

Strategic Plan

Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
2018 – 2022 (revised)

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Message from the Board

The enclosed Strategic Plan for the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board is being established off-cycle with the intention that it will serve as the solid basis for any revision in the following years. We drafted it after receiving significant feedback from the National Academy of Public Administration and the Office of the Inspector General. It is our intention that this Strategic Plan will be the underpinning of our work planning and staffing going forward and will supersede any previous Agency plan prior to the 2020 work and staffing plan.

Given the opportunity to revisit the Strategic Plan, we took it upon ourselves to reassess our organization's goals and objectives relative to our mission. Developed with an iterative methodology designed to maximize interaction among staff, management, and the Board, the final document herein reflects input from all Agency levels and functions.

We believe this to be a re-base-lining for the Agency moving forward. It is focused on a vision of the Agency's future that emphasizes our technical excellence while allowing for continuous improvement and nimble response to a challenging environment. We set goals and objectives aimed at providing our best advice to the nuclear weapons complex, efficiently and effectively and transparently. Additionally, the plan will help us cultivate a multitalented and dynamic workforce that embodies our core values, focuses on the mission, and continuously hones its skills through training and development.

We commit ourselves to the mission, vision, goals, and objectives set forth in this document and to the workforce that supports us to realize that mission.

Bruce Hamilton
Jessie Roberson
Joyce Connery

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The Mission of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board

Under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) is charged with providing independent safety oversight of the Department of Energy's (DOE) defense nuclear facilities complex—a complex that has served to design, manufacture, test, maintain, and decommission nuclear weapons, as well as other national security priorities. The Act mandates that the Board reviews the content and implementation of DOE standards, facility and system designs, and events and practices at DOE defense nuclear facilities to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to inform the Secretary of Energy in providing adequate protection of public health and safety at DOE defense nuclear facilities.

Congress established the Board in 1988¹ as an independent federal agency within the executive branch of government, answerable to the President and subject to congressional oversight and direction. Five Board members, appointed by the President subject to confirmation by the Senate, are required to be “respected experts in the field of nuclear safety with a demonstrated competence and knowledge relevant to the independent investigative and oversight functions of the Board.” The Board is a collegial agency, meaning that its actions are determined by the Board as a whole. The Board's chairman serves as the chief executive officer, and performs this function subject to Board policies.

The Board's essential mission is to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, in his role as operator and regulator of DOE defense nuclear facilities, in providing adequate protection of public health and safety. As noted above, the Board's jurisdiction covers DOE's “defense nuclear facilities” – a term defined in the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, as amended. The Board only is concerned with facilities operated by DOE that are: (1) covered by the Atomic Energy Act; and, (2) have a function related to national defense. The phrase “defense nuclear facilities” thus excludes two major classes of government-regulated nuclear facilities: DOE's nuclear projects that are civilian in purpose, and commercial nuclear facilities regulated by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The Board's oversight jurisdiction also does not extend to the U.S. Navy's nuclear propulsion program or to environmental hazards regulated by other federal and state agencies. (The table on page 5 lists the major sites that the Board oversees.)

The Board's oversight mission covers all phases in the life of a defense nuclear facility: design, construction, operation, and decommissioning. Congress granted the Board a suite of statutory tools to carry out its mission. Principal among these is the formal Board recommendation issued to the Secretary. The statute requires the Secretary to either accept or reject the Board's recommendation, and in the case of an acceptance, to write and execute an implementation plan. This process all takes place on the public record. In cases involving an “imminent or severe threat” to the public health and safety, the statute requires the Board to also send its recommendation to the President, who makes the final decision on actions to be taken. In addition to recommendations, the Board is empowered to hold public hearings (and subpoena witnesses, if necessary), conduct investigations, obtain information and documents needed for the Board's work from DOE and its contractors, and review and comment on DOE requirements and standards affecting safety at defense nuclear facilities. DOE is required by law to grant the Board “ready access to such facilities, personnel, and information as the Board considers necessary to carry out its responsibilities.” Finally, the statute authorizes the Board to seek assistance from other federal agencies (such as NRC) and from organizations outside the government (such as the National Academy of Sciences), as needed.

