

Murie Science Learning Center Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Background

The Murie Science and Learning Center (MSLC) is one of 18 Research Learning Centers (RLC) established by the National Park Service (NPS) around the country to increase the communication, use, and effectiveness of scientific research being conducted in the national parks. The mission of the MSLC is to promote science and stewardship on behalf of Denali National Park and Preserve and other national parks in Alaska.

Located in Denali, the MSLC came into existence as an organizational concept in 2003 and moved into its present facilities in 2005. It is overseen by the NPS in collaboration with a non-profit Managing Partner, currently Alaska Geographic. While the MSLC primarily serves Denali, it partners widely with universities, non-profits, and other parks and agencies in fulfillment of its mission.

This Strategic Plan lists the MSLC's goals and objectives for 2016-2020, and provides five-year targets for accountability. It was developed by the NPS and Alaska Geographic Directors of the MSLC, with oversight from the MSLC Advisory Committee. The plan aligns with the Research Learning Center Strategic Framework (2015). It is revised approximately every five years in conjunction with the selection of a new MSLC Managing Partner.

Guiding Principles

- Focus on science topics that span large geographic areas, bridge between disciplines, and benefit multiple parks and partners.
- Prioritize projects that build collaborative partnerships and leverage existing resources and funds.
- Prioritize the majority of efforts and funds on outreach and education, while also recognizing the important role that research plays in the MSLC mission.
- Use measurable targets to guide and improve MSLC programs.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1 – Share park science with the purpose of improving scientific understanding and environmental stewardship.

Goal 2 – Assess and evaluate MSLC activities and adapt as necessary to achieve the mission.

Goal 3 – Facilitate science and scholarship in Denali National Park & Preserve.

MSLC Strategic Framework – Goals, Objectives, Targets for 2016-2020

Goal 1 (85% of effort) – Share park science with the purpose of improving scientific understanding and environmental stewardship.

Objective 1-1 – Engage Denali visitors and staff in park science through narratives, citizen science, and hands-on activities.

MSLC outreach activities and science communication products are utilized by other parks and programs within the Alaska Region, or inspire others to create similar activities and products.

Objective 1-2 – Create training opportunities for Denali-area staff on key science topics and techniques for effective science communication.

All Denali-area staff who contact visitors use science materials, techniques, and information provided by MSLC in interpretation and education materials, products, and programs.

Objective 1-3 – Prioritize sharing park science with youth and underserved audiences, with the goal of engaging younger generations as park advocates and stewards.

MSLC offers some of Alaska’s highest-quality science-related youth activities and programs.

Teachers state-wide seek continuing education opportunities, youth programs, and educational materials related to park science through the MSLC.

Objective 1-4 – Promote park science to Denali’s managers, and share science-based-management-decision stories with all audiences.

Denali managers use science summaries created by the MSLC to help them understand park science and make science-based management decisions.

All MSLC programs feature science-based management stories whenever relevant and available.

Objective 1-5 – Support all Alaska parks in effectively communicating science.

MSLC regularly provides science communication best practices, digital content, trainings, staff time, equipment, etc. with other Alaska parks and their partners.

Objective 1-6 – Improve the quality and quantity of park science being shared by building and facilitating overlap and synergy between scientists and education staff.

The most current and high-priority science topics are being shared to internal and external audiences regularly and rapidly.

Goal 2 (10% of effort) - Assess and evaluate MSLC activities and adapt as necessary to achieve the mission.

Objective 2-1 – Implement a process to evaluate the effectiveness and nimbleness of MSLC activities to reach the objectives under each goal.

All MSLC programs are evaluated annually, at an appropriate level of detail relative to their goals and objectives, and adapted as necessary.

An external evaluation of all programs is completed and results shared with the MSLC Advisory Committee for next steps.

Goal 3 (5% of effort) – Facilitate science and scholarship in Denali.

Objective 3-1 – Provide facilities and targeted financial support for science and scholarship in Denali and other Alaska parks.

All researchers working in Denali are aware that MSLC offers lodging, office space, outreach opportunities, and other in-kind support to researchers, as well as targeted financial support for research projects.

All researchers working in Denali utilize MSLC resources (tools, staff, etc.) to ensure effective communication of science and scholarship activities.

Implementation

Background on the MSLC Management Plan

The ‘Murie Science and Learning Center Management Plan’ (signed November 26, 2014) is the governing document for the MSLC in regards to oversight and management, roles and responsibilities, budget and finances, partnerships, work plans, etc. Portions of the Management Plan are summarized below, but please refer to the original document for complete details.

Governance and Coordination

Denali National Park and Preserve is responsible for overseeing all MSLC operations, including program approval, forging partnerships, and oversight of agreements and finances. The DENA Superintendent has ultimate decision-making authority over MSLC, but relies on input from the Murie Advisory Committee for most high-level matters. The Advisory Committee is comprised of the DENA Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief of Interpretation, Chief of External Affairs, Chief of Resources,

and NPS Director for MSLC. In instances where there is not a conflict of interest, the Managing Partner organization's Executive Director and MSLC Program Director also serve as members of the Advisory Committee.

The MSLC routinely communicates and coordinates with other Research Learning Centers, research and outreach staff in other Alaska parks and Inventory and Monitoring Networks, and other organizations and agencies that focus on science education. The purpose of these communications is to facilitate achievement of the MSLC mission and to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

Budget and Capacity

The MSLC is funded by a combination of Denali base funds, Denali project funds, and Managing Partner direct support that is generated through MSLC programs and products. In 2016, the MSLC has three full-time NPS staff (director/education coordinator, education specialist, and science communication specialist), two full-time Alaska Geographic staff (program director and education program coordinator), and 3-10 seasonal staff (supported by either AKGeo or NPS funds) at any given time.

Partnerships

It is a guiding principle of the MSLC to prioritize projects that build collaborative partnerships. MSLC seeks beneficial and effective partnerships that help accomplish its strategic goals and objectives, and assists parks in developing such partnerships. Its practice is to first determine the required services and outcomes, and then work with the best partner(s) to accomplish those requirements.

Annual Reports and Proposals

The MSLC Directors and other partner leads develop annual end-of-season reports that detail specific accomplishments and products, lessons learned, partnerships, and a budget summary. Likewise these individuals develop annual program proposals that identify specific accomplishments and products, responsible parties, schedules/deadlines, and budgets. The annual reports and proposals are presented to members of the Advisory Committee for discussion, modification, and approval.