

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

National Experience and HQ & RO Position Location Assessment and A.N.N.A Criteria



Background and Need:

Recommendation 24 states that the Refuge System will “*Develop and mentor Refuge System employees so they are fully equipped to accept the responsibilities of leadership at all levels in the Service.*” As part of this recommendation, the Leadership Development Council (LDC) has been tasked with defining National Experience for the National Wildlife Refuge System and evaluating which NWRS Headquarters and Regional Office positions can be performed from the field.

Deliverables:

1. **Define *National Experience*:** Many upper-level positions have traditionally had a requirement of national experience in order to qualify. This sub-team will evaluate what qualifies as national experience and determine what amount, if any, and what kind of experience should be required for certain upper-level positions.
2. **Determine which Headquarters and Regional Office positions could be performed from the field:** With advancements in technology and communication, some traditional Washington and regional office positions could be performed from a field station or other setting. This sub-team will determine and outline which of those positions, if any, would fit this criterion.

Discussion:

Define *National Experience*. The phrase “national experience” refers to gaining the knowledge and skills needed to interact at high levels of the organization – including but not limited to budget and policy development, regulations, leading major initiatives, interagency interactions, and engaging the highest level of leadership in the agency. It is vital that our senior leadership possesses this level of experience, which typically has been obtained by taking career positions at headquarters, where it is possible to engage in congressional hearings, departmental meetings, high-level briefings (e.g., OMB, DOI,) and meet with national NGOs and other partners. Additionally, there are high-level assignments at HQ that are spontaneous in nature and may not lend themselves to engaging staff located in regional offices and/or the field.

Unfortunately, giving all potential future Refuge System leaders a career rotation through headquarters is proving difficult, given mobility and quality-of-life issues facing prospective candidates. As a result, many upper-level leadership positions are being filled by employees without headquarters-based national experience. Indicative of this are the number of regional chiefs and GS-15 refuge managers who have not held a position at headquarters. However, this diverse cadre of managers has been able to accumulate many of the skill sets and competencies needed to be effective in upper-level leadership positions. Given this, it is incumbent upon the Refuge System to ensure that all potential leadership candidates, whether at headquarters or in the regions, are provided a clear pathway to attaining the competencies associated with national experience.

Refuge System employees are able to work in diverse job series in a conservation system that spans half the globe, where they engage in complex local, regional, national, and international issues. In addition, many employees bring with them career experiences working for other FWS programs and federal agencies, the military, the states, or the corporate and nonprofit sectors. This career diversity allows Refuge System employees the opportunity to develop important skills and abilities that are critical to building foundational leadership competencies. This foundation becomes stronger with increasing diversity and complexity of experiences. As such, individuals with a single-station or even a single-region career (HQ included) will be limited in their ability to develop the full suite of leadership competencies. All employees have the potential to achieve an upper-level leadership position; however, the career pathway will vary significantly by individual, especially in the time frame it takes to obtain the needed competencies.

Therefore, it is critical for the Refuge System to ensure that the leadership competencies associated with national experience are fully developed in future leaders. An important guide is the USFWS Leadership Competency Development Model (<http://nctc.fws.gov/courses/roadmaps/competency-model/>), which identifies the career progression for achieving the relevant competencies. The leadership training opportunities offered by the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) – e.g., competitive programs: SUTL and ALDP; open enrollment training: Leadership Challenge Workshop, Leading at the Speed of Trust, Crucial Conversations, etc. – complement the Leadership Competency Development Model and provide the opportunity for Refuge System employees to invest in and own their career development.

In addition to the Service leadership development training programs, significant experiential opportunities have been identified that cumulatively add to one's ledger of national experience.

Examples of these types of assignments include:

- Working on national teams and interagency work groups
- Acting in higher-level leadership positions
- Instructing in the Refuge Academy and other NCTC courses
- Developing NWRS and FWS policy
- Briefing the Director and the Secretary
- Coordinating with congressional offices
- Extended HQ details with the NWRS, other FWS programs and in DOI
- Being deployed on national emergency responses (e.g., fire, oil spill)

Details, while demonstrating initiative, may not be the best approach to gaining experience unless considered long-term (multiple months and up to a year). Details should afford future leaders the opportunity to challenge themselves in leadership competency growth and development, with developmental goals identified in their Individual Development Plan (IDP), planned activities to meet developmental needs, and feedback from the on-site supervisor and others in the workplace.

