



National Transportation Safety Board

Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2020–2024



INTEGRITY ♦ TRANSPARENCY ♦ INDEPENDENCE ♦ EXCELLENCE

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Chairman's Message

I am pleased to present the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB's) Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2020 to 2024. As we look toward the future, it is important that we adapt to the changes occurring in the transportation industry and address new safety concerns. This plan describes our strategic goals to improve our processes and products, to ensure we are more efficient and effective and remain relevant, to engage productively with our employees, and to improve transportation safety for the American people.



Our strategic goals are the following:

1. Improving processes: Evaluating and identifying ways to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our investigative and business processes
2. Improving products: Evaluating and identifying ways to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our products
3. Improving employee engagement, diversity, and inclusion: Implementing actions to ensure we sustain a culture that is fair, diverse, and provides opportunities for all employees to excel

Studies of organizational excellence have demonstrated the value of alignment in enhancing a safety culture, but the lessons of alignment go far beyond safety. In every organization, people, processes, and products can support one another when management and frontline workers are aligned. The NTSB is no exception.

Employees engaged in the mission and organization and aligned with the organization's goals provide the fuel for continuous process improvement. Improved processes yield improved products. Improved processes and products, in turn, keep employees more engaged.

How do organizations know that they are improving? They measure.

At the NTSB, new tools for collecting and analyzing data, which are part of our newly implemented multimodal investigative management program, enhance our ability to more fully learn about, and improve, our work.

I look forward to working closely with agency leadership and staff to achieve these goals.



Robert L. Sumwalt, III
Chairman

NTSB at a Glance

About the NTSB

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in other modes of transportation—railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline. We determine the probable cause of the accidents we investigate and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents. In addition, we coordinate the resources of the federal government and other organizations to assist victims and their family members who have been impacted by major transportation disasters.

We also conduct safety studies focused on broader safety questions and topic areas. Additionally, we serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

Mission

Making transportation safer by conducting independent accident investigations, advocating safety improvements, and deciding pilots' and mariners' certification appeals.

Legislative Mandate

Maintaining our congressionally mandated independence and objectivity.

Conducting objective accident investigations and safety studies.

Performing fair and objective pilot and mariner certification appeals.

Advocating for safety recommendations.

Assisting victims of transportation accidents and their families.



Core Values

Our core values guide our daily actions, our internal conduct, and our relationships with our stakeholders. They provide the solid foundation upon which our hardest decisions are made. Aligning one's actions with the agency's core values is a fundamental part of being an NTSB employee.

- ❖ **Integrity:** We hold ourselves and each other to the highest ethical standards and are committed to being fair, honest, respectful, inclusive, and objective in our work and in our treatment of others.

- ❖ **Transparency:** We encourage openness, collaboration, and feedback to ensure clarity and trust.

- ❖ **Independence:** We are impartial and objective.

- ❖ **Excellence:** We are thorough, rigorous, and accurate; we continuously seek diverse perspectives in all that we do.



About this Plan

This plan is the result of meetings held in mid-2019 with agency leaders, which challenged them to find strategies to improve our work in three areas: processes, products, and people. As a result of these meetings, agency leadership devised the objectives outlined in this plan. These objectives move beyond output measures and the data that are collected as part of annual office plans and move toward improving the way in which our people, processes, and products are managed. They also propose new ways of looking at these three areas that will improve the relevancy and effectiveness of our work.

Strategic Goal 1: Improving Processes

Evaluating and redesigning processes—whether investigative or business-related—promotes efficiency and responsiveness. In accordance with the [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#) and the [Office of Management and Budget’s Memorandum M-19-23](#), we are increasing our use of data to allocate resources and achieve program objectives. Our increased capability in data analytics and access to new sources of data will help us improve our investigative and agency operations. For example, we are already seeing a positive impact on processes with our new multimodal accident database and its robust query tool. In the area of business processes, we continue to make strides in reducing the time to respond to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, a challenge on which we will continue to focus.

Strategic Objective 1.1: Improve the timeliness of investigations through data analysis

We aim to improve the efficiency and quality of our accident investigations by applying data-driven tools and structured techniques that improve the investigative process. We will evaluate current investigation processes to determine inefficiencies, optimal case distribution and complexity, appropriate investigation scope, report review bottlenecks, project management, remote workforce management, and human capital management. A data-focused review of general aviation investigations and a new investigative case management system are allowing us to better understand where timeliness can be improved. As we learn from this process, we will apply the lessons learned to other investigative processes across all modal offices.

