as an important influential factor. Likely impacting other elements already mentioned above more directly, media coverage was mentioned as a catalyst to paying more attention to certain issues. One participant in the leadership category explained that he has often received calls directly from the media. In other cases he has had to speak for his agency to the press corps. All interviewees in both leadership and senior intelligence analyst categories mentioned that media coverage is somewhat of a factor in this area although none stated that the media was the sole reason for any policy decision. Ironically, none of the federal representatives viewed media coverage or slant on the coverage of a topic as having any influence on fusion center operations, direction, or policy.

***Relevant.*** Public out-cry and community concerns were noted by a little over half of the participants, which included all individuals in the intelligence analyst and investigator category. While it is difficult to unpack this element from comments made about media coverage, and possibly increased partner reporting, individuals believed that this factor had at least some influence on organizational decisions. Some referenced examples included the recent drug epidemic, as well as gang activity in certain regions as hot topics voiced by communities. Several individuals felt that community needs should be considered when deciding on public safety objectives.

***Potentially relevant.*** A little less than half of the interviewees claimed that adjacent fusion centers have some influence on fusion center decisions. None of the

leadership participants cited this factor as having relevance. As referenced in the perceived problem section above, when discussing especially negative social media policies and experiences, vibrations can be felt throughout the Network. When/if a fusion center comes under intense scrutiny and/or has been admonished for a particular reason, the rest of the Network was described as taking note and learning from that misstep. One analyst noted how an incident concerning an advocacy organization declaring privacy concerns with a particular fusion center over controversial operations led to the establishment of policy in her center that addressed similar operations conducted there. Another leadership participant mentioned several times that sometimes policy is welcomed because it helps protect the center's equities. Another analyst described how requests for information from other fusion centers within his regional grouping of fusion centers, led to joint efforts on strategic intelligence production, and caused a slight direction change for some operations in order to satisfy the requirements.

***Limited impact.*** Factors concerning financial resources received a surprisingly low rating by respondents. Leadership individuals had a relatively higher response rate than those in other positions. This is likely due to those in leadership positions having to manage budgets and forecast future expenditures. While dwindling grant funding and lack of line-item budgets were mentioned during interviews as one factor that has been negatively impacting fusion center operations, most respondents appeared to believe that funding alone would not necessarily change policy. This factor seemed to weigh more on focus areas and to what magnitude an action, operation, or work task, would be executed by the fusion center.

*Considered.* The status of current resources was cited by less than 1/3 of the participant field, which included none from the senior intelligence analyst category. An individual in a leadership position mentioned that resource availability obviously impacts direct support that a fusion center can provide to a requesting agency. He also explained that resources also impact tactical and strategic decision making within the center. In the case of Fusion Center C, the concentration of personnel resources focusing on a topic area led to the establishment of policies and eventually the creation of a stand-alone section. It is important to note that in many cases individuals described that executive priorities and agendas appear to lead to increased staffing, which then triggers the generation or adjustment of fusion center policy.

Referenced equally to resources were federal requirements. While federal organizations are often considered partner organizations, and as mentioned earlier in the manuscript, are often embedded within the Network as is often the case with DHS and FBI, I assessed that participants perceived this as strategic national security requirements potentially related to the NSS. Most of the participants referenced the fusion centers' willingness to support federal needs in many parts of the interview, but it appeared that federal wants do not have a great impact on policy and direction for individual fusion centers.

One analyst noted that support to federal requirements should be a responsibility of the Network so long as it does not interfere with fusion center priorities. Other participants did express that perhaps more attention should be paid to federal priorities, but summarily explained that they were trumped by other priorities and obligations.



Federal representatives responded proportionately higher than all other positions and none in leadership positions felt that this factor had any relevance to internal organizational policy decision making. This may not be surprising valuations given the heavy slant of participants feeling that the Network's direction should be angled towards state and local requirements and priorities.

*Noted.* Also noted only by a couple respondents in the leadership category was the potential impact of external pressures from advocacy groups and organizations. As mentioned above, advocacy group pressure applied on another member of the Network was referenced as a trigger for the development of policy at another center. Some individuals representing each of the participating centers pointed out that their fusion center has not necessarily been subjected to intense scrutiny. It is important to note that at least one of the centers participating in the study had been involved in a controversy instigated by an advocacy group during a timeframe prior to the employment of any of the state participants for that center.

**Perceptions of integration.** Participants were asked questions that sought to get an understanding from their points of view about their fusion center's level of integration with broader structures and initiatives, which support public safety and national security initiatives, such as the Network itself and national security strategies. These questions offered access to information, which helped provide context concerning how fusion center staff felt that they did or did not contribute to broader national objectives. They also permitted the discovery of factors that were vital to influencing integration of the fusion centers with these external entities.

Interview question 4C was: How would you describe your fusion center's level of integration with the U.S. national security strategy? Interview question 4D was: How would describe your fusion center's level of integration with the National Network of Fusion Centers? Interview question 4E was: What factors do you perceive as integral to your fusion center's integration with national security objectives? Interview question 4F was: What factors do you feel are present that are positively supporting or creating barriers to your fusion center's integration with U.S. national security objectives?

***Integration with the Network.*** Participants generally felt that their fusion center was a contributing partner to the Network. The criteria for each individual's evaluation for this topic often appeared to center on direct engagement with other fusion centers through several ways, which will be further described below. These engagements were assessed to be a meaningful determinant of integration based on their frequency. In other words, organizational activity that occurred regularly between two or more centers seemed to be interpreted by participants as progress toward integration. Table 17 provides an overview of overall opinions of integration of fusion centers with other fusion centers.

Table 17

*Opinions about fusion centers' integration with the network*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Fully Integrated</u>	<u>Integrated</u>	<u>Minimally Integrated</u>
Leadership	2	1	
Federal representatives	<b>3</b>		
Senior intelligence analysts	2		1
Intelligence analysts and investigators	<b>4</b>		

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position.

One concept that appeared to factor into the opinion of integration dealt with participation in joint meetings. Meetings with the self-organized consortiums of fusion centers, which are active amongst different regions across the nation, were mentioned as valuable organizational tools that supported and “proved” of fusion center organizational integration. Likewise, the NFCA and related meetings with the association was mentioned by several participants. An individual in a leadership position explained how initiatives such as those mentioned above help the fusion centers stay better connected to each other and provide a space to hear about and understand challenges faced by other fusion centers within the Network.

Joint analytical work and request for information services between fusion centers was also cited as demonstrating a high level of integration with the Network. Individuals in the positions of senior intelligence analysts, intelligence analysts, and investigators,

seemed to place a high value on this, as all participants in these categories discussed elements of this factor. One analyst discussed how through their regional consortium of fusion centers, several analysts from various centers shared information needs from their respective areas of operations, and decided to work together on an assessment. He further described how these partnerships and decision to do a joint strategic product on a topic led to a concerted collection effort across the region.

Another analyst explained that she doubted a day went by when their fusion center was not communicating in some capacity with another fusion center across the country. She further described that this could be in the form of asking or answering a request for information, working on a joint product, forwarding information of relevance to another fusion center's jurisdiction, as well as through other means. A federal representative similarly mentioned that regular communications between fusion centers also demonstrates a higher level of integration between organizations and described his center as "very involved" in this capacity.

Some representatives from Fusion Center A commented on their regular involvement, especially with neighboring centers in the region. The senior intelligence analyst for Fusion Center A explained that they had an employee from their fusion center who was detailed to a center a few hours away. That individual was described as providing information and intelligence from the partner center back to fusion center A, as well as actively participating in analysis and the generation of intelligence products at that center. A federal representative at Fusion Center A claimed that his fusion center's tight integration with other centers in the region was heavily influenced by activities in

and priorities concerning a significant metropolitan area whose suburbs expanded well outside of the specific city's boundaries. He further described how this city and surrounding areas actually fell within the area of responsibility for more than one fusion center. This example could suggest a perceived operational necessity or felt need by all concerned fusion centers to collaborate in order to mitigate any risk to mission objectives, which include coordination beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

Other factors that were voiced by about 30% of the field related to organizational similarities. The terms "common language" and "similar mission" were used to describe the perception of likeness between centers. However, one analyst did note that each fusion center may have different focus areas, strengths, and weaknesses, while serving unique populations and stakeholders. She did point out that in spite of this; there were common mission tasks and probably similar mission areas, differing only in their rankings of the priorities.

As highlighted in Table 16 at the start of this sub-section, only two individuals from the sample population felt that their fusion center was just below full integration with the Network. Both of these individuals claimed that there was limited regional or national strategic work being done by their fusion centers. Both the leadership and senior intelligence analyst, who were from different centers, acknowledged that their centers had robust relationships and interactions with other parts of the Network, but they felt that this was in the furtherance of their specific state and local priorities. One individual in a leadership position thought the NFCA was the best entity in a position to spur this integration. He also said that he wished that the NFCA had more power and staff to

bolster integration between fusion centers and increase collective focus on regional and national topics of interest.

***Integration with the National Security Strategy.*** Central to this research study is determining the status of fusion centers' integration with national security objectives. Like other areas of questioning, several questions were posed to the sample population that aimed to determine such in a more direct manner. Unlike opinions about fusion center to Network integration, which were heavily skewed towards positive responses, opinions on fusion center integration with the national security strategy were more varied and skewed towards opinions of less integration. Table 18 highlights the overview of responses by position.

Table 18

*Opinions about fusion centers' integration with the National Security Strategy*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Integrated</u>	<u>Minimally integrated</u>	<u>Not integrated</u>
Leadership		<b>3</b>	
Federal representatives	1		2
Senior intelligence analysts		2	1
Intelligence analysts and investigators		1	3

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position.

The only unanimous position or site category values from the field of interviewees were provided by those in leadership positions who felt that there was at

least some integration, but there were still significant issues influencing this concept. One individual claimed that national security strategies and objectives serve as a “backdrop” for fusion center operations, but are rarely the central driving force for the fusion center. He further claimed that state and local priorities, pressures, and needs, normally take precedence over any other consideration, which may contribute to hampering further integration. This sentiment was echoed by another position cohort respondent who said that integration was disjointed and minimal at best because of the necessity to provide services to external partners who are predominately state and local entities.

Another participant in the leadership position category similarly mentioned the pressure to focus on priorities that reside in the state and local sphere. He also discussed how he felt that there was at least a minimal level of integration that he was comfortable with. The participant expressed that there were too many federal focus areas, initiatives, objectives, and pilots that were simply difficult to impossible for individuals at his level to have a complete grasp of. He further described how his DHS and FBI representatives in the center helped him develop a better understanding of national security initiatives and direction, which informed some of his fusion center’s actions even if to a smaller extent than other needs. He assessed that without direct federal representation in the center, his knowledge of and thereby integration with the national security strategy, would be next to zero.