Major Sites Subject to Board Jurisdiction

Site	Location	Operations	Website
Hanford Site	Richland, Washington	Management and treatment of radioactive wastes; facility decommissioning	http://www.hanford.gov
Idaho National Laboratory	45 miles west of Idaho Falls,	Storage and processing of radioactive waste	http://www.inl.gov
Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory	Livermore, California	Research to support the nuclear weapons arsenal	https://www.llnl.gov
Los Alamos National Laboratory	Los Alamos, New Mexico	Research to support the nuclear weapons arsenal; manufacturing of nuclear weapon components; disposition of legacy transuranic waste	http://www.lanl.gov
Nevada National Security Site	65 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada	Disposition of damaged nuclear weapons; critical and subcritical experiments; waste management	http://www.nnss.gov
Oak Ridge National Laboratory	Oak Ridge, Tennessee	Energy research; treatment and disposal of radioactive wastes	http://www.ornl.gov
Pantex Plant	17 miles northeast of Amarillo, Texas	Maintenance of the U.S. nuclear stockpile	http://www.pantex.com
Sandia National Laboratories	Albuquerque, New Mexico	Nuclear research; support for the weapons stockpile maintenance program	http://www.sandia.gov
Savannah River Site	Aiken, South Carolina	Tritium extraction, recycling, and storage; management and treatment of radioactive wastes; nuclear materials storage and disposition; research and development	http://www.srs.gov
Waste Isolation Pilot Plant	26 miles east of Carlsbad, New Mexico	Disposal of transuranic waste in underground repository	http://www.wipp.energy.gov/
Y-12 National Security Complex	Oak Ridge, Tennessee	Manufacturing and surveillance of nuclear weapons components; processing of weapons-grade uranium	http://www.y12.doe.gov/

Achieving our Vision and Mission

Mission

The mission of the Board shall be to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, in the role of the Secretary as operator and regulator of the defense nuclear facilities of the Department of Energy, in providing adequate protection of public health and safety at such defense nuclear facilities.

Vision

To secure a safe future for the American people through proven technical excellence and transparency that inspires public confidence as the defense nuclear enterprise evolves.

Values

- Integrity
 - Interaction among DNFSB staff and colleagues is open, honest, and sincere
 - We commit to openness and trust in all relationships
 - We observe the highest ethical standards in all aspects of our work
 - We take personal responsibility for our own actions
 - We are accountable to each other for the highest standards of behavior
 - We clearly define and fulfill the commitments we make; if we cannot meet that commitment, we inform everyone who might be impacted
- Respect
 - We treat each other as we would like to be treated
 - We treat others with respect and value diverse points of view
 - We treat everyone fairly and provide everyone an opportunity to contribute
 - We are attentive, listen, and exhibit deference to those who express different opinions on issues
 - We respect decisions taken by the Board
- Excellence
 - We exhibit a passion for success, both individual and collective
 - We strive to be the best in achieving our goals
 - Excellence is a daily pursuit
 - Excellence is pursued in all aspects of performance
- Independence
 - Our mission is not compromised by the influence of others—we rely on the facts as presented and the highest level of professional judgment
 - Independence does not imply isolation, we seek all facts and opinions openly, and weigh them all before arriving at conclusions
 - Decisions are based on objective, unbiased assessments of all information and conclusions are well-documented
 - We perform our duties publically and transparently

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Key Factors Affecting our Strategic Outlook

Major Management Priorities and Challenges

As this document is being written, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary. Created by Congress as an independent agency within the executive branch, the Board provides independent analysis, advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy in his role in ensuring public health and safety at Defense Nuclear Facilities. Over the years, the Agency has garnered the reputation of being a reliable, expert-based organization whose guidance and Recommendations were valued by the Department, Congress, and the public. In recent years, however, the reputation of the Agency as a whole, and the Board, in specific, has suffered.

In 2018, the Board commissioned the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) to develop a thorough organizational assessment, to include an evaluation of the functioning of the Agency as well as the execution of the mission along with recommendations for addressing the major challenges. In November of 2018, the Board received the final report which outlined the importance of the Board's mission, detailed significant organizational challenges and offered action-oriented recommendations for the Board to take in order to restore its effectiveness and its reputation. In addition to the NAPA report, the Board had received several climate surveys and Inspector General Reports that corroborated NAPA's findings. The key management challenges included: internal mistrust and discord; inadequate strategic direction; shortcomings in internal and external communication; complex procedures that hamper timely execution of mission; and lack of a human capital plan. The results of these conditions eroded staff morale and increased staff attrition, having a negative impact on mission work.

In this Strategic Plan, we, the Board, have committed to undertaking the steps necessary to redirect the Agency to focus on our mission through our core values of integrity, respect, excellence and independence--setting forth clear goals and objectives that will chart a path to success. We understand that a status quo approach would have continued negative impact on the organization and would not allow us to achieve our statutory mission. Frequent changes in Board leadership and composition have thwarted efforts to address the challenge outlined by NAPA. Over the past six years, the Board has had five Chairmen, for instance. As a result, we have not put in the work to put forward a strategic vision and plan that will sustain the Agency regardless of Board composition—until now.

