

Strategic Plan

Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
Fiscal Years 2022 – 2026

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Message from the Board

The enclosed Strategic Plan for the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (Board) will underpin the agency's work planning and staffing going forward. It reflects continuity with the Strategic Plan that the Board completed in 2019, which received significant feedback from the National Academy of Public Administration and the Office of the Inspector General. Additionally, it incorporates key priorities of President Biden's administration, particularly in the areas of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Overall, this Strategic Plan focuses on a vision of the agency's future that emphasizes technical excellence and allows for continuous improvement and nimble response to a challenging environment. The Board set goals and objectives aimed at providing its best advice to the defense nuclear complex, efficiently, effectively, and transparently. Additionally, this plan will help the Board cultivate a multitalented, dynamic, and diverse workforce that embodies the agency's core values, focuses on the mission, and continuously hones its skills through training and development.

The Board is committed to the vision, mission, goals, and objectives set forth in this document and to the workforce that supports it, as it executes the critical work that it is called on to do by the American people.

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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 designs, manufactures, tests, maintains, and decommissions nuclear weapons, as well as other national security priorities. The act mandates that the Board review the content and implementation of DOE standards, facility, and system designs, as well as 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 1988 as an independent federal agency within the executive branch of government, answerable to the President and subject to congressional oversight and direction. The five Board members, appointed by the President and 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 chairperson serves as the chief executive officer and performs this function subject to applicable law and Board policies.

The Board's essential mission is to provide independent analysis, advice, and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy to inform the Secretary, 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 Board's oversight mission covers the entire life cycle 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 of Energy. 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 entire process 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 its 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 “prompt and unfettered 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 (e.g., NRC) and from organizations outside the government (such as the National Academy of Sciences), as needed.

Achieving our Vision and Mission

Mission

The mission of the Board is 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, backgrounds, and experiences
- We treat everyone fairly, strive for equity, 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
- We respect the senior agency leaders and their efforts to carry out the agency mission in accordance with their roles

Excellence

- We exhibit a passion for success, both individual and collective
- We strive to be the best in achieving our goals
- We are inclusive and bring out the best in each other
- 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 publicly and transparently

Major Management Priorities and Challenges

The Board is in its fourth decade of operation. Over the years, the agency has earned the reputation of being a reliable, expert-based organization whose guidance and recommendations are valued by DOE, Congress, and the public.

In recent years, the Board has made notable improvements. These include implementation of congressional directives, implementation of several of the National Academy of Public Administration recommendations, and development of a revised Strategic Plan adopted in 2019 with input from key stakeholders. These changes reflect the Board's commitment to continuous improvement in advancing its nuclear safety mission.

In early 2021, the Board hired its first executive director of operations (EDO), who is helping the Board achieve its management priority of enhancing operational stability and consistency across the agency. This role, along with the new Office of the EDO, has enhanced functional alignments and created a focal point for improved teamwork across agency offices.

The Board is continuing to pursue several agency-wide initiatives to address identified challenges and efficiently carry out its mission. These initiatives include improving the agency's internal processes and procedures, strategically aligning resources, and effectively managing both internal changes and responses to external changes in the DOE nuclear security complex.

In early 2022, the Board executed its post-pandemic return to the office with a new telework directive that empowers its workforce to deliver on its mission in an even more flexible way than before. Moreover, people are essential to the Board's ability to meet its mission, and the Board is aggressively working to fill vacant staff positions to mitigate the impact of a loss of institutional knowledge and skills due to retirements and personnel transfers in recent years. It has made significant progress in hiring and is focused on continuing its strong hiring efforts.

Information technology (IT) is becoming increasingly important to agency operations. It was critical in supporting a maximum telework posture for the agency during the pandemic and remains so as the agency maintains a hybrid work environment. The Board assessed its IT infrastructure and contracted for additional support to deploy updates and modifications to its IT systems, components, and software environment to meet new government-wide cybersecurity mandates. Substantial work will be completed in 2022 and beyond on zero-trust architecture, IPv6, continuous diagnostics and mitigation, and supply chain risk management.