Including the leadership position responses mentioned above, 11 of 13 interviewees specified that state and local priority focus for fusion centers impacted the

Network's integration with the national security strategy. For further context, while this focus was voiced as one reason contributing to negative integration values, many did not essentially feel that this aspect should necessarily change. In other words, I assessed that the general feeling by participants was that state and local priorities should be ranked higher for reasons explained earlier in the chapter concerning opinions of fusion center focus. Table 19 provides a highlight of themes that emerged as factors that impact integration.



Table 19

*Items impacting fusion center integration with the National Security Strategy*

<u>Description</u>	<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Federal representatives</u>	<u>Senior intelligence analysts</u>	<u>Intelligence analysts and investigators</u>	<u>Raw count</u>
State and local priority driven	<b>3</b>	2	<b>3</b>	3	11
Marketing, communications, and messaging on NSS	2	2	<b>3</b>	3	10
Policy, mandate, jurisdictional factors	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	2	2	10
Resources		2	2	2	6
Relationships		2	2	2	6
Budget		1		3	4
Lack of defined direction/metrics		1	2	1	4
Training			1	2	3

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position. The agreed upon values consisting of all individuals in a fusion center were site A and C for state and local priorities as well as site B for marketing of the NSS.

Beyond state and local priority focus, other themes emerged from participant responses. Ten participants felt that communications about NSS were lacking. A majority of respondents felt that increased marketing and education about the NSS could potentially spread awareness about objectives, direction, and specific measures or actions that fusion centers should consider. One participant in a leadership position underscored

the need for discussion about the NSS with senior executives inside the federal national security structure. He claimed that regular calls or briefings would be very beneficial and specifically stated that simply sending out e-mail messages along these lines, like what may have been done in the past, would not necessarily increase awareness and understanding. An analyst claimed that there is general lack of understanding of how fusion centers fit into the big picture. She stated that she is aware of how a suspicious activity report received from a fusion center could lead to a federal investigation, but strategic integration was fuzzy at best. One federal representative felt that even if there was not integration, he thought that the fusion centers were of value to the NSS because their actions supported elements of protection, security, and resiliency.

An equal number of participants felt that jurisdictional issues, statutes, mandates, and internal policies confounded fusion center integration with the NSS. As stated previously in the manuscript, two of the fusion centers represented in the study were constrained by their organizational mandate to be an assisting agency, meaning there were certain actions that they were not able to take unless requested. Internal standing operating procedures that required certain types of information to be sent directly to external agencies were noted by others. In this case, a senior intelligence analyst and a couple analysts described a “lane in the road” where they may not put any additional focus on the item because they perceived it as being handled by that external organization.

Leading back into the state and local priority focus, several individuals mentioned that their mandates, in effect, caused them to concentrate efforts on subfederal topics.

Respondents from one site, for instance, explained that statutes that put the fusion center's executive agency in operation had a significant influence on mission areas for the center. They described their parent organization's primary focus areas, which reflect the fusion center's central efforts, were rooted in gangs and drugs. One leadership position participant stated that they had been working with senior executives and the legislature to expand the mission jurisdictional aspects to include other areas, some of which would reflect items of greater relevance to the NSS.

Resource constraints were mentioned as a factor impacting integration by just under half of respondents. Most of the participants from fusion center C commented about their heavy personnel commitment to their sections covering traditional criminal activities and law enforcement issues. Their threat analysis unit, which covered strategic issues and topics concerning terrorism and extremism, had significantly less staff relative to the crime units. The staffing decisions were based on the sheer volume of reporting and requests that came into the center, which mostly centered on crime. Comments from a federal representative, a senior intelligence analyst, and an intelligence analyst alike included the need for more resources to help cover the strategic topics that were more in line with national security interests. That being said, there was realization that manning could not or should not be decreased for positions focusing on traditional crime.

Relationships were referenced by six interviewees as having at least some impact on integration. This concerned issues involving the perceptions that some organizations express dominance over some national security topic areas or certain case types. While there were mentions of other topic areas such as drugs and organized crime, terrorism

appeared to be the most widely represented example. Participants explained that information sharing and collaboration between agencies has significantly improved, but items concerning terrorism were still often viewed as being “owned” by federal organizations. One federal representative mentioned that this is, at times, complicated by the classification of information. One intelligence analyst discussed database access and separation of law enforcement and intelligence systems as contributing to this divide. Another participant explained how collaboration in the terrorism realm sometimes needs to be “forced” by catching an agency in the act of withholding details of an incident. Essentially this has caused a shaming of that agency or individual which led to more transparent and collaborative interactions.

The last three elements that were mentioned by multiple participants dealt with funding (five responses), defined metrics (four responses), and training (three responses). One federal representative and a leadership individual mentioned that decreases in funding over time challenges the ability of many fusion centers to focus on broader national security topics that are not observed in the area of operations on a regular basis. Several participants referenced how whoever funds the largest share of fusion center operations tends to benefit from alignment of priorities. In other words, diminished federal funding for the Network, coupled with increased relative funding percentages from sub-federal entities, leads to greater focus on items viewed as a priority by the state and local stakeholder organizations.

Possibly related to the marketing and communications theme described earlier are defined metrics and training on items concerning national security strategies. One

analyst explained that she thought there was next to zero awareness on specific functions the fusion center should be doing to contribute to these national objectives. A few other individuals also claimed that training would be needed to educate the staff on national priorities.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

The value of all research studies are measured against their demonstration of academic rigor and trustworthiness. Qualitative studies have been viewed as suffering from a great risk of low quality largely due to the common use of unstructured data that requires interpretation. As previously described in Chapter 3 and below, I made every possible effort that I could think of to provide the greatest evidence of trustworthiness for this study .

Validity and credibility of this study was supported by several actions. Member-checking procedures were implemented as one measure. Each participant was provided opportunities to review transcripts and document drafts. These individuals were encouraged to comment, correct, and/or clarify information that I had collected and interpreted during the analysis phase of the study. I also back-briefed or restated responses to participants during each interview session, where individuals confirmed, corrected, and/or clarified statements. In a couple cases I corrected and adjusted field notes and other materials to support information accuracy. Triangulation was one of the cornerstone techniques used during the analysis phase. Similar comments and concepts relayed by multiple participants obviously helped with the generation of codes and subsequently the discovery of patterns and themes. At times, comments were reflective

of concepts described in other studies and scholarly articles further establishing relevance and significance of the data and findings.

Credibility was established through saturation. Repeated and consistent responses also helped with coding, patterning, and theme generation. While the original target sample size was 12, 13 participants were subsequently utilized for a greater representation of subjects within the selection criteria as well as to provide a higher confidence rating that saturation was achieved.

Transferability was obtained primarily through the collection of in-depth data. Information obtained from participants was thoroughly described resulting in detailed accounts of perceptions. Prior theory applications were also supportive of this with several items from this area reflected in the results of the research section of this study on the Network.

In order to increase the dependability factor for this study, cross-validation of the collected interview data was executed. Multiple collection instruments were employed during interviews which included audio recording devices and field notes. Additional reflective notes were also used by me to support analysis. Member-checking procedures also supported the dependability for this study.

While researcher bias coupled with the interpretive nature of this design, pose risks for objectivity, multiple techniques were supportive of this factor. I attempted to provide a detailed background information and highlighted his potential biases. The awareness of these potential biases also aided my ability to ward off bias influence. Peer review/consultation techniques were employed to help in this area. In order to get an

outside opinion on this study and analytical findings, materials were also provided to a colleague of mine who is a former graduate student and was experienced in qualitative research studies.

## **Results**

This section of the chapter highlights some of the main findings from the conduct of this original research concerning the Network. This study sought to understand and discover items that are affecting and influencing the Network's integration with broader national security objectives by answering three central RQs. Kingdon's (2003) MSF was heavily leveraged to assist in the generation of research questions and to help with the interpretation of data collected during in-person and telephonic interviews of individuals that were currently working within the construct of the Network. MSF itself greatly assisted me in making sense with some of the data collected through the interview and research processes.

The central RQs for this study were addressed by associated interview questions asked of participants during the data collection phase of this study. As mentioned previously in the manuscript, Appendix C provides a detailed listing of these interview questions and highlights the relationship between specific interview questions and the central research questions for the study. Outlined below is an overview of the linkage between the research and interview questions. RQs 1 and 2 had broad overlapping themes with the questions themselves being very closely associated with one another. Therefore, data gleaned from many of the interview questions, often applied to both of these research questions.

RQ1: What factors influence the integration of the Network with the U.S. national security strategy? Associated interview questions that aided in answering RQ1 were 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E.

RQ2: What barriers impact the Network's integration with the U.S. national security strategy? Associated interview questions that aided in answering RQ2 were 3D, 3E, 3F, 3G, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4F.

RQ3: What circumstances contribute to the criticisms voiced about fusion centers? Associated interview questions that aided in answering RQ3 were 3G, 3H, 3I, and 4G.

### **Research Question 1**

Answering this RQ involved gaining an understanding of how decision making happens within a fusion center, how fusion center representatives evaluate their existing relationships, and how participants perceive their fusion center contribution to matters of public safety and national security. Three overarching themes emerged that were derived through analysis of participant responses and evaluation of identified codes. The first of these relevant factors concerned perceptions of problems or existing threats that were not adequately being addressed. The second concept centered on perceptions about which fusion center staff felt was the primary receiver of their services. The next theme was related to perceptions about organizational constraints and lanes in the road. Many participant descriptions of influencers of integration were assessed to address elements of the multiple streams framework (MSF), which will be described further.



As mentioned previously, overall participant perceptions about the Network's integration with the national security strategy suggested that there was a general perception that there was minimal to no integration with the broader national security objectives. These responses were highlighted earlier in Table 19. In most cases this did not necessarily appear to be viewed as a negative thing. Supporting this assessment was the near unanimous opinion from the field that a fusion center's primary focus should not be on national level issues, but should prioritize items that are most relevant to that fusion center's area of operations as determined by state and local entities. Table 15 previously highlighted the premise that a majority of responses from the participant field leaned in this direction.