In order to align ourselves, we, the Board members underwent a series of workshops with the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to develop strategies to better communicate, build trust, and identify common core values. We also underwent Clifton Strengths testing and related workshops to better appreciate and leverage each other's strengths. In addition to Board Members committing the time to fostering deliberation and teamwork, as recommended by NAPA, we also had several sessions with senior staff in order to better communicate our vision with them. We also exposed the entire staff to the same tool to foster better understanding and communication horizontally and vertically throughout the organization.

Once we had worked on the problem-solving and communication skills, we developed this Strategic Plan with input from across the Agency, at every level, as a commitment to re-baseline how the Board operates starting with a strategic vision, a value proposition, and shared goals. In addition, we are making employee engagement a priority by working vertically and horizontally across the agency to improve communications, hone interpersonal skills, and invest in employee development. We have woven these goals and performance measures into the Strategic Plan so

that they may become a sustainable part of the Agency, regardless of which individuals occupy Board Member seats.

In addition to internal organizational challenges, there are several external factors that impacted how we developed our strategic plan. The pace and focus of the Board's oversight work is impacted, in a large part, by DOE's schedule for major actions in the defense nuclear complex. Changes in the Department's schedules and priorities based on circumstances within and beyond DOE's control, may require a corresponding change in the Board's oversight plans. We are working with staff to clarify our priorities both through the strategic planning and work planning process and to improve internal communications so that when issues arise, the Agency can nimbly respond. In instances in which those changes impact the Board's targets for a particular performance period, an explanation for the change as well as a description of work conducted in lieu of planned work will be provided.

We also feel that we will improve mission performance by making a concerted effort to examine safety issues that impact more than one site. Those safety concerns may impact two or three defense nuclear facilities or they can be complex-wide. By identifying similar concerns, it may become clear that the cause of the issue may reside in poorly written or conveyed standards or guidance to the sites that is negatively impacting implementation, allowing us to address the issue in the most efficient and broadly applicable manner.

We are also prioritizing timely and transparent communications and outreach. Our safety impact is directly correlated to the reviews we conduct and the outcomes of those reviews whether they be letters, reports, hearings or Recommendations. In all cases, the Agency endeavors to make a clear, concise, and compelling case. The NAPA assessment described a many-years erosion of effective Agency interactions with the Department of Energy, Congress, and other interested parties. In order to address this erosion, under our strategic goal for transparency, we specifically outlined outreach efforts to remedy that.

Staff disillusionment has been a recurring theme in all of the reports and reviews done on the Agency over the past half a dozen or so years. This has had the greatest impact on our work. We lost a considerable number of well-qualified, experienced, capable individuals leaving us suffering from a "brain-drain" and a lack of knowledge transfer. We recognize the need to develop and maintain an outstanding workforce. A portion of the strategic plan is therefore dedicated to the development of Board Policy on our human resources, a Human Capital Plan that includes succession planning, career pathing, and work force development. We have come to terms with the tension between wanting a small, nimble and responsive workforce with the realities of the need for key functions and redundancy for some of those functions. Through compromise, we have a shared vision of a steady state workforce that can be revisited when justified to meet mission needs. We also want to ensure that the individual workers at the Agency, regardless of field, can develop their career to meet their expectations as well as the expectations of the Agency.

Being a small Agency, the DNFSB has been able to work nimbly to address emerging safety issues, but it has also been challenging for the organization to keep up with burgeoning Federal requirements which stress a small management structure. Policies and procedures should make organizations run more smoothly. As the IG and NAPA both articulated in their reports to us, our policies and procedures are cumbersome and in some cases, antithetical to performing our mission. One of our priorities is to review and update our policies, directives, and procedures to streamline them and ensure that they are effective and efficient and meet all appropriate federal guidelines and requirements. We expect this Strategic Plan not to be a product that sits on the shelf, but an

actionable roadmap to reinvigorate the Agency to most effectively accomplish its extremely important mission.

Significant External Challenge: DOE Order 140.1

One additional external factor that has created significant challenges for the Agency was the Department of Energy's issuance of Order 140.1 in May 2018 and its subsequent execution. The Order was designed to codify the Department's interface with the Agency in its conduct of its statutory mission. The Order, as written, attempts to curtail the Board's jurisdiction and access to information. At present, there are numerous examples in which access to information or activities was either denied or significantly delayed, and thereby impacting the Board's ability to carry out its statutory mission. Additionally, significant time and attention of senior management, and in some cases Board Members, has been taken up with adjudicating routine requests, disrupting daily work and impacting morale. The Board continues to challenge this order through various means, including direct communications with DOE and to the Hill in an effort to rescind or substantially revise the Order. Even if the Order is rescinded or revised, however, there remains the concern that the culture of resistance to oversight will remain and impact our ability to accomplish our mission.