The knowledge, skill, and abilities gained from daily work experiences, details, and training courses drive the development of leadership competencies. However, to ensure that the competencies associated

with national experience are achieved, an informed approach is required. The attached Assessment of Needed National Aptitudes (ANNA) cross-references the executive functions of the Service with a set of criteria that reflect steps toward achieving the competencies associated with each executive function. The ANNA criteria are listed in order of increasing complexity for each executive function; therefore, “checking off” the more complex criteria may signify a better understanding of the executive function and associated leadership competencies. Although there is no set number of checked criteria that guarantees mastery of a specific competency, having multiple criteria checked in each of the executive functions would indicate a more in-depth experience and opportunity to achieve the relevant competency.

The ANNA helps clarify the linkages between career development and the leadership competencies, and is applicable not just for charting a path to obtaining national experience, as it can also guide employees in their leadership development during all phases of their career. The ANNA has potential to serve as:

- an IDP roadmap for Service employees to inform their training and career progression as they aspire to higher levels of leadership
- the basis for mentoring and career counseling by supervisors and mentors
- a training reference in Service employee development, leadership, and supervision courses and programs
- an informational reference for hiring officials in developing interview questions and assessing job candidates
- a reference to Service executives and upper-level managers in their responsibilities to develop others into higher leadership positions

The ANNA is not all-inclusive; other experiences, training, and education that Service employees bring to their jobs or have access to may add to their national experience ledger. Also, accumulating any number of checked criteria boxes on the ANNA does not necessarily reflect attainment of competencies associated with national experience. It is important that the employee actually “gets it,” and reflects the use and understanding of the leadership competencies in his or her ongoing job performance. It is incumbent upon each employee to have discussions with his or her supervisor regarding professional growth and development, and whether he or she is ready for the next challenge.

National experience at headquarters remains important in leadership levels throughout the Refuge System and the Service. It is also important to understand that those who do a stint at headquarters are serving an essential role in support of the operational capacity of the Refuge System. Having diverse field and regional experience sitting daily at the headquarters table influencing policy and budget decisions is invaluable. However, having held a position at headquarters is but one consideration in selection for upper-level leadership positions; there is more to being at headquarters than just “punching your ticket.” When applicants for an upper-level position have equivalent qualifications, headquarters experience may be the deciding factor. What should carry the greatest weight is your breadth of experiences, successes at your job, your ability to work with others, and attained leadership competencies.

Headquarters/regional office positions in the field. We believe there are a number of staff-level positions in HQ and the regional offices that may be appropriate for considering flexibility in the duty station location. In considering alternative duty stations for certain positions, it is important to evaluate impacts on both the efficiency of accomplishing work as well as the benefits and drawbacks to individual employee development. As a rule, we believe that the members of the management team, whether in a regional office or HQ, are inherently more effective when physically located within the respective office. It is important both institutionally and personally that managers are in an environment where they can be effective program advocates and be exposed to the developmental opportunities provided in a central office setting. For the purpose of this exercise, we have defined the management team as branch chiefs and above for the HQ and branch chief-level regional counterparts in the regions. The term “central office” means a regional office or headquarters.

In determining whether a position can be remotely located, institutional considerations should drive the decision. Considerations include:

- Can the employee effectively accomplish his or her job responsibilities and efficiently contribute to achieving the organizational mission?
- Does the employee have a liaison in the RO/HQ to “walk things through” when necessary?
- Can I attract a more qualified applicant in a different geographic setting?
- What SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) must we develop in order to minimize the likelihood of developing an “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” mentality – from both the remote employee AND the respective central office?

In providing for an alternative duty station, we must acknowledge clear trade-offs for the individual’s employee development. Opportunities for interacting and briefing senior officials (defined here as Directorate members) are limited, and employees with regional and headquarters experience often cite this opportunity as one of the significant benefits of a central office experience. Additionally, without a clear and conscious effort from supervisors, remotely located employees are generally removed from the nuances of policy development and the complete budget development cycle – two other areas consistently identified as critical for higher regional and headquarters leadership positions.