This is not to say that any of the individuals indicated that national security issues were irrelevant. On the contrary, participants viewed national-level issues as relevant, but a fusion center's contribution to these issues produced the best results when they focused on smaller items that could be subsequently related to these larger issues. In the previous section, table 18 listed results that demonstrated that a majority of respondents felt that integration with the broader Network has largely been achieved. Several factors contributed to this perception ranging from the volume of regular contact between fusion centers to similarities between organizations. In essence, similar composition and work tasks would suggest the support of a perception of integration. Federal organizations, which are viewed as having different roles and functions as compared to fusion centers may be viewed as less integrated. Table 20 below provides a snapshot, in descending

order of magnitude, items that were assessed to influence integration. Raw totals and complete break-out was provided in Table 16 in an earlier section in this chapter.

Table 20

*Influencers of Integration*

<u>Relative value rating</u>	<u>Drivers</u>
Cross-cutting	Crisis incidents, perceived problems, and partner needs/reporting
Very significant	Organizational policy and mandates
Significant	Agenda/politics
Important	Existing executive priorities and media coverage
Relevant	Public outcry
Potentially relevant	Adjacent fusion center influence
Limited impact	Funding
Considered	Federal requirements and current resources
Noted	Pressures from external advocacy groups/organizations

*Note.* Ratings of cross-cutting, significance, and importance represent values greater than a majority of participants.

***Perceptions of problems/threats.*** Perceptions of threats or problem areas are one of the main factors that were found to influence integration. The problem stream is one of the central influential tenants of the MSF. Kingdon (2003) explained that this stream stems from “a mismatch between the observed conditions and one’s conception of an ideal state...” (p. 110). This explanation was useful in understanding influential markers

for the Network.

The only three cross-cutting values, highlighted previously in table 16, that all participants indicated as elements that influence fusion center direction, are associated with the MSF problem stream. Crisis incidents and emergency situations were noted as one of these top-level influential factors. This item was generally described as concerning events that require, as one participant stated, “all hands on deck.” These events, which could range from an active shooter situation to reporting of an imminent threat of an attack, were of major significance to fusion center staff. Senior executives and partner organizations alike are perceived as relying on the fusion center to properly assess and characterize the event to inform decision making executed by stakeholders. This factor was claimed by several participants as a challenge to a fusion centers operations and longer range focus on strategic issues.

Also within the problem stream scenario is perceptions of shortfalls in procedure and/or capability. After action review or other evaluation of fusion center activity that results in what is viewed as an area where significant improvement was claimed to influence a fusion center’s operations. In cases of sub-standard response, legal challenges from external entities, and/or simple perception of the lack of a capability policy, priorities, and even resources, were described as being adjusted to address the issues.

Another element related to the problem stream was assessed as having an association to reporting, requests, and responses from partner organizations. One senior intelligence analyst noted, and several other participants similarly stated, that fusion

center operations and direction is heavily influenced by this factor. Increased reporting and responses on a specific topic area from state and local partners often causes a higher level of attention to be paid in a certain area. Likewise, an uptick in requests for information concerning a particular item was cited as influencing focus and even policy.

*Perceptions about primary customer.* The second overall theme identified through data analysis concerns fusion center staff perceptions about which customers or stakeholders they are most responsible to. All participants mentioned during the interviews that one of the primary work functions of a fusion center deals with the sharing of information to partners that included private sector entities, federal agencies, and to some extent, the public. In spite of this, responses from all participants directly and indirectly indicated that state and local organizations were widely viewed as the primary consumer that the fusion centers were charged with providing services to. To be more specific, and likely related to mission responsibilities that are most closely aligned to criminal investigations and investigative support, state and local law enforcement agency needs were assessed as the priority customer group. This was based on the frequency of participant response which had references to law enforcement agencies specifically, and a general description of what they viewed as the direction of their activities and work functions.

Priority alignment directed towards state and local needs sits within the construct of all three streams of the MSF. As mentioned above, partner needs fall within the problem stream, but elements of that can also be described as bumping against the political and policy streams. Participant statements included comments about state and

local agency pressures and expressions for support directed towards senior executives in the state. These pressures can be considered to translate into political goals and/or posturing that subsequently results top-down emphasis on topics that the fusion center is then expected to address.

Other areas noted by more than half of the respondents, that are considered part of the political stream, concerned the influence of media coverage/attention and public outcry. Kingdon (2003) explained how perceptions about public opinion are often used to promote political agendas and restrain other ideas from gaining prominence. One analyst described how this phenomenon has impacted her fusion center

I think they (media) have a big influence. Whether it is what happens in the media like the officer involved shootings because there was an increase in them but the media paid so much attention to them I think this caused the leadership to want us to focus on it. You know, get involved with those kinds of situations.

While respondents did not necessarily have a vantage point to specifically articulate political aims nor detail individual decision points for senior executives, they described examples of how priorities have changed and evolved over time. Individuals from Fusion Center C explained how this has led to increases in staffing which has focused on specific topical areas in the past. Individuals representing two fusion centers explained that the increased focus on other areas was also linked to candidate narratives, platforms, and/or promises and were assessed to eventually result in the creation of new sections focusing on those topics. In each case, these items were angled towards issues perceived as state and local specific concerns that could support national security, but

were not necessarily driven by the national security strategy or federal priorities. It is important to note that while political agendas were cited by participants as influencers, not all of these were necessarily viewed by participants as irrelevant priorities.

*Perceptions about existing organizational mandates and existing policy.* The third theme resides squarely within the MSF's policy stream. Kingdon (2003) explained that adjustments to or creation of new policy requires that the proposal be considered technically feasible, acceptable within the organization, within a tolerable cost range, and considered to have a reasonable chance of receptivity amongst decision makers. This policy stream also relies on alignment with the other two streams. In other words, all relevant decision makers would essentially be required to agree to the assessment of the problem or issue; this issue would have to be in support of or at least not take away from the political agenda, and be considered technically possible at a reasonable resource or budgetary cost level.

All but one participant made repeated references to organizational mandates, policy constraints, and statutory requirements as heavily influencing fusion center policies, direction, and focus. Similarly, 10 out of 13 participants also commented that existing organizational policies and jurisdictional constraints have a direct influence on their fusion center's integration with the national security strategy. Tables 16 and 19 previously highlighted these value ratings in this chapter.

As described by a few individuals from fusion center B, there have been significant efforts to support antihuman trafficking initiatives. They described that initially this topic was not necessarily viewed as a central problem in the state by senior

executives. Eventually this was assessed by individuals to be a greater threat than originally thought and was influenced by increased official reporting on the subject coupled with additional media coverage and reporting from nongovernment organizations. Efforts were taken to increase focus in this area by the fusion center, but were quickly stymied because of existing policy and jurisdictional statute limitations. After assessing the technical details of the implications of policy change, they are currently awaiting the right opportunity to adjust organizational authorities in support of this initiative. This description is reflective of the policy window concept described in MSF. The alignment of the three streams provides the opportunity for the advancement of policy and focus adjustment, but Kingdon (2003) explained that there exists a capacity limit for change in the system at a given time.

In another case, personnel from two fusion centers also described limitations that were related to their agency's jurisdictional constraints that impacted their ability to shift priorities or led to work in certain topical areas. Fusion Center B and C staff described their executive agency as being a supporting agency. This means that in many mission areas they were limited in their ability to orient against certain topics of interest unless they were formally requested by a state and local organization. One senior intelligence analyst succinctly described the practical impact "...because by law (organizational name purposely redacted) is considered an assisting agency so we don't get involved in anything unless it is at the request of a local jurisdiction, a district attorney, or the governor's office." In those instances this was described as being a case by case decision. These restraints were built into the statutes that put their organization into

existence and could cause political turmoil should they be viewed as attempting to overstep their authorities.

### **Research Question 2**

As mentioned earlier in the results section, there were many overlapping concepts between RQ 1 and 2. Items already noted in the RQ 1 results that apply here will be highlighted, but not further detailed due to redundancy. Like that of RQ 1, elements identified in this subsection also reflect factors described in the MSF. The relevance of findings in the context of the MSF for RQ 2 as well as 1 and 3 will be further discussed in the interpretation of findings section in Chapter 5.

The three significant themes viewed as barriers to integration with the NSS were determined based on values noted by greater than 75% of the study participants. These items centered on misalignment of priorities, ineffective marketing of the NSS, and jurisdictional factors such as mandates, statutes, policy, and procedure. Other items assessed to be pertinent to the study, but not as weighty as the aforementioned factors concerned resources, territorialism, funding, NSS metrics, and training on the NSS. These elements registered responses ranging from 46% down to 23% respectively. Raw totals and complete break-out was provided in table 19 earlier in this chapter. Table 21 below highlights the significance ratings of barriers to integration.



Table 21

*Barriers to integration*

<u>Relative value rating</u>	<u>Barriers</u>
Very significant	Misalignment of Priorities
Significant	Ineffective marketing, communications, messaging on NSS and policy, mandates, and jurisdictional factors
Important	Limited resources and organizational responsibilities/lanes in the road
Relevant	Budget constraints and lack of defined direction/metrics
Potentially relevant	Training needs

*Note.* Ratings of very significant and significant represent values greater than a majority of participants.

***Misalignment of priorities.*** The most significant barrier to integration was perceived to be a misalignment of priorities between the NSS and participating fusion center priorities. NSS was generally viewed as focusing on very strategic goals and objectives that were not necessarily discernible or were seen as not always directly related to regular mission functions of fusion centers. This opinion is likely related to figures represented earlier in table 14 where approximately 85% of the participants felt that fusion centers had a small role in contributing to the NSS itself. One leadership participant felt that the fusion center made mostly small contributions even though the center had the potential of having more significance, and another thought that they did in fact have a large impact.

The discrepant case with a view of positive significance felt that his fusion center contributed to the NSS by way of investigative and analytical support to requests for service, resources, and information from federal organizations. The participant explained how fusion centers act as a conduit of information for the federal government and are able to gather and disseminate granular information that would not be otherwise obtainable by federal agencies. In essence, this individual felt that the Network was a necessary link for vital information that the federal government requires to execute its mission concerning national security.

Related to the above findings and explained earlier in the study, table 15 highlighted that 12 out of 13 participants felt that a fusion center should focus on state and local priorities. Various reasons were explained for this ranging from senior executive focus on the protection of the state to service responsibilities to state and local organizations. One federal representative explained that even though the misalignment of priorities presented barriers to integration, he felt that some of the fusion center focus areas were supportive of at least some objectives of the NSS:

The fusion centers understand that they have different focus areas (from the NSS), but the fusion center supports the NSS on a small scale, not that most of their mission supports the NSS, but what they do does strengthen the national homeland security efforts and combating the threat of terrorism from abroad and internal.