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Roles and Responsibilities

The Board

- Uphold the Board's statutory safety mandate and communicate decisions to the Secretary of Energy/Department of Energy
- Develop and maintain productive relationships both internal and external to the Agency
- Provide strategic direction to the Agency
- Ensure the most technically-talented staff are hired and retained through a Human Capital Plan
- Develop and promulgate agency policy statements
- Model the culture desired in the Agency and uphold core values

The Executive Director of Operations (EDO)

- Propose strategic direction and provide strategic insight to the Board
- Implement the strategic direction of the Board
- Optimize and prioritize resources
- Speak externally on behalf of the Board when directed
- Lead the staff and execute the Human Capital Plan
- Manage and approve Agency-wide Directives
- Provide continuity to the Agency as Board composition changes
- Ensure communications within and across the organization
- Uphold Agency core values

Office Directors

- Provide strategic insight to the EDO
- Implement the strategic direction of the Board within respective component
- Optimize and prioritize resources within respective component
- Review work products through strategic lens
- Develop and maintain productive relationships both internal and external to the Agency
- Train, develop, and mentor staff
- Ensure communications within and across the organization
- Uphold Agency core values

Deputy Directors and Associate Directors

- Execute the respective work plan
- Identify process improvements
- Review work products for technical accuracy, impact, and readability
- Enable, lead, and manage staff
- Interact with the Department of Energy at appropriate levels
- Ensure effective communication within and across the organization
- Uphold Agency core values

Staff

- Execute the respective component work plan
- Comply with processes and communicate challenges
- Produce technically accurate, impactful and readable work products
- Work with management to identify training needs and professional development opportunities
- Ensure effective communications within and across the organization
- Uphold Agency core values

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Strategic Goals and Objectives Summary

Strategic Goal 1

Provide proactive and independent safety oversight of the defense nuclear complex.

Strategic Objective 1.1	Strategic Objective 1.2	Strategic Objective 1.3
Complete timely, high-quality safety reviews that identify and analyze safety issues and best practices, and search for similar challenges complex-wide.	Develop and issue advice and recommendations designed to ensure safety and employ best practices within the defense nuclear complex.	Provide robust field oversight of facilities and projects across the defense nuclear complex.

Strategic Goal 2

Enhance transparency of ongoing Agency initiatives and the state of safety within the defense nuclear complex.

Strategic Objective 2.1	Strategic Objective 2.2
Proactively sustain sound working relationships with relevant government and non-governmental entities.	Improve timely dissemination of information about the Board priorities and conclusions regarding the state of safety at Defense Nuclear Facilities.

Strategic Goal 3

Develop and maintain an outstanding workforce to achieve the Agency’s mission.

Strategic Objective 3.1	Strategic Objective 3.2
Cultivate an agile workforce with the skills necessary to meet the mission.	Use professional development and training to efficiently and effectively accomplish the mission.

Strategic Goal 4

Maximize the DNFSB’s performance by pursuing excellence in our Agency culture and operations.

Strategic Objective 4.1	Strategic Objective 4.2	Strategic Objective 4.3
Pursue efficiency through continuous improvement of internal policies and procedures through testing and evaluation.	Establish and maintain a culture that encourages teamwork and innovation across the Agency in accordance with core values.	Strengthen operational performance by modernizing Agency processes and associated infrastructure.

Strategic Goal 1

Provide proactive and independent safety oversight of the defense nuclear complex.

Strategic Objective 1.1

Complete timely, high-quality safety reviews that identify and analyze safety issues and best practices, and search for similar challenges complex-wide.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Prioritize and execute reviews to maximize impact on safety
- 2 — Conduct cross-cutting as well as site specific reviews, identifying safety concerns and best practices in work products

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Completion of high priority reviews while demonstrating flexibility to address emerging issues.
- 2 — Work products provided to the Board within specified timeliness metric.

Strategic Objective 1.2

Develop and issue advice and recommendations designed to ensure safety and employ best practices within the defense nuclear complex.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Provide timely, technically accurate, compelling information to the Secretary of Energy
- 2 — Ensure the Secretary of Energy has enhanced awareness of complex-wide safety issues

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Identification and inclusion of both site-specific and complex-wide safety concerns and best practices in products developed through routine oversight and reviews
- 2 — Encouragement provided to the Department of Energy to share best practices as well as safety concerns

Strategic Objective 1.3

Provide robust field oversight of facilities and projects across the defense nuclear complex.