Strategic Objective 1.2: Improve the timeliness of agency operations through data analysis

We will continue to review our FOIA process. Reviewing and processing FOIA requests in a comprehensive and timely manner reflects our core value of transparency. Other business practices will be added in the future.

Strategic Goal 2: Improving Products

The investigative and business products we develop are the keystones of our work. They are critical to ensuring our relevancy and are the primary sources by which the transportation industry, government, and the public understand our work. One improvement we recently made in this area was to standardize our investigative reports, bringing consistency to our investigative products across the modes and improving the reader experience

Strategic Objective 2.1: Improve the effectiveness of agency products

Our primary products to improve transportation safety are our safety recommendations. Recommendations can be issued at any time during an investigation and are carefully tracked within the agency. However, organizations involved in our investigations often implement safety improvements within days of an accident as a result of our initial investigative activities. These implemented safety improvements, as well as other aspects of how we accomplish our safety mandate, are not currently documented in a comprehensive and standardized way. This objective will require us to evaluate current processes and the overall impact of these improvements and will allow us to reach a consensus on what we document. The resulting measures will more accurately reflect the impact of the agency's work.

We will also review one of our most important means of delivering our products: our public Board meetings. Board meetings are an opportunity for the public to see the actual deliberations between the Board and investigative staff regarding a draft accident report or safety study. Board meetings are required under the Government in the Sunshine Act and are critical to our advocacy for safety improvements relative to the accident being examined. The availability of webcasting and the rapid pace of news are causing us to rethink how we select accidents for Board meetings, as well as how the meetings are conducted. Studying the effectiveness of Board meetings as a way to communicate with the public, industry, and lawmakers; to advocate for safety improvements; and to reach those citizens affected by the tragedies we investigate will improve our use of that platform.

To best serve the transportation industry, the public, lawmakers, and those impacted by transportation accidents, we will refresh our external agency website. This update will improve users' ability to search for and analyze data. The revised website will include a new query tool that allows users access to the full spectrum of public data related to our investigations. The new site

will more readily show the breadth of our work on issues such as fatigue, distraction, impairment, and other factors that cross modal lines.

Strategic Goal 3: Improving Employee Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion

Our highly skilled workforce is most effective when its members are motivated, engaged, and trained. Our work is better when we support a culture of diversity, awareness, inclusion, and mutual respect. Strengthening our human capital management program will attract and retain talent, especially in high-demand, high-skill areas. Within our workforce, we will seek to develop future leaders, foster high levels of employee engagement, and provide continuous learning and development. We will focus on recruiting, retaining, and training staff with the right mix of skills and expertise. Promoting diversity, inclusion, and mutual respect allows every staff member an equal opportunity to contribute and succeed.

Strategic Objective 3.1: Improve the engagement of agency staff

A new employee intranet site will increase employee engagement and the flow of in-house information to all staff, regardless of their duty station. This new interactive intranet site will allow leadership to increase communication with all staff, and will feature news regarding agency activities, employee-specific information, and cross-agency initiatives.

Employee engagement is key to us meeting our goal of becoming the number one small agency in the federal government.¹ We will gauge our success using various employee surveys (via our intranet site) and the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). The FEVS includes questions that measure employee engagement and the relationship an employee has with his or her organization. The Partnership for Public Service recently conducted focus group discussions with NTSB staff to assess employee engagement, and we are implementing a number of actions as a result.

Strategic Objective 3.2: Attract, develop, and retain a high-performing, diverse, and inclusive workforce

Our main asset is our workforce, and we will focus on talent management as well as on promoting diversity, awareness, inclusion, and mutual respect.

Revising our strategic human capital plan will allow us to build and maintain the effective, highly skilled workforce that is critical to the agency's future. The revision will focus largely on

¹ The [Best Places to Work in Federal Government](#) is administered by the Partnership for Public Service. Currently, we are listed as number 6 in the best places to work [small agency rankings](#).

improving talent management: recruiting, retaining, and training employees with the right mix of skills and expertise to successfully execute our mission. The revised plan will describe the agency's leadership and workforce needs for the future and present strategies to meet those needs.