Similarly, a leadership participant explained his view that fusion centers have different priorities, but they do have some supportive elements to the NSS:

We are looking at (state name purposely redacted), but I think we can complement each other. So we have our goals and focus, but it will bleed into focus and mission on the federal level. Our priorities are going to be different than the national security strategy, but in the long run they seem to help each other.

An alternative point to this perspective was provided by a senior intelligence analyst who cautioned about what she felt was too heavy of a focus on state and local priorities. She expressed concern that while state and local focus was beneficial to their sub-federal stakeholders and allowed the fusion center to be a reliable asset for those in her state the focus also presented some strategic challenges for fusion center efforts to tackle issues of terrorism:

We are starting to get bogged down in daily crime that maybe we shouldn't be and we should maybe be using all of these people more for what they (fusion centers) were designed for, which was counterterrorism. When you start getting involved in these crimes for the locals you get farther away from that and things could get missed. You get bogged down in that which maybe shouldn't be handled by the fusion center...

Another challenge to adjusting priorities to be more centered on NSS concerns service to the state itself. As mentioned previously, the primary customer for the Network is seen as being state and local organizations. These entities are viewed as external life blood for the fusion centers. These organizations are often the entities that provide the raw incident data to the Network, are more integrated with their specific

communities, and most often ask fusion centers for direct and indirect support. A change in priorities towards NSS centric items was viewed in some cases as incompatible with the requirements of these primary customers. One analyst stated “Every state is so different that to implement one size fits all won’t work in every state.” She further explained some of the differences between neighboring states and how certain threat topics had more of a negative impact in some communities or states than others.

Judging from participant responses, it is evident that fusion center priorities are most aligned with items that consist of state and local requirements. Concern over losing partnership, perceived irrelevancy, state executive focus areas, and feeling like they would be turning their back on their primary customers confounds this issue. While many state and local priorities are supportive of the NSS, this diverted approach provides less of an opportunity for direct support to the NSS. In many cases, it was described that the volume of requests and information coming in concerning state and local priority items dwarfs that of items with a national security nexus.

The different angles of focus concerning NSS goals and objectives as compared to participant fusion center priorities could present a challenge to seamless integration between the Network and the U.S. Government in regards to overall security. While it was acknowledged by some participants that fusion centers are supportive of national security efforts through many of their actions focusing on traditional criminal activities, any areas that can be assessed as disjointed could present gaps in security coverage. Alignment of priorities would close these gaps, but are perceived as potentially

presenting a risk to partner engagement thereby reducing the amount of raw information coming into the center.

*Marketing, communications, messaging of the NSS.* Another factor discovered that was assessed to have created a potential barrier to further integration of the Network dealt with aspects of marketing for, communications on, and messaging of the NSS. Participant responses generally indicated an awareness of the overarching premise of the NSS. However, approximately 77% of the responses indicated feelings that they were not confident that they had a complete understanding of all of the NSS objectives that they could directly support. One intelligence analyst's comment explained this lack of understanding, but felt that it could be overcome when she stated "I would think that if we know what the priorities were for the national security strategy we might be able to change and affiliate our partners on information collection along them."

Some responses indicated that the litany of federal programs, initiatives, and ideas for pilot programs to address national level issues, was overwhelming. The constant roll out of new initiatives and changing priorities has created chaos and information overload that does not appear to be effectively messaging the core areas that fusion centers should engage. An intelligence analyst described confusion in this area and claimed "there is not a national consensus about what your fusion center needs to do now." One individual in a leadership position described competing messages, perceptions of duplicative initiatives and recommended consolidation of programs and priorities:

I think there are too many programs, when I see all the e-mails, programs, and brochures I get to a point where I get frustrated. Let's get to a point to what it

(NSS priorities) should be and let's focus on it. (The federal government) has a ton of programs out there. I wonder if...someone could take a look at all the different programs and just narrow it down.

Other themes that emerged during the interviews concerned defining metrics and associated training for staff concerning elements of the NSS. These items were assessed to be subordinate to the marketing, communications, and metrics elements described in this section. Four individuals referenced that a lack of defined metrics for activities that were viewed as demonstrating alignment with the NSS complicates integration. Three individuals commented that beyond or as a part of NSS marketing, training for fusion center staff would help individuals gain an understanding of expectations and best practices that are supportive of NSS. One participant aptly explained this perception and further explained that more defined metrics and training concerning the NSS would be supportive of integration and efficiencies:

I don't think everyone is jumping off of the same platform or the same diving platform and I think that that would help as far as consistency between agencies and what to expect from other fusion centers and that would help federal agencies because you would be getting the same information from all fusion centers then.

***Mandates, and jurisdictional factors.*** Mandates and jurisdictional factors, which include policies, statutes, law, and other formal requirements, were mentioned as impactful to and potentially presenting barriers to integration by 77% of respondents. These items falling squarely within the policy stream of the MSF were understood as concrete elements that sometimes did not provide fusion centers to move in a certain

direction. The impact of these factors was described at length earlier in the RQ 1 section of this chapter.

***Organizational responsibilities/lanes in the road.*** All participants explained that the Network relies on individual and organizational relationships, and thrives due to those connections. Each interviewee made numerous references to terms and phrases related to these associations such as “partnerships,” “collaboration,” “joint operations,” “interagency participation,” and other related terms. Relationship factors that were further described in Table 13 consisted of some of the items that were deemed influential to relationships in this discipline such as frequency of contact, truthfulness, collaborative work tasks, priorities, territory, personnel changes, and even access to levels of information. Of the items that were identified as influencing relationships, organizational responsibilities or perceptions of lanes in the road for different agencies were assessed to be a potential barrier for integration. They may have even created a first class and second class citizen perception with regards to the U.S. intelligence community and the Network.

One senior intelligence analyst described the perception that some topics are viewed as being owned by federal agencies so fusion centers may sometimes decrease the activities in an area perceived to be outside of their mandate. Terrorism is one example of this where many have viewed this issue as owned solely by the JTTF and to a slightly lesser extent, the FBI and the DHS. She stated, “I feel we kind of get away from it (terrorism)...I would like to get into the terrorism realm, but then we are just making a separate JTTF at that point. Both would be serving the same role.”

One federal representative explained that this issue is exacerbated by other issues dealing with territorialism from federal organizations at times. He further described how at times, efforts to limit fusion center access to information holdings presents a barrier to integration:

...they (fusion center staff) are told you can't see this, you can't do that, you don't need this. People get tired of getting told what they can and can't have by the feds. There is still issues with integration, the fusion centers across the country are not really the intelligence community. Why can't they be a part of the intelligence community when they are contributing to it?

***Resources and budgets relationships.*** Six individuals indicated that lack of resources present a barrier to integration and four participants highlighted funding as additional challenges. Budgets were also referenced by four individuals. These two themes were assessed as being related to one another as funding potentially permits the acquisition of additional resources. Similar to issues expressed in other studies reviewed in Chapter 2, participants described at different points the overall challenges presented by limited funding, assets, and staff. While also explaining challenges related to focusing the direction of the fusion center, one leadership participant felt concerned that the center's resources and budgets were being stretched too thin:

We get pulled in every direction when it comes to training, investigations, and initiatives. It seems as if we are getting yanked in every direction. My goal would be to focus in on a couple of those and become good at it.



One investigator discussed the challenges experienced by fusion centers concerning funding and resources as well. He felt that fusion centers struggled with not having a defined budget year to year, which challenged fusion center staff's ability to plan strategically and implement certain initiatives

...it is budgets, because you can't control it...obviously we are grant funded, salaries paid by the agency, but all the training, other resources, and the ability to do what we do comes from the grant. My solution would be we need to have some type of line item budget from the agency administering it in order for us to do the things that we do.

### **Research Question 3**

Chapter 2 highlighted the discourse that has surrounded the Network. There have been many concerns and criticisms voiced about fusion centers that have ranged from questions of legality of operations to concerns that the Network was not supporting missions like counterterrorism, which is what was viewed as the original intent of fusion centers. RQ 3 sought to gain a better understanding of contributing factors to these opinions from the perspective of Network staff. This study found that a few factors were viewed as being most impactful to how fusion centers are viewed, which were related to education and awareness, transparency and openness, and political agendas. As with the factors described in the RQ 1 sections, these elements have overlapping aspects as well. National mood/public sentiment and organizational reputation were assessed to actually be subordinate to some of the elements. Differing priorities were discussed by one individual from the intelligence analysts and investigators category. While this was not

ultimately assessed to be an influential factor to fusion center criticisms, he pointed out that shifting priorities sometimes puts entities at odds with one another. Table 22 highlights items that were assessed to be influential to criticisms voiced about the Network.

Table 22

*Influencers of fusion center criticisms*

<u>Position</u>	<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Federal representatives</u>	<u>Senior intelligence analysts</u>	<u>Intelligence analysts and investigators</u>	<u>Raw count</u>
Awareness and education	<b>3</b>	2	2	<b>4</b>	11
Political agenda	1	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	2	9
Transparency/openness	2	1	<b>3</b>	2	8
Organizational reputation	1	1	2	2	4
National mood/public sentiment	1				1
Differing priorities				2	2

*Note.* Bold fields indicate complete value alignment between given position. The agreed upon values consisting of all individuals in a fusion center were site B and C for awareness and education.

***Education and awareness.*** Eleven study participants expressed that they were not sure if many external organizations as well as the general public had a high-level of awareness on fusion centers and the Network itself. In some cases, respondent comments included references to decision makers, such as those in the state's legislature. The need for increased education and marketing of fusion centers across both public and private sectors was a common sentiment amongst participants. All participants from fusion

centers B and C discussed aspects of awareness and education as having some form of effect on external perceptions of a fusion center.

Some participants believed that opinions about fusion centers were thought to have been impacted by a lack of understanding about the organizations themselves and how they fit into the public safety strategy for the state as well as the broader national security strategy. One participant in a leadership position made this point in his comments:

The ones that really understand who we are and what we are about (view the fusion center) very positively. But there are others out there, external agencies that if you ask them what the (name of fusion center redacted for privacy protection purposes) is about they really don't know, don't get it, don't understand...

One senior intelligence analyst mentioned that the legislative body had a limited understanding of her fusion center's operations and how it contributes to security in the state. She further commented:

So even people that are making policy that governs the (name of fusion center redacted for privacy protection purposes) don't really know what we do, so the public is not going to understand what we do. I think it is that air of mystery that is not doing us any favors.