When moving entire functional areas (as opposed to individual employees) to a remote location, additional considerations emerge. We have learned several lessons from our own Natural Resource Program Center, now in its fourth year. While the center benefits in many ways from its location in Fort Collins, Colorado, we must acknowledge that its employees are generally not experiencing the full range of developmental opportunities afforded to headquarter employees. In addition, it is important to have a liaison or chief for that functional area located in the central office. Without such capacity, it is more likely that the functional area will be neglected.

Moving positions or entire functional areas to an alternative duty station has broader workforce ramifications. Shifting a significant number of positions over time from headquarters and regional offices provides the Refuge System and the Service an opportunity to address their future presence on the conservation landscape. Strategically co-locating staff resources with other Service programs or with

other federal or state agencies would benefit the ongoing investment in landscape-scale conservation planning and partnerships. This structured shift would be adaptive, providing for the recruitment and deployment of staff resources to address critical and emerging issues.

Attachment 1: National Experience – Assessment of Needed National Aptitudes

To ensure that the Service achieves its mission, agency leaders must have a keen understanding of and experience in how programs, policies, and practices are implemented at all levels of the organization. This requires both a contextual and a practical understanding of the various opportunities and challenges facing the Service within a program, a field station, a region, and at the national level. Integral to this understanding and experience is the ability to appreciate and manage the inherent tensions that may exist between ensuring national consistency and providing flexibility regarding the implementation of local, on-the-ground conservation activities. Recognizing and managing these tensions and being able to identify potential opportunities and challenges requires a breadth of understanding and expertise in the areas outlined in the ANNA table below to ensure that an individual has national experience at an executive leadership level as defined by the Service’s leadership competencies model (<http://nctc.fws.gov/courses/roadmaps/competency-model/>).

The knowledge, skill, and abilities gained from daily work experiences, details, and training courses drive the development of leadership competencies. However, to ensure that the competencies associated with national experience are achieved, an informed approach is required. The ANNA cross-references the executive functions of the Service with a set of criteria that reflect steps toward achieving the competencies associated with each executive function. The ANNA criteria outlined below are listed in order of increasing complexity for each executive function; therefore, “checking off” the more complex criteria may signify a better understanding of the executive function and associated leadership competencies. Although there is no set number of checked criteria that guarantees mastery of a specific competency, having multiple criteria checked in each of the executive functions indicates a more in-depth experience and opportunity to achieve the relevant competency.

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<p>Budget Formulation and Passback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting for the federal government is an enormously complex process. • The Division of Budget provides support to all Fish and Wildlife Service programs each step of the way in the budgetary process. • Preparation of the President’s budget typically begins in the spring each year, at least nine months before the budget is submitted to Congress, about 17 months before the start of the fiscal year to which it pertains, and about 29 months before the close of that fiscal year. • The Division of Budget directs and manages the budget formulation process by prescribing policies, procedures, and controls while ensuring compliance with the administration's objectives and conformance to statutory authority. The division also reviews proposed changes in appropriation structure and language, participates in and coordinates budgetary determinations, and reviews proposals for supplementary budget requests and reprogramming of funds. <p>Competencies: Political Savvy Vision Influencing/Negotiation</p>	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Has a working knowledge of how the Service develops and proposes a budget. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in the preparation of the President’s Green Book. <input type="checkbox"/> Had a budget-specific detail or special assignment in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a program budget and planning office ○ the Division of Budget, Planning, and Human Resources ○ the Department of the Interior ○ the Office of Management and Budget <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible for program-level budget administration. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in the development of performance reports for expenditures. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in budget allocation to the regions. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Congressional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congressional briefings are 	<p>Criteria:</p>