A diverse and inclusive workforce is critical to maintaining our high level of technical and business operations. We want every staff member to have an equal opportunity to contribute and succeed. Employee surveys—including the FEVS, which determines a diversity and inclusion index score—will allow us to better understand staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion.

Key Challenges Affecting Achievement of Strategic Goals

Our ability to achieve our strategic goals may be influenced by the changing balance of industry; other federal, state, and local government activities; national priorities; and resource availability. The following challenges may affect our ability to achieve our goals:

- Recruiting, retaining, and developing highly skilled and diverse staff, particularly when competing against the private sector
- Ensuring that we understand new technologies in all modes of transportation and hire and train accordingly
- Budgetary constraints, including fluctuations in the amount and timing of appropriations

Addressing Goal Achievement Challenges

Effective long-range planning, open communication with lawmakers and industry, a talent-management process that is responsive to the needs of agency human capital trends, and improved employee engagement are ways we hope to address the challenges noted above. Long-range planning in acquisition requirements, human capital management, and core operations ensures that we are ready to deal with future investigative needs. Effective communication with lawmakers and industry helps us keep these stakeholders informed of our challenges. Thinking strategically, promoting employee engagement, and encouraging staff development will allow these strategic goals and priorities to be successful.

Measuring our Success

In accordance with the [Government Performance and Results Act of 2010 and the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-11, Part 6](#), our strategic management process and performance framework starts with this strategic plan, which establishes long-term priorities and performance goals, objectives, and metrics to gauge our success. Over the past several fiscal years, we have cultivated a performance-based culture, which remains a focus of agency management and staff. This strategic management process helps us demonstrate progress toward our performance goals and priorities, which will be measured using quarterly reviews and data analysis

for future decision-making. See [Appendix C](#) for more discussion on our strategic management process cycle.

We will define our performance goals and evaluate our progress annually using our determined metrics. We regularly collect and analyze performance metric data to inform decisions through quarterly reviews with senior leadership and staff. This focus promotes active management and staff engagement across the agency.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Summary of Goals, Objectives, and Metrics

Table 1: Summary of Goals, Objectives, and Metrics

Strategic Goal	Strategic Objective	Performance Metric
Goal 1: Improving Processes	1.1 Improve the timeliness of investigations through data analysis	1.1.1 Study and implement an improved investigation timeliness process
Goal 1: Improving Processes	1.2 Improve the timeliness of agency operations through data analysis	1.2.1 Study and reduce the backlog of FOIA responses
Goal 2: Improving Products	2.1 Improve the effectiveness of agency products	2.1.1 Establish a safety actions program to document all safety actions resulting from investigations
Goal 2: Improving Products	2.1 Improve the effectiveness of agency products	2.1.2 Establish agency-wide Board meeting criteria
Goal 2: Improving Products	2.1 Improve the effectiveness of agency products	2.1.3 Refresh agency external website to improve search capabilities
Goal 3: Improving Employee Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion	3.1 Improve the engagement of agency staff	3.1.1 Implement an interactive employee intranet site
Goal 3: Improving Employee Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion	3.1 Improve the engagement of agency staff	3.1.2 Improve employee engagement as measured by employee surveys
Goal 3: Improving Employee Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion	3.2 Attract, develop, and retain a high-performing, diverse, and inclusive workforce	3.2.1 Revise the Strategic Human Capital Plan
Goal 3: Improving Employee Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion	3.2 Attract, develop, and retain a high-performing, diverse, and inclusive workforce	3.2.2 Improve diversity and inclusion as measured by employee participation and survey feedback

Appendix B: NTSB Structure and Locations

Organizational Structure

We are authorized five [Board members](#), each nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate to serve 5-year terms. One member is nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate as chairman, and another is designated by the president as vice chairman, each for a 3-year term. When there is no designated chairman, the vice chairman serves as acting chairman. Currently, we have three Board members. The figure below shows our organizational structure. For more information about our offices and their functions, visit the [organization page of our website](#).