This is problematic for the Network that relies on partner organizations for information. As stated in the RQ 1 results, fusion centers also view these same organizations as those it is supposed to provide services to. Decision makers such as

legislative bodies directly affect funding and allocation of resources to fusion centers.

Non-government organizations and the general public also need to understand these organizations and how they provide services concerning public safety for the citizenry in order to have any sort of confidence in the Network itself.

Subordinate to awareness and education, but related to this element concerns organizational reputation. Four participants mentioned how reputation can positively and negatively influence perceptions of the fusion center. Three of the four respondents were from Fusion Center C. Discussion points from these individuals centered on previous organizational relationships with the fusion center and that center's executive agency. In some cases these relationships negatively influenced the way some organizations were willing to deal with the fusion center. In other instances, past experiences were viewed as positively supporting the image of that fusion center.

One federal representative refuted the premise that lack of awareness was a contributor to negative opinions about fusion centers. He stated, "I think there has been enough education on fusion centers..." and further offered his opinion that political agendas are more of a significant driver, which will be further discussed in the next segment. He felt that fusion centers have went to great extents to brief and educate the masses on Network operations some of the most vocal opponents however, are well aware of the Network operations.

***Political agendas.*** Politics was thought to play a role in perceptions about fusion centers, to at least some degree. Nine participants noted this with all federal representatives and senior intelligence analysts affirming an opinion in this regard. One

federal representative felt that beyond awareness and transparency, some factors driving criticisms about fusion centers were tied to agenda driven motivations. He stated, “They (privacy organizations) think that fusion centers are spy agencies that violate people’s constitutional rights...in my opinion, it is blatant politics and agenda driven.” A senior intelligence analyst alluded to this when discussing her portrayal of media coverage of items concerning law enforcement and intelligence matters. She stated that some media stories were misleading and painted a negative picture of the Network leading to increased scrutiny of fusion center operations.

Other examples illustrating this concept included direct legislative influence and accusations of bogus generation of articles concerning the Network. One leadership participant explained that some advocacy organizations have been involved with lobbying against some of the principles of the fusion center concept. He explained that, in some cases, there has been an environment created with state legislatures where there is a view that it is too politically risky to publically support fusion centers. In another example, one participant discussed articles discussing fusion centers in a negative light where points and accusations were made about the Network even when he believed that the author knew otherwise.

Subordinate to this element was national mood or public sentiment. This was viewed as one of the drivers identified by Kingdon (2003) as an influencer of the political stream. One participant explained that fusion centers and government in general has been losing badly in the public relations realm:

Maybe some of this is the strange dynamic in the mood of the country, organizations like fusion centers, law enforcement, and emergency operations centers are looked at with so much skepticism. I don't know if this is fallout from the Snowden or Manning stuff but all of a sudden you can't trust the government anymore.

Public opinion, national mood, and media coverage was viewed as potentially influencing and even driving executive agendas. These items, when focused on law enforcement or intelligence activities, were perceived as coloring the view of fusion centers and operations in general. Even when limited information about the Network was available to the general public, perceptions about fusion centers were viewed as slanted in a negative manner by many organizations and individuals who were potentially unfamiliar with their activities except through negative coverage of missteps and general privacy concerns.

***Transparency and openness.*** The concept of government accountability through transparency was recognized by eight participants as an item that has contributed to much of the angst and concern expressed by external entities. This was especially the case with advocacy groups, but government entities were mentioned as well. In many cases there was a feeling that fusion centers were involved in operations and activities that were not legally sanctioned. The perceived view seems to be that fusion centers were involved in the execution of broader functions that are normally associated with clandestine intelligence community operations. One senior intelligence analyst described:

When you are dealing with the private organizations, I think some of them, and not to be specific about one private org or groups, I think sometimes they think we are a clearing house for everything and monitoring like a big brother syndrome type thing. I think the majority of external entities think the fusion centers are viable, but you will have organizations that think they are big brother and monitoring stuff.

Another senior intelligence analyst explained how limited information on fusion center operations could contribute to erroneous assumptions about the Network and potentially lead to false narratives on fusion centers:

They (public) don't know what we do on a regular basis, they don't know that we work investigations, but at the same time I can understand about how that lack of knowledge could contribute to some, like conspiracy theories if they only have their own thoughts on what goes on.

At the same time, issues of transparency were viewed by one participant as a result of unreasonable expectations. One leadership respondent discussed what he perceived to be unrealistic expectations for information on items that require operational security to ensure the integrity of investigations:

(Individuals) feels entitled that they should know everything. The idea of transparency is good in some cases, but we need to be able to do cases without telling everybody everything that we do. I think that is perceived by some as sneaky but we cannot operate effectively by telling everyone what we do all the time. I attribute it the world with all the information out there (referring to societal

expectations in the information and social media age), but some things need to be confidential and most don't understand that.

Regardless the personal view of how transparent and open a fusion center should be, a wide majority of study participants responded in a manner that acknowledged that this element contributes to views of the Network. In most references to this element, individuals thought that greater levels of transparency would curb negative opinions of fusion centers. In one case, a senior intelligence analyst voiced this same opinion, but also explained that greater transparency could also open up the fusion center for targeting by advocacy groups or other entities that she thought would otherwise focus on the closure of the Network.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 4, I discussed covered in-depth a variety of items related to execution of this research study concerning the Network. The setting of the study was further described and detailed the breakout of participant demographics to include descriptions of the participating fusion centers. The collection process itself was explained to highlight the circumstances and environmental factors in support of evaluation of the study itself. Data analysis procedures and processes were also offered, coupled with illustrative tables, to bring into view participant responses for the interview questions. Evidence of trustworthiness was provided for reader assessment of the applicability of study to the Network or other topic area.

This chapter culminated with the results section that attempted to further refine data collected and was subsequently presented in the data analysis section. Data were



further grouped and analyzed for relevance to the central research questions for the study. RQ 1 attempted to identify and understand factors that influence Network integration. This study determined that a blend of perceptions of problems and threat vectors, views of primary customer set, and existing mandates and policies, were influencing the Network's integration. RQ 2 was angled toward determining elements that are presenting barriers to that integration. Aspects concerning the misalignment of priorities, ineffective marketing concerning the NSS, existing mandates and policies, perceptions about organizational responsibilities, as well as budget and resource shortfalls, were presenting challenges to the Network's integration. RQ 3 was centered on understanding variables that may contribute to negative perceptions about fusion centers. Perceptions about the Network was influenced by a general lack of awareness of fusion centers roles and functions, views of transparency in operations, and political agendas.

In the final chapter of this study, I will provide discussion topics and conclusions for the study. In Chapter 5, I will offer an interpretation of study findings and tie in the foundational framework for the study. Study limitations and implications will also be presented along with recommendations for the Network.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Fusion centers were primarily established in the early 2000s in response to the devastating attacks against the US on 9/11 (Klem, 2016). These organizations were grassroots efforts by SLTT organizations to address security, intelligence, and information sharing gaps (DHS, 2016b). These gaps were attributed to allowing al-Qaeda operatives to successfully carry out one of the most significant terrorist attacks to date (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). The 79 fusion centers collectively banded together to form a network comprised of individuals from all levels of government and across various disciplines who were charged with strengthening the security of the homeland (DHS, 2016b). A decade plus since their inception, in studies and articles, researchers have criticized and questioned aspects of Network operations suggesting that there are fissures concerning the integration of the Network with the NSS.

In this qualitative study, using a phenomenological approach, I attempted to identify and understand elements that are impacting this integration. In this study I sought to understand the elements that influence Network integration. This was executed through an attempt to identify barriers that presented challenges to integration, and to discover what is causing negative perceptions of the fusion centers.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Fusion centers sit at a point that is representative of some complicated intersections concerning levels of government, varied disciplines, and even between sectors. Organizationally these entities are hybrids by design, comprised of individuals

representing different levels of government, various disciplines, and in some cases, private sector organizations. This composition constitutes one of the greatest potential capability strengths of the Network, but with it comes challenges for the organization. Some of these complications are tied to the Network's diverse customer base with a wide set of individual information requirements. Others are associated with the difficulty in managing relationships with such an array of different partners. Differing priorities, agendas, and mandates have contributed to criticisms voiced about fusion centers and also represent some of the influencers of the Network's integration with broader national security objectives.

### **Extension of the Field of Knowledge Concerning the Network**

In this study, I aimed to advance the body of work focused on the Network and U.S. domestic intelligence. This was accomplished through the further identification and increased understanding of elements that appear to be influencing fusion center operations, relationships, and direction. My findings from this research confirmed some suppositions made in prior scholarly work in this arena, and in a few cases, refuted such. This results of this study also presented some new concepts that have not necessarily been identified as factors impacting the Network in prior works.

**Confirming concepts.** I found perceptions of transparency concerning fusion center operations to be a relevant factor that is associated with many negative perceptions of the Network. Prior works have described how the general concern about intelligence operations, coupled with operational security, has led to concerns that fusion centers were viewed as unlawfully carrying out their work tasks or doing so in a manner without

adequate oversight (Price, 2013). Walby (2012) suggested that limited information about fusion elements has brought into question fusion center's legal authorities. Carter et al. (2016) expressed concern over the external view that Network accountability is only through self-reporting. As stated in the findings for this study, openness and transparency was noted by participants to be a factor in perceptions.

Another confirming concept related to findings that fusion centers were increasingly oriented away from terrorism. Coffey (2015) noted many elements in the Network were engaged in operations related to traditional law enforcement issues. Regan and Monahan (2013) reported the same and offered the possibility that this trend was related to the volume and types of information received by fusion centers. In this study, responses from participants from the three represented fusion centers confirmed this migration away from terrorism into the all crimes realm. With the results of this study, I was able to build on this by furthering the understanding of the reason for this trend, which was linked to reporting volume, customer requirements, organizational priorities, and agency policy.

Budgets, information access, and relationships have been noted as items that could potentially be impacting information sharing effectiveness and efficiency (Vidal, 2013). While in this study I did not attempt to measure performance or effectiveness, participant responses helped establish similar findings in this realm that were related to integration. As I mentioned previously in Chapter 4, perceptions of organizational responsibilities, resources, and relationships were noted as items that sometimes present barriers to integration.

***Disconfirming concepts.*** Gosz's (2015) study of fusion centers suggested that different management structures and leadership practices have caused integration issues with the Network. Participants in this study provided data that suggested there were perceptions of a high level of integration between fusion centers. Much of this was based on partnerships on initiatives, joint production of intelligence products, and regular routine contact between individuals and organizations. Additionally, neither management styles nor structure were perceived by participants to be an influencer of integration.