<p>Briefings</p>	<p>meetings with members of Congress or their staff to discuss Service programs, issues, or activities. These meetings may take place in Washington, D.C., congressional offices located in a state or district, or at other sites.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Manual chapter 101 FW 2 provides guidance for Service employees in preparing for meetings and briefings with congressional members and staff. • Researching and preparing to deliver testimony before Congress is a process that takes quite a bit of time and groundwork. • There are many elements that can assist you in the process, including preparing a briefing book. This book commonly comprises research, documents, and other materials to assist you during the hearing. <p>Competencies: Political Savvy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Completed the Congressional Operations Seminar Training. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in a congressional briefing. <input type="checkbox"/> Provided documents or other materials to assist during a hearing. <input type="checkbox"/> Wrote or assisted in writing testimony. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in providing responses to Questions for the Record. <input type="checkbox"/> Completed a detail in Congressional and Legislative Affairs. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Directorate and Departmental Briefings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings, whether in the form of briefing notes, longer briefing papers, or oral briefings, are used to keep decision makers informed about the issues they are responsible for. • In government, briefings are the principal means of communication between government managers and their senior officials. <p>Competencies: Decisiveness Strategic Thinking</p>	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Prepared briefing papers for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assistant Director(s) ○ Director ○ Department ○ OMB <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in briefings with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assistant Director(s) ○ Director ○ Department ○ OMB <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

<p>Regulation and Policy Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation and policy development is critical for communicating requirements for, and directing the implementation of, Service authorities and activities. • The program that originates the regulation or policy is responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consulting with the Division of Policy and Directives Management (PDM) before developing, revising, or amending a chapter. ○ Consulting with other divisions or offices affected by the policy. ○ Writing, revising, or amending the chapter. ○ Seeking Directorate comments on new chapters and revised chapters that have Service-wide impacts. ○ Ensuring that OMB has an opportunity to review significant policies and determining whether to seek comment from the public. ○ Determining what impacted offices should surname a final chapter. <p>Competencies: Influencing/Negotiations Strategic Thinking</p>	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in the development of a proposed regulation or policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Familiar with the PDM process. <input type="checkbox"/> Provided information for the Unified agenda or 90-Day report. <input type="checkbox"/> Familiar with the Service’s surname process. <input type="checkbox"/> Experienced in public engagement activities associated with the Federal Rulemaking process. <input type="checkbox"/> Briefed OMB on a proposed regulation or policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in an interagency review process for a proposed/final policy. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<p>Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FACA was enacted in 1972 to control the growth and operation of the “numerous committees, board, commissions, councils, and similar groups which have been established to advise officers and agencies in the executive branch of the federal government”. 	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Briefed a FACA council. <input type="checkbox"/> Has a formal relationship with a FACA liaison. <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding of and participation in the federal advisory committee process. <input type="checkbox"/> Work with solicitor- what constitutes FACA review. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 108 FACA Councils at the Department of the Interior. • There is a Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for each advisory committee. <p>Competencies: Political Savvy Accountability</p>	
National Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with partners is critical to success at all levels of the organization. • Partnering helps pool scarce resources; avoid duplication of effort; and promote coordinated, focused, and consistent communications and mutual efforts that support many missions. • Examples of national partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies ○ Tribes ○ CARE-Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (a national coalition of 22 wildlife, sporting, conservation, and scientific organizations). ○ Other national-level NGO organizations or groups that support the Service and act as liaisons. ○ Interagency teams (e.g., DOD, DOT). <p>Competencies: Accountability Political Savvy External awareness</p>	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Understands the role of working with partners at a national level. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in meetings with national partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in collaborative planning, or policy development with national partners. <input type="checkbox"/> Served as a Service point of contact for a national partner or a partner-based conservation effort. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Coaching or Mentoring at the Executive Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key aspect of leadership within the Service is developing future leaders. • In doing so, Service leaders need to be able to clearly articulate and communicate a Service-wide 	<p>Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Served as lead or project manager for a regional or national team. <input type="checkbox"/> Participated in a job shadow to assist in developing staff. <input type="checkbox"/> Helped coach/train a detailee, Pathways

	<p>as well as programmatic, regional or office vision for conservation and the strategies and considerations (e.g., sociopolitical, economic, etc.) associated with making decisions and implementing actions at all levels of the organization.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing others via coaching and mentoring can be achieved in many ways outside of holding a supervisory position and goes beyond the basic requirements of formal employee supervision. <p>Competencies: Developing Others Influence and Negotiation Accountability</p>	<p>Student, or summer intern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Taught a course via NCTC. <input type="checkbox"/> Served as a mentor in a formal mentoring program. <input type="checkbox"/> Served in a supervisory capacity as part of a detail or a permanent position. <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
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