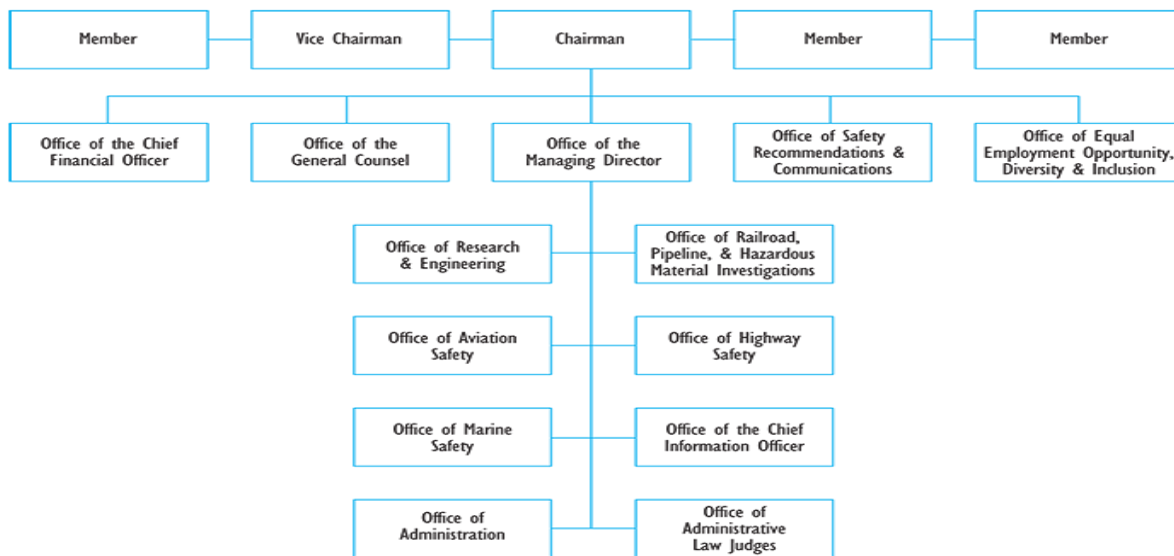


Figure 1: NTSB Organization Chart

Our Locations

We are headquartered in Washington, DC, and have staff working remotely throughout the country and in regional offices in Ashburn, Virginia; Denver, Colorado; Anchorage, Alaska; and Federal Way, Washington (figure 2 shows the NTSB’s US regional presence).