***Original concepts.*** The original concepts presented in this study highlighted some of the reasons provided by other researchers that were determined to be influential factors to integration. Perceptions of problem areas, existing policy, and political agenda for fusion centers have been noted in other studies and research concerning various topics such as generalized public policy (Kingdon, 2003). Kingdon (2003) wrote extensively on policy agenda setting, which relied heavily on these concepts. That said, I was unable to find scholarly research on the Network that presented findings in this area.

Another new concept in the area of fusion center research that was introduced in this study dealt with how an organization's perception of their primary customer can influence operations both positively and negatively. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, there was an overwhelming response by the participant field indicating that their primary customer was state and local entities. In this study, I found that this directly influenced the direction, policies, and the work tasks of the fusion center ultimately influencing the fusion center's integration with the NSS.

### **Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) Relevance**

Kingdon's (2003) MSF served as one of the backbone supporting concepts for this research. I used this framework as a lens to interpret the results of the study through. Prior to this, I used the MSF to aid in shaping the interview protocol used for data collection. The results of this study were found to be related to the central tenets of the framework, which suggests that concepts of the MSF could be used to aid in developing a greater understanding about the Network. Authors of future studies attempting to further identify and refine factors that influence fusion centers could consider continued use of the MSF for a framework for their research.

The high-level elements I identified and detailed in the RQ1 portion of the results section centered on perceptions about problems and/or threats, primary customer set, and mandates and policies. The problem/threat concept falls squarely within what Kingdon (2003) described as the problem stream. Like that described in the MSF, fusion center staff explained how matters related to mismanagement, emerging issues, and missteps gained significance and consequently influenced decision making in the organization. I assessed the perceptions about the fusion center's primary customer base to actually have intersections of elements of the political, policy, and problem streams. Existing mandates, statutes, and policies discussed here were best described as residing in the policy stream.

RQ2 results included ineffective marketing, mandate and policy restrictions, perceptions of organizational responsibilities, and limited resources/budgets. I assessed marketing issues to be most related to the political stream due to concepts that involve

consensus building and engagement. Mandates and policies were again related directed to the policy stream. Perceptions of organizational responsibility contained elements of the political, policy, and problem streams. Budget and resource limitations fell within Kingdon's (2003) descriptions of factors involved in the problem stream. The overarching items described in the results for RQ3 dealt with fusion center awareness (deemed part of the political stream), transparency (viewed as having traits of all three streams), and politics and agenda (identified as part of the political stream).

Participant responses suggested that when there was alignment of the three streams, change was likely to be imminent in the organization. A simplistic example of how the MSF appeared to be reflected in the reality of fusion centers concerned the identification of a domestic organization in a jurisdiction that a fusion center may not have an existing primary focus on. In the case of an attack, as noted by respondents when describing crisis events, media coverage and public outcry would stimulate interest in the event. This event would sensitize the political stream and likely the problem stream but would not necessarily result in an operational change. Evaluation of response and actions during the crisis would be executed if it was determined that there was a shortcoming in the organization's approach. The collective view of an operational gap or inadequacy would certainly fall within the problem stream. As participants explained in their examples of the introduction of policy, staff members would likely offer a proposal suggesting resolution to a similar issue in the future, introducing the policy stream. The coupling of these streams via the attack, the outcry, and the resolution creates a policy window that increases the likelihood of the adoption or change of policy.

The overall relevance of this illustration to the integration of the Network is clear. MSF can potentially describe concepts that explain the drivers for change within the Network. If integration between the Network and the NSS is deemed a goal that can bring additional value to homeland security, then efforts targeting different aspects that are part of each of the streams could create a path forward in this direction.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While with this study I attempted to expand the knowledge in the field of study on the Network and domestic intelligence operations as a whole, I identified several limitations during the planning and execution phases of this research. These limitations were related to the sample size and other variables concerning the representation of the population writ large. Other limitations stemmed from the scope of the study itself as well as the collection procedures employed during the interviews.

The study centered on assessing the aspects of integration at the Network-level, which currently represents 79 fusion centers. The participants represented only three fusion centers out of this array of organizations. On its face, this limited representation challenges any argument that this research can be generalized across the entire Network for this very reason. Focus on a specific center or even comparison of a couple of centers would have likely resulted in findings that were more detailed and provided a richer contrast between those concerned centers. In this study, I highlighted some elements of comparison, and when applicable to this angle of inquiry, highlighted details on noted distinctions.



The participating fusion centers also had similarities between them that do not represent the entire spectrum of entities that comprises the Network as well. Each center was identified as the primary center for its state. As mentioned previously in the manuscript and listed in Appendices C and D, there are two defined categories of fusion centers. Category 1, primary centers, consist of fusion centers that are identified as the principle fusion center for their state as designated by the chief executive. Category 2, recognized centers, consist of other centers based within that state or territory. Both are required to meet the same baseline capabilities as described in the founding documents and guidelines fully described in Chapter 2. In a vast majority of the cases, primary fusion centers are owned and operated by state-level agencies as was the case with the centers participating in this study.

All three fusion centers' executive agencies were state law enforcement organizations. Fusion Center A was billed as being codirected by a state emergency management organization, but it was described that day to day operations were essentially directed by the state law enforcement entity. Not all fusion centers in the Network are run by state law enforcement organizations; some have multiple agencies providing day to day oversight (beyond governance board guidance and direction). Some centers are directed by municipal government organizations, as is the case with many of those falling under the recognized center category.

These three fusion centers each had the same overall mission focus bend as described by participants. As stated previously, participants indicated that their fusion center is each best described as having an all crimes focus. There are other centers within

the Network that would describe themselves as falling closer to the all terrorism and the all hazards sides of the spectrum in some cases.

The participating centers each also had roughly the same amount of personnel working inside their primary facility on a day to day basis. Participants from Fusion Centers A, B, and C coincidentally described their daily internal strength (not counting detailed personnel or liaison networks) as being around 30+ individuals. Some centers in the Network have daily participation ranging from below 10 individuals to 100+ staff members.

Participants in the study each had direct or partial organizational links to the law enforcement discipline. While officers and civilians working for law enforcement agencies represent a vast majority of the staff members for the Network, other disciplines exist. There were no participants that represented non-traditional partner disciplines such as the fire service, public health, emergency management, corrections, or agriculture, for example. These individuals may have different perspectives than those represented by the study's participants. There were also no local, tribal, or territorial participants represented in the population.

There were other limitations related to some of the methodological, personal, and procedural aspects of this study. While I assessed that data saturation for this study was achieved early on in the interview process, 13 individuals should not be considered an amount of participants that can be generalized across almost 3,000 people that comprise the Network. Other perceptions, perspectives, and experiences were likely not represented in this study. Snowball sampling techniques that rely on referrals from

potential participants presented risks as well. Participant selections likely did not represent all relevant culture groups or other pockets of individuals that may have had different experiences in the Network.

Data dependability and the study's findings could also be questioned on the basis of subjective analysis of the researcher. While attempts were made to mitigate such, researcher bias and past experiences could be viewed as having the potential to influence findings and analysis. Individual interview responses could have also been altered intentionally or subconsciously out of fear of reprisal, embarrassment, and/or lack of knowledge on some concepts. Other situations not known to me could have influenced partner responses.

The biggest procedural issue that could be described as presenting a limitation concerned some of the collection methods. While every opportunity was sought to conduct in-person interviews with participants, many factors challenged accomplishment in this area. Some interviews were conducted telephonically due to scheduling conflicts, availability, and resource constraints. Telephonic collection could be viewed as presenting challenges for the researcher by limiting the collection of observational cues such as body language and general demeanor of the participants. Member checking procedures and back-briefs were two tools used to negate these potential negative impacts to the interpretation of the data.

### **Recommendations**

The central driver for this study aimed to identify and understand items that may be influencing the integration of the Network with the NSS. The findings from this

research study on the Network noted several concepts that were gleaned from fusion center staff's responses to interview questions. These questions were angled towards the collection of information concerning participants' perceptions of factors that could be considered influencers on this integration. The study findings resulted in the identification of relevant elements and helped to give an understanding of why and how these items were impacting the Network. These findings aided in the development of several recommendations for the Network, policy-makers, and those federal agencies who are involved with domestic national security responsibilities.

#### **Develop a Strategic Communications Plan for the National Security Strategy (NSS)**

As discussed in Chapter 4, many respondents claimed that beyond a very strategic level of awareness, specific tasks and opportunities to directly support the NSS were beyond their vantage point at the current time. One intelligence analyst aptly described this feeling when he stated, "I would say it is very hazy, walking in a fog, we are just not at that level." This statement represents the lack of effectiveness of current marketing efforts for the NSS. Lack of awareness is a solvable problem with a requisite level of resource and time investment.

If decision makers are concerned about the varied focus areas of individual fusion centers in the Network, strategic planning should be considered to develop a more robust program. This program should consider how existing marketing practices could be enhanced. Training and education courses that attempt to explain the NSS and highlight how specific fusion center capabilities could be leveraged to support defined gaps in the U.S. domestic national security portfolio. Regular communications about the NSS that

involves methods beyond e-mails such as telephonic, in-person, webinars, and even video teleconferencing would also mitigate this lack of awareness. Engagements should target different levels of staff ranging from junior analysts to senior executives in the state.

### **Engagement with External Parties**

Similar to the development of a communications plan for the NSS targeting membership within the Network, fusion centers need to consider prioritizing engagement with external parties and stakeholders. This process should focus on educating these parties on fusion center operations and how the Network currently supports, and can continue to support, a wide array of requirements. An explanation about how fusion centers are similar and different from organizations such as adjacent law enforcement agencies, JTTFs, or even other federal organizations such as the FBI and DHS would be another element of this engagement. This outreach should be viewed as a core function of the center that is employed continuously in order to be most effective.

*Concerning the public and advocacy organizations.* Issues of transparency were found to still be haunting the Network. As discussed earlier, this factor has contributed to criticisms about operations and has potentially supported building a coalition of opponents to fusion centers. The Network and DHS has tried to shed some light on fusion center activities through the posting of success stories, release of aggregated assessment findings, and the listing of privacy policies for these entities. This appears to have done little for the growing concern about the impact of these organizations on individual rights and liberties.

Engagement that targets community groups and advocacy organizations should be organized and executed at the level of individual fusion centers. Fusion center staff should consider engagements that bring together different organizations and potentially look at having an open-house if that is possible. Beyond the overview of the fusion center itself, these meetings should attempt to discuss how the center is operating under existing legal authorities, dispel rumors of what a fusion center is and is not, and discuss the oversight and vetting processes at a level that does not compromise operations or security.

