

# Surfacing for Strategy:

## Organizational Learning for the Strategic Direction of an Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Occupational Health and Safety Research Center

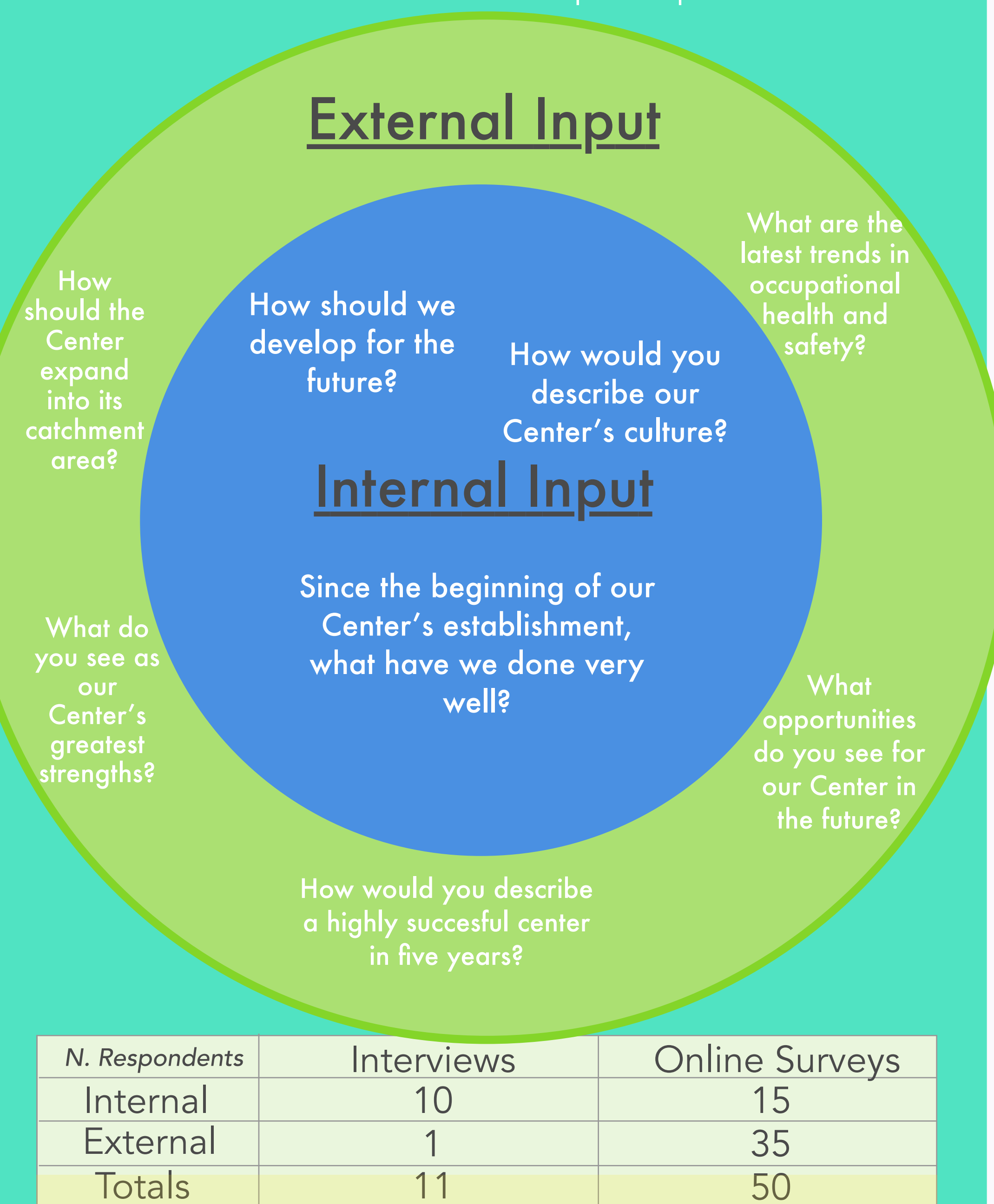
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**Objective:** Design and implement an organizational learning activity in preparation for the SCCAHS Center's first funding reapplication.