NTSB Regional Field Offices

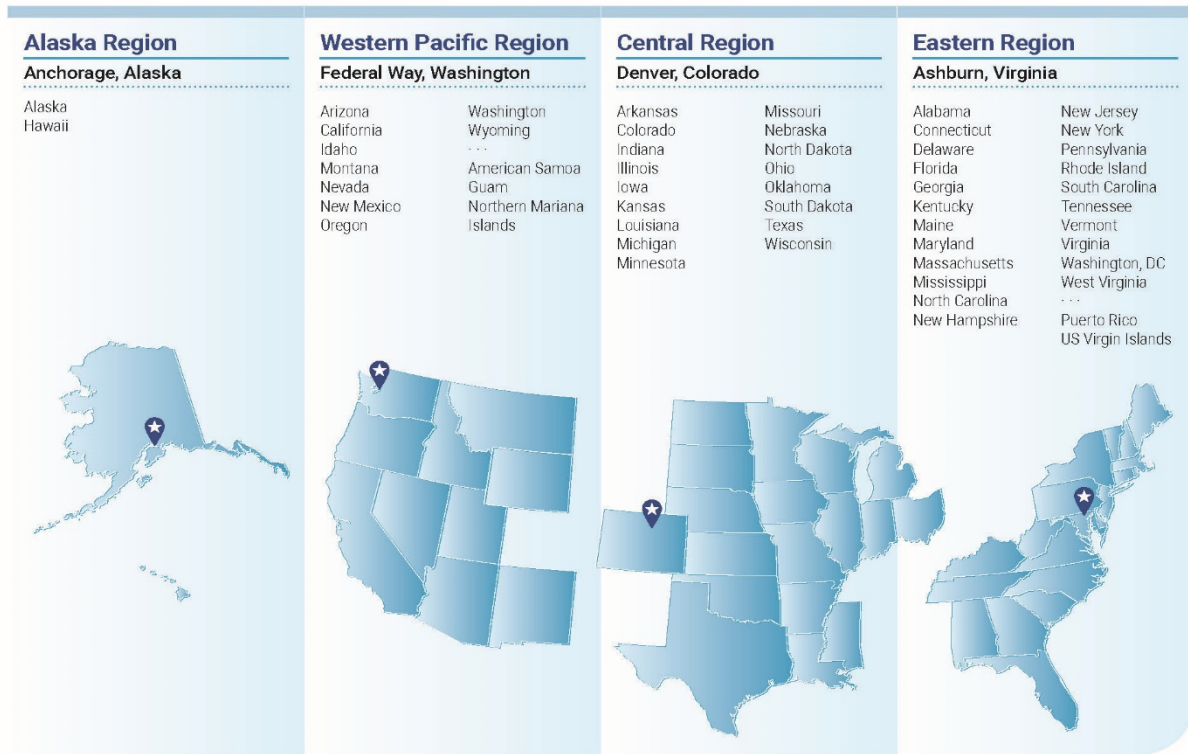


Figure 2: NTSB Regional Presence

Appendix C: Strategic Management Process

This performance-based culture has remained a focus of agency management and staff over the past several fiscal years, and it continues to be enhanced through this plan as we develop and evaluate our performance metrics and target levels each year. As we continually improve this process, we will be able to demonstrate more outcome-related performance results and make the best use of the resources entrusted to the agency. We are optimistic that our results-oriented culture will continue to evolve and promote better governance in the future, leading to further improvements in transportation safety. The figure below depicts a cyclical process map of how we measure success.

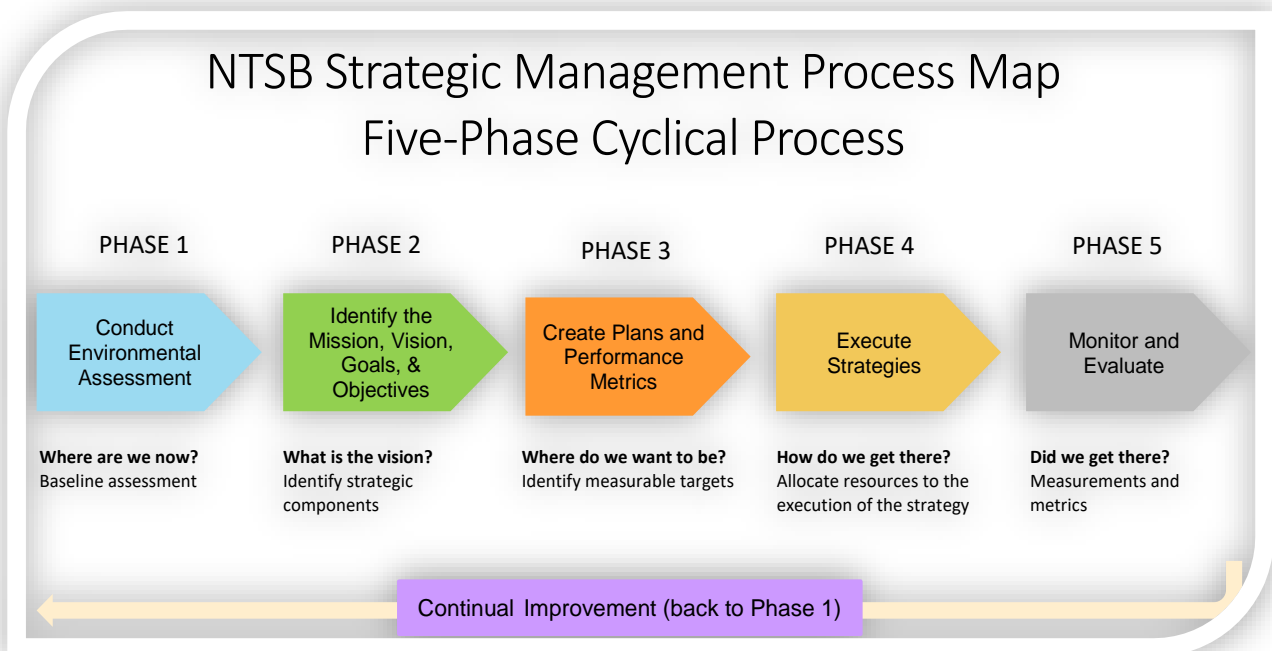


Figure 3: NTSB Strategic Management Process Map