***Concerning leadership, executives, and decision makers.*** Fusion center staff should consider engagement with executives and decision makers to increase awareness of the fusion center and also in order to appropriately management expectations. As stated by several participants, fusion centers have experienced a significant amount of pressure to respond and react to a myriad of various events. They are also struggling under the weight of wide-ranging mission focus areas.

Engagement should look at describing information flow processes, both into and out of the center from a local agency or public citizen through the national security apparatus. An executive level overview describing existing capabilities as well as capability gaps and their impacts, would also aid in spreading an understanding of challenges. Finally, forthright discussion about the executive's desired intent of the fusion center, to include the limitations of the organization, may assist with future exchanges. This could lead to more informed decision making on resource allocation for the fusion center and potentially limit the tasking of some requirements on the fusion

center that are extraneous or out of the center's range of abilities to successfully accomplish.

### **Increase in Federal Funding**

Resources and budgets were noted by some participants as creating a barrier to more cohesive fusion center integration with the NSS. While a lot of the fusion centers utilized federal funding mostly in the form of homeland security grant allocations, the gradual decrease in these funds over the last decade has caused many centers to utilize funding from other sources. In many cases, these sources are related directly to budget decisions by fusion center executive agencies and organizations that have detailed staff to the fusion center.

The decrease in dependence on federal dollars to ensure operational readiness appears to be related to the mission focus migration in many centers from a terrorism focus to all crimes and all hazards. This may have led to a further loss of alignment of mission tasks with federal priorities. An increase in federal funding for the fusion centers would likely result in a greater relative market share and influence that the federal government has, and could in turn result in a fusion center or jurisdiction being more amenable to federal wants and needs.

### **Increase in Federal Representation**

As noted by study participants, some of who were identified as federal representatives, NSS objectives fall more squarely in the realm of federal agencies. In the domestic intelligence landscape those organization are primarily, but not exclusively, DHS and FBI. This was directly stated by some participants and indirectly referenced

when others discussed their perceptions of lanes in the road and even territorialism demonstrated by some federal organizations on occasion.

An increase in federal representation at fusion centers beyond the singular individual from federal organizations, who many times only work with the fusion centers on a part time basis, could support greater integration for the Network. Close and constant contact and sincere transparency from federal agencies was noted by participants as the most influential factors of a sound relationship. Increases in federal representation could lead to greater discussion and awareness about how fusion centers fit into the NSS. At the same time, this enhanced support would likely bolster trust between organizations and increase the probability of joint operations, which were other elements discussed by study interviewees as relevant to relationships with federal organizations.

### **Alignment of Priorities**

As discussed at great length in Chapter 4, there appears to be a misalignment of priorities between the Network and the NSS. The recommendations mentioned thus far all support factors that could assist in positive movement toward realignment. However, further strategic planning targeting alignment of priorities should be implemented, and would prove to be of great value. Like that of the engagement section, planning teams from DHS and DOJ should consider gathering of stakeholders from inside and outside the Network to discuss issues concerning priorities.

A strategic planning initiative aiming for an outcome similar to that of the working groups like Global (2006, 2008) that produced some of the Network's foundational guidelines and baseline capabilities, could likely assist in the development



of a strategy for better alignment. A group consisting of individuals from all levels of government across relevant disciplines that includes representatives from federal leadership and state executives would have the best chances for universal buy-in. The strategic plan would be required to have a focus on elements of an engagement strategy, listing of capabilities, crosswalk of opportunity areas, as well as areas of weakness. The plan should culminate in a mapping of functions, tasks, subject matter areas of expertise, and other relevant elements connecting them to state and local priorities as well as those within the NSS. This strategic planning process would potentially aid in the building of consensus between levels of government and jurisdictions. Ideally, this process would lead to a closer alignment of priorities and likely indirectly force reviews of policy, mandates, and statutes that are impacting and constraining aspects of the Network.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

One of my central desires of this research was to have a study of a topic that was supportive of social changes. There are many elements of this study that supported Walden University's vision to support positive social change. Tenants of this concept were assessed to have been achieved through this study's promotion of understanding, increased organization/program awareness, encouragement of civic engagement, findings supportive of increased organizational efficiency, suggestion of practice improvements, and overall assistance with informing of policy that addresses aspects of public safety, security, and privacy.

Positive social change can be realized by increased knowledge on the topic of study. Elements of this manuscript provide the background, historical context,

challenges, and evolution of security operations conducted by fusion centers and the greater Network. This increased awareness can help inform policy concerning public safety, security, intelligence, and individual liberty protections. Policy in this realm can have direct impact on practices, procedures, and resource allocation, in support of the overall fusion center mission. This increased awareness also aids in shedding some “light” on the subject of fusion centers. Calls and concerns for transparency and lack of understanding were voiced in many scholarly articles and commentary by advocacy groups as was synthesized and summarized in Chapter 2. This study attempted to address aspects of these concerns.

The document details challenges experienced by fusion centers and the Network as a whole. Highlights of fusion center strength and weaknesses provide insight and opportunities for those working within the field to better understand how their specific fusion center fits into the broader national security strategies for the U.S. Recommendations provided may help improve work processes for these government organizations. This can lead to increased government efficiency and could even provide cost saving and resource preserving ideas and initiatives if implemented. Likewise, elements of this study can support more relevant strategic planning for these organizations and help create a more collaborative environment for the Network and external entities. These elements could likely lead to a higher confidence level in security operations and organizations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research focused on and helped identify factors that impact the Network's integration with the national security strategy. While this study and others have covered numerous angles of inquiry regarding the Network, there still remains the potential for future research in the field. Some of these potential initiatives could be considered related or even extensions of this project.

As mentioned earlier in this document, there were several limitations to this research. One significant limitation concerned the sample size for this initiative. The sample size also limited the number of fusion centers represented by the participants. While unique in their own ways, each fusion center had similar characteristics such as the personnel strength of the entity, the executive agency consisting of a state law enforcement agency, as well as each having an all-crimes focus. A similar qualitative study replicating this one could be conducted using a sample that is representative of other fusion centers within the Network. Distinctive examples might be a focus on fusion centers that are considered to have a singular terrorism focus or an all-hazards lean. Centers that are owned and operated by local organizations, as well as a grouping of organizations that fall under a specific state jurisdiction such as Florida, California, Texas, and Missouri, which have multiple centers to name a few, might result in research findings that are of interest to the field. Studies that include fusion centers that are collocated with other entities, especially federal organizations, could result in different views of integration. Again, as discussed in the limitations section, this study lacked participants who represented some of the many disciplines that participate in Network

operations. A study focusing on nonlaw enforcement and intelligence personnel could highlight distinctions with results of this study.

A future study that utilizes a quantitative design could advance knowledge in this area. Identification of integration factors is important in itself, but understanding the level of impact of each factor could assist decision-makers in determining where to prioritize their efforts with maximum effect. A potential angle of research in this direction could attempt to quantify elements that are related to integration. Whether determined by a sample consisting of Network personnel, or a participant field represented by national security entities, ranking and measuring these factors would greatly contribute to this topic of study.

Research related to this study could also consider different approaches. A case study focusing on one fusion center might permit a deeper understanding of these factors of integration. This approach would encourage resource commitment to all aspects of the targeted fusion center. Other approaches may also support a greater understanding of culture group characteristics of fusion center staff which could have impacted the findings of this study.

Other studies focusing on different aspects of integration would also be supportive of gaining more knowledge in this field. A similar design and approach to this study could be used to examine how fusion centers are integrated within the Network itself. This could be conducted looking at self-organized region center groups as discussed earlier in the document or at Network level itself. Along the same lines, a sample consisting of participants that represent partner agencies of a given fusion center

or centers could be easily implemented. Findings from studies such as these could help provide a more accurate 360 degree view of the Network and yield recommendations that could help the Network increase its perceived value to stakeholders and external decision makers alike.

### **Conclusions**

The Network exists to strengthen the Nation's ability to support and defend the citizenry against a multitude of threats. The origins of fusion centers were associated with a collective understanding that gaps existed within our national security processes and practices. 9/11 appeared to demonstrate that there was a disconnect between levels of government and laterally between individual agencies. This manuscript began by laying out some of the challenges and criticisms that have plagued the Network since its inception, it also makes the case that many other findings and comments were likely symptoms of integration issues being experienced by the Network itself.

This spurred the creation of a qualitative research plan using a phenomenological approach that sought to understand and discover elements that were impacting integration of the Network with national security objectives. Three primary RQ angled towards identifying these elements, understanding barriers, and discovering what is contributing to negative perceptions of the fusion centers drove this study. Individuals representing multiple fusion centers and different levels of positions agreed to participate in the study. Responses from these individuals resulted in the discovery of three influential overarching concepts that were impacting integration dealing with perceptions of problems, customers, and existing policy and mandates. These interviews also helped

identify barriers to integration that concerned ineffective marketing, mandate constraints, organizational lanes in the road, and limited resources. Contributing factors to negative views of the Network were also understood to be related to awareness of fusion centers, Network transparency, and political drivers.

This original study advanced the knowledgebase on this topic. Answers to this study's RQ expanded the field of knowledge concerning the Network as well as on the greater domestic intelligence activities and organizations. I had intended that recommendations offered by this study would inform decision makers, fusion center staff, partner organizations, and external interested parties on the background, reasons for certain activities, and how some of the negative aspects can potentially be mitigated or overcome.