### Methods

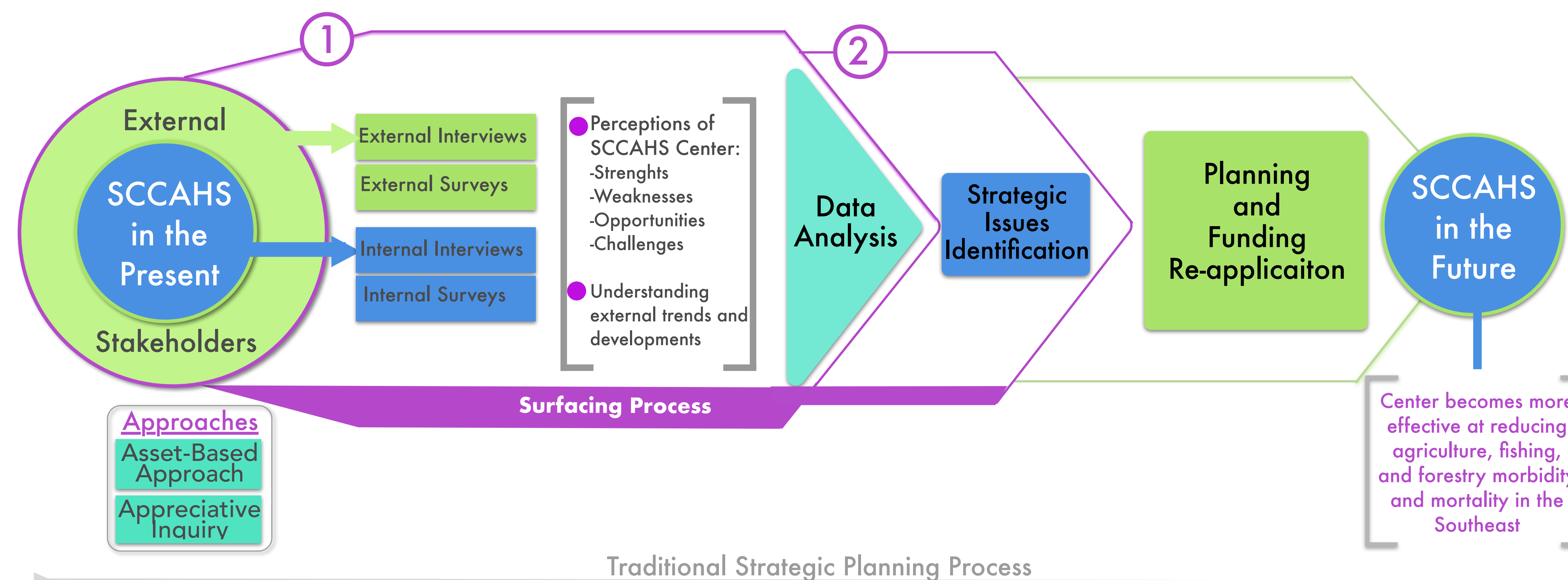
In order to seek out well-rounded input about the SCCAHS Center and its future development, choosing action research methods that balanced depth and varying perspectives was crucial. Incorporating the perspectives of our external stakeholders was a useful way to build a birds-eye and outsiders perspective to how our Center is perceived by those who we interact with. Interviews and online surveys were chosen for both internal and external stakeholder participation.



### Strategic Issues Identification

The final method used for this Surfacing process included the a strategic issues identification process by the eleven of the Center's most engaged faculty and staff. This process acted as a refinement process to help focus our Center's attention on what appears to be the most pressing issues.

### The Surfacing Process: Conceptual Framework



This 'Surfacing Activity' focuses on the first part of a traditional strategic planning process: organizational learning.

### Results

The findings of Part 1 of the Surfacing Activity were presented in narrative form and a SWOC+T analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges, + External Trends). The findings below present a sample of the type of results that were included in a larger report of findings. These findings are from the narrative portion:

- A Shared Vision for the Future**
  - The identified common themes that internal participants identified for a successful SCCAHS Center in five years included:
    - A research core conducting high quality research that is embedded into the southeast AgFF fabric and creating strong results and products
    - An established identity that stakeholders recognize in us for driving AgFF health and safety in the Southeast
    - Center is measuring and showing impact
    - Improved integration with stakeholders
- Struggling Through Political Layers**
  - It was often identified that our Center, being new, has struggled with the political layers that exist within the space of agricultural health and safety. Specifically, it was identified that our Center lacks a shared understanding on political positions.
  - It was also emphasized that our Center is bringing a diverse group of stakeholders
    - Some respondents were concerned that these stakeholder activities were underrepresenting the farmworker perspective.

The findings of Part 2 of the Surfacing Activity were shared as a presentation at a Center-wide retreat in December 2019. The Strategic Issues were converted into the form of 'Strategic Actionable Themes' which provide an easier form of understanding for common use:

- Research Program**
  - Refining role of Emerging Issues Program
  - Channeling input of Surveillance and Emerging Issues Programs into research programming
  - Strengthening strategic selection of Research & Pilot Projects
  - Improving development of Pilot Projects
  - Improving accountability of Research Projects
- Network**
  - Strengthening the strategic identification and engagement of key stakeholders in catchment area
  - Developing SCCAHS image (Relevance, Usefulness, Value, Trust, Belonging)
  - Moving away from the Florida-centric approach and into one that represents entire catchment area
- Center Cohesion**
  - Breaking internal silos (disciplinary and philosophical) to promote integration across cores, programs, and projects creating a shared identity
  - Enhancing internal communication, accountability, and transparency.
  - Transforming the existing diversity of opinions regarding SCCAHS' audiences and focus from a source of tension into a valued asset (pluralism).

### The Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS)

SCCAHS, established at the University of Florida in 2016, is the newest CDC National Institute for Agricultural Safety and Health Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery (AgFF) Center. The Center covers a large mandate of six states and two island territories: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico

The primary AgFF topics that the SCCAHS Center is engaged in are heat related illness, mental health, pesticide exposure, and surveillance of Gulf seafood workers. The Center is made up by six partner academic institutions which join in research and outreach activities across the region. The Center is gearing up for its first funding reapplication in 2021.



Photo: SCCAHS

### Discussion

This Surfacing Process was particularly useful for SCCAHS due to its loosely-coupled organization design, made up by six partner institutions. While strategic planning processes often depend on limited engagement of internal and external stakeholders, this approach offered the opportunity of individual stakeholder engagement in a manner that promoted ownership and empowerment. The opportunity for future Surfacing or Strategic Learning activities at large will be useful to create a longitudinal perspective of how the perceptions of the organization change over time. Identifying creative ways to increase engagement will be useful for future strategic learning endeavors.

### Next Steps in Utilizing Findings

The results of this Surfacing process are being utilized by the organization as it engages in planning for its funding reapplication. Additionally, many of the results can be utilized immediately. It is anticipated that the Center will utilize these result in both formal and infromal planning activities leading to the reapplication.



Photo: SCCAHS



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