Key Performance Goals

1 — Identify site-specific safety challenges and analyze for commonalities across the complex

2 — Provide timely information to the Board, acting quickly on emerging issues

Performance Measures:

1 — Oversight presence sustained at an appropriate level

2 — Internal procedures ensure consistency of field oversight

3 — Field experience is shared throughout the agency

Strategic Goal 2

Enhance transparency of ongoing Agency initiatives and the state of safety within the defense nuclear complex.

Strategic Objective 2.1

Proactively sustain sound working relationships with relevant government and non-governmental entities.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Maintain effective communications with the Department of Energy at all organizational levels
- 2 — Maintain effective communications with Congress
- 3 — Maintain effective communications with relevant state, local, and tribal governments
- 4 — Maintain effective communication with the public, including relevant advocacy groups and organizations

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Periodic engagement at the Board and Senior Staff level with relevant senior DOE Officials
- 2 — Periodic briefings conducted to relevant Congressional Members and committees
- 3 — Periodic outreach conducted to relevant state, local, and tribal governments at both Board and staff level
- 4 — Periodic outreach conducted to the public, including relevant advocacy groups and organizations

Strategic Objective 2.2

Improve timely dissemination of information about the Board priorities and conclusions regarding the state of safety at Defense Nuclear Facilities.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Improve transparency through timely posting of Agency communication and public engagement
- 2 — Ensure Board work products are made available to Congress through proactive outreach

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Timely publication of weekly/monthly/annual reports
- 2 — Routine conduct of business meetings, Public Hearings, or Board visits
- 3 — Timely notification to interested parties of Public Hearings, meetings, reports, and Recommendations

Strategic Goal 3

Develop and maintain an outstanding workforce to achieve the Agency's mission.

Strategic Objective 3.1

Cultivate an agile workforce with the skills necessary to meet the mission.

Key Performance Goals

1 — Establish a multi-year, forward-looking Staffing Plan to inform budget requests

2 — Hire well-qualified, motivated individuals to fill vacant positions and to enable effective succession planning

3 — Ensure redundancy in key functions in order to reduce mission vulnerabilities due to projected staff attrition

Performance Measures:

1 — Human Capital Plan that includes succession planning, work force development, career pathing and values diverse talents

2 — Key functions requiring redundancy are identified along with requirements and cross-training needs

Strategic Objective 3.2

Use professional development and training to efficiently and effectively accomplish the mission.

Key Performance Goals

1 — Establish career path options and encourage professional development tailored to employee goals

2 — Provide new employees at all levels with resources needed to have an impact as soon as practicable upon entering the workforce

Performance Measures:

1 — Training and development for career pathing options identified and implemented

2 — A comprehensive, Agency-wide onboarding plan is developed and executed

3 — Formal mentoring and coaching for staff

Strategic Goal 4

Maximize the DNFSB's performance by pursuing excellence in our Agency culture and operations.

Strategic Objective 4.1

Pursue efficiency through continuous improvement of internal policies and procedures through testing and evaluation.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Establish Policy Statements that lead to mission outcomes consistent with Strategic Goals and Objectives
- 2 — Ensure Board Procedures are consistent with Strategic Goals and Objectives
- 3 — Ensure internal procedures and processes reflect Policy Statements

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Policy Statements revised to reflect Strategic Plan and Policy Statements for selected management practices developed
- 2 — Board Procedures reflect Agency personnel and processes
- 3 — Streamlined internal procedures reflective of Board Policy Statements
- 4 — Work planning that is informed by annual feedback and lessons learned

Strategic Objective 4.2

Establish and maintain a culture that encourages teamwork and innovation across the Agency in accordance with core values.

Key Performance Goals

- 1 — Institutionalize core values in all phases of employee experience
- 2 — Foster open discussions across the agency on important technical and non-technical topics
- 3 — Maintain a culture respectful of diverse points of view

Performance Measures:

- 1 — Core values are promoted in on-boarding, training and performance processes
- 2 — An awards program that emphasize agency values
- 3 — Periodic open forums to discuss Agency and related issues that may impact mission or staff

Strategic Objective 4.3

Strengthen operational performance by modernizing Agency processes and associated infrastructure.

Key Performance Goals

1 — Improve efficiency through increased information accessibility and common platforms, where possible

2 — Be responsive to user needs and/or support requests across all agency functions

Performance Measures:

1 — Up-to-date platforms, systems, and software with interoperability, where possible

2 — Knowledge transfer programs and information management that support archiving and retrieving information essential to mission and mission support

3 — Updated employee guidance on processes and infrastructure that enables them to access systems and people needed to accomplish the mission and mission support across all agency functions