Preserving the Board's access to information, facilities, and personnel at DOE's defense nuclear facilities is critical to the mission. Specifically, the Board, working with the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Energy, finalized a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in early 2022 to provide a safety partnership foundation for mutual communication, transparency, and information sharing between the agencies. To support implementation of the MOU, career staff from the two agencies are finalizing a supplementary document.

The work that is already underway and that envisioned below in this Strategic Plan, addresses challenge areas identified by the Office of the Inspector General in late 2021 in the *Inspector General's Assessment of the Most Serious Management and Performance Challenges Facing the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board in Fiscal Year 2022*. Key areas are:

1. Managing a productive organizational culture and climate;

2. Ensuring the safe and effective acquisition and management of mission-specific infrastructure, including cyber, physical and personnel security, and data;
3. Ensuring a systematic safety focus in the DNFSB's technical oversight and reviews;
4. Using the COVID-19 lessons learned to strengthen the DNFSB's readiness to respond to future mission-affecting disruptions; and,
5. Managing the DNFSB's efforts to elevate its visibility and influence and to assess and improve its relationship with the DOE.

The Board values the Office of the Inspector General's work and will continue to use it to help drive continuous improvements.

In short, the Board is well positioned to make even more progress on its priorities and sees many opportunities to make a significant, positive impact in the years to come.

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.

Performance Goals

1.1.1—Prioritize and execute reviews to maximize impact on safety

1.1.2—Conduct cross-cutting as well as site-specific reviews, identifying safety concerns and best practices in work products

Strategic Objective 1.2

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

Performance Goals

1.2.1—Provide objective, timely, technically accurate, and compelling information to the Department of Energy

1.2.2—Ensure the Department of Energy has enhanced awareness of site-specific and complex-wide safety issues

Strategic Objective 1.3

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

Performance Goals

1.3.1—Identify site-specific safety challenges and analyze for commonalities across the defense nuclear complex

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

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.

Performance Goals

2.1.1—Maintain effective communications with the Department of Energy at all organizational levels

2.1.2—Maintain effective communications with Congress

2.1.3—Maintain effective communications with relevant state, local, and Tribal governments

2.1.4—Maintain effective communication with the public, including relevant advocacy groups and organizations

Strategic Objective 2.2

Improve timely dissemination of information about the Board's priorities and conclusions regarding the state of safety at defense nuclear facilities.

Performance Goals

2.2.1—Improve transparency through timely posting of the agency's communications and public engagement

2.2.2—Ensure that the Board's work products are made available to Congress through proactive outreach

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.

Performance Goals

3.1.1—Establish a multi-year, forward-looking staffing plan to inform budget requests

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

3.1.3—Ensure resilience in key functions to reduce mission vulnerabilities due to projected staff attrition

Strategic Objective 3.2

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

Performance Goals

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

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

3.2.3—Administer career management policies and practices consistently so that all employees have an equal opportunity for career advancement

Strategic Objective 3.3

Ensure the agency recruits from a diverse, qualified group of potential applicants to secure and maintain a high-performing workforce drawn from all segments of US society.

Performance Goals

3.3.1—Establish, broaden, and/or strengthen relationships with organizations to be able to provide recruitment opportunities for women and underrepresented groups

3.3.2—Improve outreach and recruitment activities to enhance outreach to diverse audiences

Strategic Goal 4

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

Strategic Objective 4.1

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

Performance Goals

4.1.1—Establish policy statements that lead to mission outcomes consistent with strategic goals and objectives

4.1.2—Ensure that the Board's procedures are consistent with its strategic goals and objectives

4.1.3—Ensure that internal procedures and processes reflect policy statements

Strategic Objective 4.2

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

Performance Goals

4.2.1—Institutionalize core values in all phases of employee experience

4.2.2—Foster open discussions across the agency on important technical and non-technical topics

4.2.3—Maintain a culture respectful of diverse points of view

Strategic Objective 4.3

Strengthen operational performance by modernizing the agency's processes and associated infrastructure.

Performance Goals

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

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

Strategic Objective 4.4

Conduct ongoing communications to reinforce the commitment of all employees to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Performance Goals

4.4.1—Communicate the Board's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and equal employment opportunity

4.4.2—Implement training for employees to ensure a consistent understanding of the agency's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

