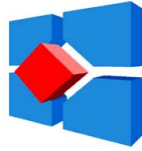


CONCEPT SYSTEMS INC.



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL
SCIENCES RESEARCH

STRATEGIC PLANNING
PHASE I SUMMARY REPORT

(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

PREPARED FOR
OBSSR

BY
CONCEPT SYSTEMS, INCORPORATED

MARCH 31, 2006

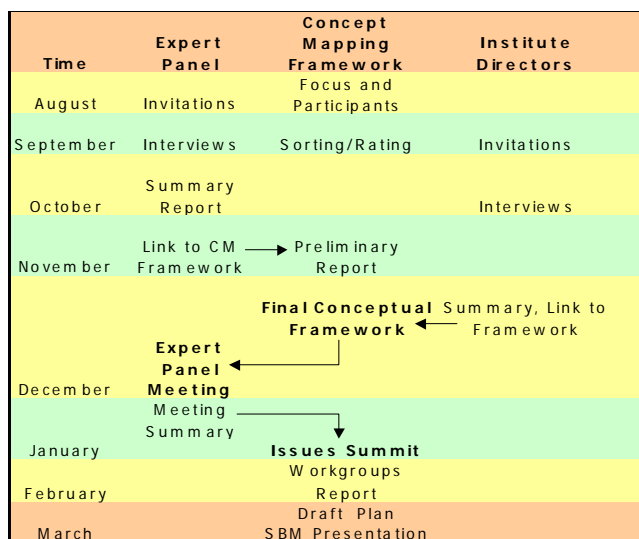
OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH

PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY*

The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) was established in 1995 to stimulate behavioral and social sciences research throughout the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and to integrate these areas of research more fully into others of the NIH research enterprise, thereby improving our understanding, treatment, and prevention of disease. Since that time, this organization has matured and the work of OBSSR has become critical to the mission of the NIH. In light of past growth and success, now is an opportune time to revisit the strategic focus of the office.

The intent of this project was to solicit the best thinking from a diverse audience to shape OBSSR's strategic focus. Because involving many people with diverse perspectives requires a structured process to organize each person's important contributions, Concept Systems Inc. (CSI) facilitated this process through the use of the concept mapping methodology, the convening of an Expert Panel and related interviews, interviews with key Institute Directors, content analysis of existing literature, and the convening of an Issues Summit of leaders throughout the fields of behavioral and social sciences. A Project Planning Group was established to advise and support these efforts.



Streams of Inquiry

Concept Mapping is a mixed methods planning and evaluation approach that integrates familiar qualitative group processes (brainstorming, categorizing ideas, and assigning value ratings) with multivariate statistical analyses to help a group describe its ideas on any topic of interest and represent these ideas visually through a series of related maps. The Concept System® planning and facilitation methodology was used in this process.

The Planning Group, with guidance from Concept Systems, Inc., developed a focus prompt to which stakeholders responded:

“What specific actions should the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research undertake to maximize the contributions of the behavioral and social sciences to the overall NIH mission?”