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## Appendix A: Primary Fusion Centers

- Alabama Fusion Center
- Alaska Information and Analysis Center
- Arizona Counter Terrorism Information Center
- Arkansas State Fusion Center
- California State Threat Assessment Center
- Colorado Information Analysis Center
- Connecticut Intelligence Center
- Delaware Information and Analysis Center
- Florida Fusion Center
- Georgia Information Sharing and Analysis Center
- Hawaii Fusion Center
- Idaho Criminal Intelligence Center
- Illinois Statewide Terrorism and Intelligence Center
- Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center
- Iowa Intelligence Fusion Center
- Kansas Intelligence Fusion Center
- Kentucky Intelligence Fusion Center
- Louisiana State Analytical & Fusion Exchange
- Maine Information and Analysis Center
- Mariana Regional Fusion Center (Guam)
- Maryland Coordination and Analysis Center
- Massachusetts Commonwealth Fusion Center
- Michigan Intelligence Operations Center
- Minnesota Fusion Center
- Mississippi Analysis and Information Center
- Missouri Information Analysis Center
- Montana All-Threat Intelligence Center
- Nebraska Information Analysis Center

- New Hampshire Information and Analysis Center
- New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center
- New Mexico All Source Intelligence Center
- New York State Intelligence Center
- North Carolina Information Sharing and Analysis Center
- North Dakota State and Local Intelligence Center
- Ohio Strategic Analysis and Information Center
- Oklahoma Information Fusion Center
- Oregon Terrorism Information Threat Assessment Network
- Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center
- Puerto Rico National Security State Information Center
- Rhode Island State Fusion Center
- South Carolina Information and Intelligence Center
- South Dakota Fusion Center
- Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center (Las Vegas, Nevada)
- Tennessee Fusion Center
- Texas Joint Crime Information Center
- U.S. Virgin Islands Fusion Center
- Utah Statewide Information and Analysis Center
- Vermont Intelligence Center
- Virginia Fusion Center
- Washington Regional Threat and Analysis Center (Washington, D. C.)
- Washington State Fusion Center
- West Virginia Intelligence Fusion Center
- Wisconsin Statewide Information Center
- Wyoming Information and Analysis Team

Note. From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2016d). Fusion center locations and contact information. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-center-locations->

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## Appendix B: Recognized Fusion Centers

- Austin Regional Intelligence Center; Austin, Texas
- Boston Regional Intelligence Center; Boston, Massachusetts
- Central California Intelligence Center; Sacramento, California
- Central Florida Intelligence Exchange; Orlando, Florida
- Chicago Crime Prevention and Information Center; Chicago, Illinois
- Cincinnati/Hamilton County Regional Terrorism Early Warning Group; Cincinnati, Ohio
- Dallas Fusion Center; Dallas, Texas
- Delaware Valley Intelligence Center; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Detroit and Southeast Michigan Information and Intelligence Center; Detroit, Michigan
- El Paso Multi-Agency Tactical Response Information eXchange (MATRIX); El Paso, Texas
- Houston Regional Intelligence Service Center; Houston, Texas
- Kansas City Terrorism Early Warning Fusion Center; Kansas City, Missouri
- Los Angeles Joint Regional Intelligence Center; Los Angeles, California
- Nevada Threat Analysis Center; Carson City, Nevada
- North Central Texas Fusion Center; McKinney, Texas
- Northeast Ohio Regional Fusion Center; Cleveland, Ohio
- Northern California Regional Intelligence Center; San Francisco, California
- Northern Virginia Regional Intelligence Center; Fairfax, Virginia
- Orange County Intelligence Assessment Center; Orange County, California
- San Diego Law Enforcement Coordination Center; San Diego, California
- Southeast Florida Fusion Center; Miami, Florida
- Southeastern Wisconsin Threat Analysis Center; Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Southwest Texas Fusion Center; San Antonio, Texas
- Southwestern PA Region 13 Fusion Center; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



- St. Louis Fusion Center; St. Louis, Missouri (DHS, 2016d)

Note. From U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2016d). Fusion center locations and contact information. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.gov/fusion-center-locations-and-contact-information>

### Appendix C: Interview Questions and Linkage

Category I questions focus on participant biographic information, which will allow for the categorization of collected data between individual participants. This series of questions will assist in the assessment of individual variables.

- 1A. What is your professional discipline?
- 1B. How many years have you worked within that discipline?
- 1C. How many years has your professional responsibilities been associated with a fusion center?
- 1D. How would you categorize your position, governance, management, supporting staff (analyst, training, investigations)?
- 1E. How would you describe your specific position responsibilities?
- 1F. Can you describe your role in policy making within your organization?

Category II questions focus on participant fusion center descriptive information, which will allow for the categorization of collected data between fusion centers represented by the participants. Like Category I questions, these will aid in the assessment and identification of individual variables, but will do so in a manner that reflects differences between fusion centers.

- 2A. Would you please provide a description of your fusion center and its operations?
- 2B. Is your fusion center operated by a state or local organization?
- 2C. Is your fusion center collocated with another federal agency?

- 2D. How many individuals work within your fusion center, what disciplines are represented, and what levels of government are represented?
- 2E. How would you describe your fusion center's primary focus areas?

Category III questions focus on fusion center policy processes and priorities, which are directly tied to concepts described by the multiple streams framework (MSF) such as perceptions of problems, existing policy constraints, and political influences. While the research questions (RQ) for this study are associated with aspects of many of the questions in this category those that have direct ties to a specific RQ are succeeded by the specified RQ highlighted in Chapters 1 and 3 of this manuscript.

- 3A. What do you think should be the biggest focus area for your fusion center?  
Why? RQ1
- 3B. What do you think that executives and decision-makers senior to your position feel should be the biggest focus area for your fusion center? Why? RQ1
- 3C. Can you describe your opinion of the fusion center's role with regards to U.S. national security strategies? RQ1
- 3D. Do you feel that fusion centers should have a primary responsibility to implement U.S. national security strategies or to state or local security priorities?  
Why? RQs 1 and 2
- 3E. Can you describe how policy decisions are made for your fusion center?  
RQs 1 and 2
- 3F. How are mission and operational priorities determined by your fusion center?  
RQs 1 and 2

- 3G. How do external influences impact policy and priority decision making for your fusion center? RQs 1, 2, and 3
- 3H. How do you feel that external entities (such as other government organizations, academia, advocacy groups) perceive fusion center operations?  
RQ3
- 3I. What do you think influences those perceptions you just described? RQ3

Category IV questions center on the collection of data that involves perceptions of organizational relationships, fusion center integration, and factors believed to impact fusion center integration. Like those of Category III, questions in Category IV are associated with aspects of each RQ. Those that have direct ties to a specific RQ are succeeded by the specified RQ highlighted in Chapters 1 and 3 of this manuscript.

- 4A. How would you describe the relationship between your fusion center and federal organizations involved with national security? RQs 1 and 2
- 4B. For the relationship described above, what factors have positively or negatively influenced this relationship? RQs 1 and 2
- 4C. How would you describe your fusion center's level of integration with the U.S. national security strategy? RQs 1 and 2
- 4D. How would you describe your fusion center's level of integration with the Network? RQs 1 and 2
- 4E. What factors do you perceive as integral to your fusion center's integration with national security objectives? RQ1

- 4F. What factors do you feel are present that are positively supporting or creating barriers to your fusion center's integration with U.S. national security objectives?  
RQ2
- 4G. How would you explain your feelings about how fusion center integration with the U.S. national security strategies influences opinions about your fusion center or the Network by external parties? RQ3

## Appendix D: Initial Message to the Organization

Sir or Madam:

My name is Nicholas Klem, I am a Public Policy doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting dissertation research concerning the National Network of Fusion Centers in partial fulfillment of my degree requirements. I currently work with the XXXXXXXXX and have worked within the U.S. intelligence community for over two decades. I would like to talk with you further about my study, of which I am the sole researcher, and ideally gain organizational approval to ask some of your staff if they would be willing to conduct a 45 minute interview that focuses on the fusion center's integration with the national security strategy at a future time. Below is a more in-depth background of my research highlighting the purpose, intent, the nondisclosure of fusion center and participant data to external parties, statements that underscore that no favors or negative consequences will be experienced whether or not an organization or individual participates. This research is also not associated with any official or professional tasking or responsibilities.

The purpose of my study is to discover and understand factors that impact the Network's integration with the broader U.S. national security strategy. This research intends explore the opportunities and obstacles of federal counterterrorism intelligence and information sharing with fusion centers. This research intends to identify integration challenges and opportunities that currently exist within the Network's operating environment. Fusion

center names, specific locations, participant information or any personal identifying information will not be disclosed to third parties nor will they be published in the final draft of the project.

The objective is to interview individuals from multiple federally recognized fusion centers (federal, state, and local). Individuals that agree to participate in this study will be asked to answer a few questions about their background, the description of the fusion center, and they will then be asked a series of questions concerning how policy decisions are determined in their organization as well as their perceptions of fusion center integration with the U.S. national security strategy. At the end of the interview, they will be afforded the opportunity to go over their answers to ensure that their answers were accurately captured.

The goal of the study is to add to an understanding about factors that may be supportive of or impeding fusion center integration. Ultimately, this study will lead to published findings that contribute to study concerning the Network. This study is for academic purposes in support of my personal degree requirements and is not sponsored formally by any agency to include your organization. Participation in the study is not tied to any actual or implied favors, compensation, and/or release from any past official obligations and there are no negative consequences tied to a decision not to participate.

Please contact me if your organization is interested in participating. Should you contact me to participate or just ask questions, be assured that all information and correspondence will remain confidential. You may contact me at XXXXXXXX or on my cell phone at XXXXXXXX.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Nicholas Klem



## Appendix E: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research

Dear Fusion Center Member:

My name is Nicholas Klem, I am a Public Policy doctoral candidate at Walden University conducting dissertation research concerning the National Network of Fusion Centers in partial fulfillment of my degree requirements. As the sole researcher for this project, I am respectfully requesting that you consider allowing me to interview you about your perceptions concerning your fusion center's integration with the national security strategy for about 45 minutes at a site convenient to you. I currently work with the XXXXXXXXX and have worked within the U.S. intelligence community for over two decades, but as mentioned previously, my research is in not associated with any official or professional tasking or responsibilities.

The purpose of my study is to discover and understand factors that impact the Network's integration with the broader U.S. national security strategy. This research intends explore the opportunities and obstacles of federal counterterrorism intelligence and information sharing with fusion centers. This research intends to identify integration challenges and opportunities that currently exist within the Network's operating environment. Fusion center names, specific locations, participant information or any personal identifying information will not be disclosed to third parties nor will they be published in the final draft of the project.

The objective is to interview individuals from multiple federally recognized fusion centers (federal, state, and local). If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a few questions about your background and the description of the fusion center and then you will be asked a series of questions concerning how policy decisions are determined in your organization as well as your perceptions of fusion center integration with the U.S. national security strategy. At the end of the interview, you will be afforded the opportunity to go over your answers to ensure your answers were accurately captured.

The goal of the study is to add to an understanding about factors that may be supportive of or impeding fusion center integration. Ultimately, this study will lead to published findings that contribute to study concerning the Network. This study is for academic purposes in support of my personal degree requirements and is not sponsored formally by any agency or your fusion center. Participation in the study is not tied to any actual or implied favors, compensation, and/or release from any past official obligations and there are no negative consequences tied to a decision not to participate.

Please contact me if you wish to participate. Should you contact me to participate or just ask questions, be assured that all information and correspondence will remain confidential. You may contact me at XXXXXXXX or on my cell phone at XXXXXXXX.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Nicholas Klem