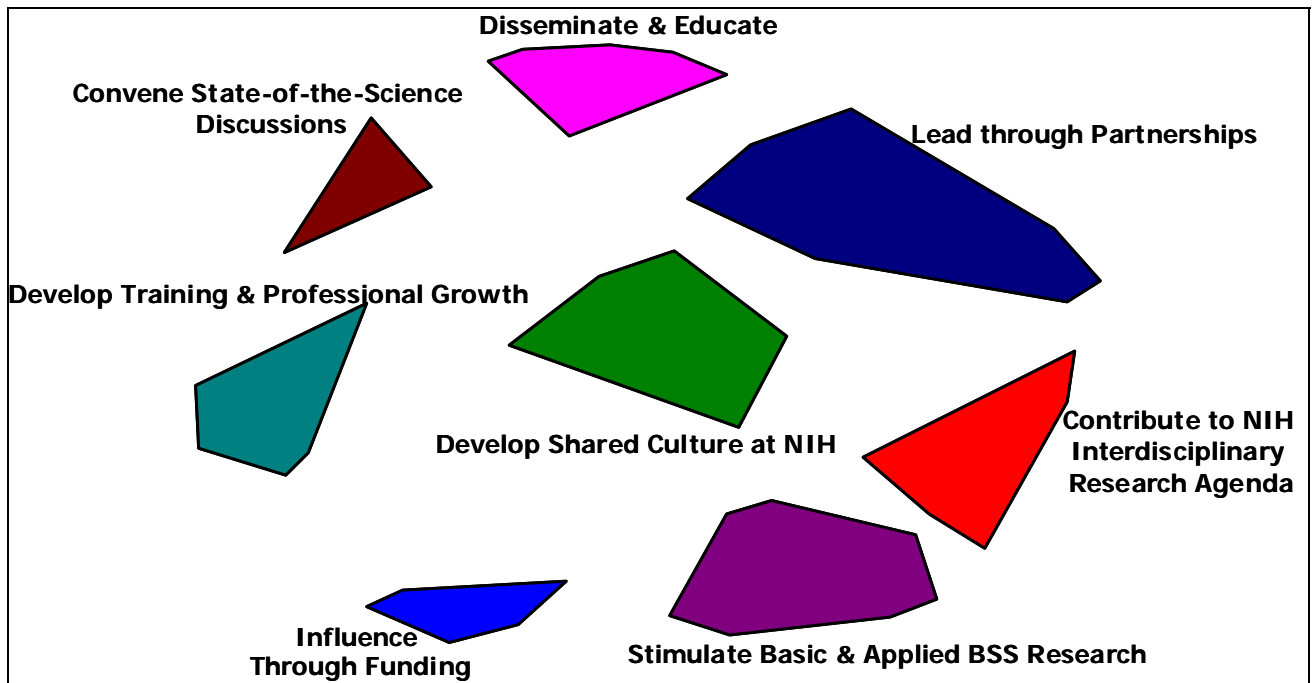
* The full OBSSR Strategic Planning Phase I Summary Report will be available from the Office in late summer, 2006.

The Planning Group invited over 200 people to participate in this project; including leaders in the fields of behavioral and social sciences, NIH Institute representatives, and other external key stakeholders. Through the engagement of these stakeholders, this initiative was able to develop a strategic framework that provides OBSSR a broad conceptual basis from which to identify priority strategies, while at the same time providing details regarding specific strategies, as well as an archived database of specific tasks or actions suggested by the participants to enable the priority strategies to be addressed efficiently and effectively.

247 specific ideas were contributed by 229 participants. The Planning Group conducted an idea synthesis, which surfaced 93 specific strategic elements, and archived the remaining tasks, activities and considerations for use in the implementation of the plan.

The results of the initiative are presented in graphic and narrative form in this report, and include a series of concept maps that depict the specific elements of the strategic framework as identified by the stakeholders, as well as the Cluster Map results, which show the clusters labeled with these categorical issues. The major categories that emerged were:

- Develop Training & Professional Growth
- Convene State-of-the-Science Discussions
- Disseminate & Educate
- Lead through Partnerships
- Contribute to NIH Interdisciplinary Research Agenda
- Stimulate Basic & Applied BSS Research
- Develop Shared Culture at NIH
- Influence through Funding.



Concept map. An eight-cluster concept map indicating the main topics, or concepts, that contain the 93 ideas that make up the content of the project results.

Pattern Matches and “Go Zones” describe the foundational framework of the above clusters in relation to the importance and feasibility values that stakeholders indicated on each statement on the map. Using the conceptual framework and the detailed importance and feasibility comparisons that the map provides -- along with the results of the Expert Panel, Institute Director interviews, and the Issues Summit reports (all described below) -- the Planning Group is able to arrive at specific priority strategies, and the tactics and actions that will enable those strategies to be implemented.

Pattern Matches indicate a general disconnect between those clusters that are considered most important (Influence through Funding, Develop Shared Culture at NIH) and those considered most feasible (Disseminate & Educate, Convene State-of-the-Science Discussions), indicating a need to look closely at each of these areas. In addition, comparisons on importance between internal (NIH) and external (non-NIH) participants can assist the Planning Group in determining what groundwork needs to be done before the strategic priorities can be communicated to and supported by both internal and external stakeholders.

In addition to establishing the strategic conceptual framework through the use of concept mapping, the Project Planning Group proceeded with other deliberate approaches to engaging experts internal to NIH and within the professions. An Expert Panel was convened, composed of 9 NIH staff members and 9 experts who are external to NIH. Expert Panel membership represented the breadth of science and methodologies with which the Office works.

Each Panel member participated in an individual interview to identify perspectives and opinions regarding OBSSR. A half-day meeting of the Panel reported the interviews findings and enabled additional observations and recommendations to be developed. Telephone interviews were conducted with the 18 members of the Expert Panel from August through October 2005. Members of the Expert Panel were asked to provide responses to the following six open-ended questions, with a range of sub-questions, during an individual telephone interview.

- How can OBSSR best contribute to the stated mission of NIH over the next decade?
- Over the next decade, which of the core areas of basic and applied (i.e. clinical, dissemination, and policy) behavioral and social sciences research hold extraordinary opportunities to achieve the stated mission of the NIH?
- Given the direction and rapid advances in science/technology today, how should the behavioral and social sciences be positioned to capitalize on these advances (i.e., what is the new emerging role for the behavioral and social sciences and what are the challenges in bringing to full fruition the discoveries in the sciences)?
- What is the appropriate role for OBSSR to play in the training and education of behavioral and social scientists of the future?
- What is the role for OBSSR in disseminating the discoveries and findings of behavioral and social science research, and to what specific audiences?
- Thinking about government agencies and non-government entities like those listed above, that OBSSR might create strong partnerships with to increase OBSSR's reach and effectiveness, what agencies or groups might be productive partners in the future? Can you suggest any specific agencies or organizations?

During the interviews, a key tension emerged around whether OBSSR should provide support and advocacy for the behavioral and social sciences, or leadership in theory and research practice standards for these disciplines. In addition, nearly all Expert Panel members believed that interdisciplinary efforts are an important part of OBSSR's work. According to several respondents, OBSSR can also support interdisciplinary efforts by leading behavioral and social science researchers to define a common language and research standards. Finally, the respondents had different views about OBSSR's appropriate role in communication and dissemination of behavioral and social science information. The majority of respondents stated that all types of behavioral and social science research are still greatly underemphasized at NIH.

After the interview process was complete, CSI developed three documents: the Expert Panel Interview Summary, the Expert Panel Interview Executive Summary, and the document describing Themes from the Expert Panel Interview. Expert Panel members were invited to a four-hour meeting, where the results of the interviews in which they took part were presented and discussed. The group discussed the range of issues that affect, and are affected by, OBSSR's scope and focus of work.

In conjunction with the Expert Panel interviews, CSI also conducted phone interviews with three key NIH Institute Directors to help OBSSR understand their perspectives on the appropriate role of OBSSR at NIH. We interviewed Duane Alexander, Director, National Institute of Child & Human Health Development, Richard Hodes, Director, National Institute on Aging, and Nora Volkow, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse. Each was asked to provide their perspectives on the following six themes:

- OBSSR's contributions to the NIH
- What opportunities in behavioral and social sciences there might be in the future
- The influence of rapid science and technology advances on behavioral and social sciences
- OBSSR's role in training behavioral and social scientists of the future
- OBSSR's role in dissemination of behavioral and social science research discoveries
- OBSSR's potential for building productive partnerships.

These Institute Directors agreed that the role of OBSSR should be a facilitative and, in some cases, an advocating one. In contrast to the Expert Panel interviews, however, there was no mention of OBSSR taking a leadership role in defining theory or methods in the behavioral and social sciences. They indicated that facilitating interdisciplinary efforts are an important part of OBSSR's work. The respondents agreed that all types of basic behavioral and social science research are still greatly underemphasized at NIH.

Concluding this first phase of strategic planning development, OBSSR held a 1.5-day Issues Summit, with participation from the Expert Panel members and other key leaders of the bss fields. At this summit, five working groups were formed, with each group focused on a region of the concept map, as outlined below:

- Develop Training & Professional Growth
- Knowledge Synthesis
 - Convene State-of-the-Science Discussions

- Science of Dissemination
 - Disseminate & Educate
- Partnerships
 - Lead through Partnerships
 - Develop Shared Culture at NIH
- Stimulate Trans-NIH & Transdisciplinary BSSR
 - Contribute to NIH Interdisciplinary Research Agenda
 - Stimulate Basic & Applied BSS Research

(Note: The concept map cluster: *Influence through Funding* was not specifically addressed by the Issues Summit working groups).

During the course of this meeting, OBSSR was able to gain clarity and consensus of strategic priority areas that the new plan must address. It was agreed that OBSSR must focus its attentions to the internal NIH audience, while engaging various outside partners to help foster NIH appreciation and demand for OBSSR. Its continued goal should be the improvement of credibility and standards in behavioral and social sciences research. Finally, OBSSR should look for opportunities to align its research agenda with emerging Public Health demands.

At the conclusion of the first phase of this strategic planning effort, the NIH Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) has achieved its goal of soliciting and aggregating the best thinking of a diverse audience in order to shape OBSSR's strategic focus. OBSSR is now in a position to use this information to chart the direction of the Office over the next decade by setting priorities, establishing a systems-based implementation plan, and developing assessment tools.