

National Transportation Safety Board

Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Strategic Performance Report



INTEGRITY ◊ TRANSPARENCY ◊ INDEPENDENCE ◊

EXCELLENCE ◊ DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

FY 2020 Annual Strategic Performance Report

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Acronyms and Initialisms

ARTP	Aviation Report Timeliness Project
ASPR	Annual Strategic Performance Report
AS	Office of Aviation Safety
CAROL	Case Analysis and Reporting Online
DIAC	Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Councils
D-Ramp	Delegated Report Agreement Meeting Plan
EEODI	Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Diversity and Inclusion
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FEVS	Federal Employment Viewpoint Survey
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FY	fiscal year
HS	Office of Highway Safety
MD	Office of the Managing Director
MS	Office of Marine Safety
NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer
RPH	Office of Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Investigations
SRC	Office of Safety Recommendations and Communications

The NTSB at a Glance

About the NTSB

The National Transportation Safety Board (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.

Our Mission

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

Our 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.

Our Core Values

Integrity

Transparency

Independence

Excellence

Diversity and Inclusion

About this Plan

The NTSB’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Annual Strategic Performance Report (ASPR) outlines our strategies to achieve agency priorities, promote organizational change, and improve agency performance. The FY 2020 ASPR provides stakeholders—the traveling public, the transportation industry, government agencies, and Congress—with a comprehensive view of our goals and objectives for the fiscal year. In addition, this ASPR draws a clear line from our mission through performance metrics and targets to our goals, objectives, and key performance indicators. The ASPR is guided by our [FY 2018–2022 Strategic Plan](#) and complies with the [Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010](#) and the Office of Management and Budget’s [Circular A-11, Part 6](#).

This report includes three new strategic goals: improving processes; improving products; and improving employee engagement, diversity, and inclusion. These goals are designed to improve the agency’s operations, from investigative to support offices.

Figure 1 below shows our strategic goals and objectives:

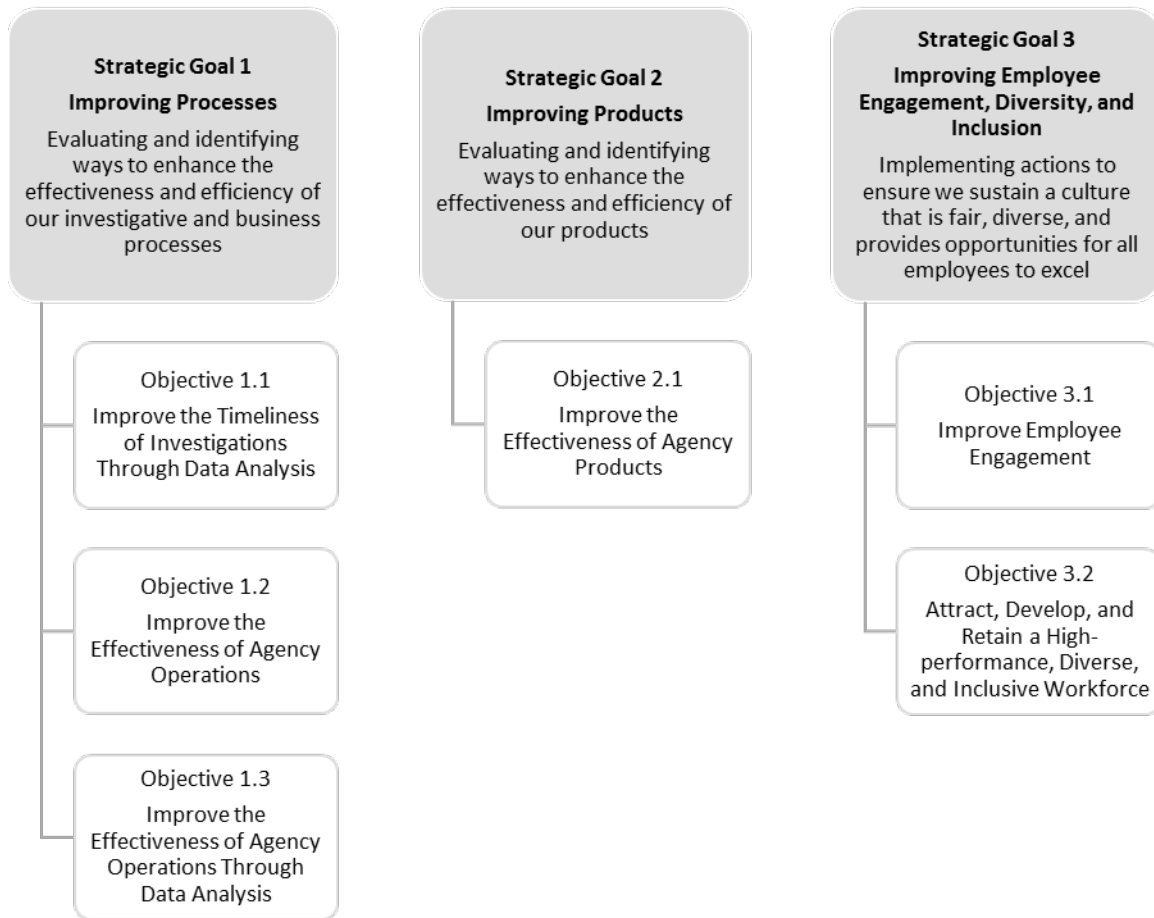


Figure 1: NTSB Strategic Goals and Objectives

Strategic Performance Management

In accordance with the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act [of 2010 and Circular A-11, Part 6](#), our strategic management process and performance framework starts with our FY 2020–2024 Strategic Plan. The annual strategic plan serves as the foundation for establishing long-term priorities and developing performance goals, objectives, and metrics that gauge our success. The strategic management process demonstrates progress toward our performance goals and priorities and is measured using quarterly reviews and data analysis.

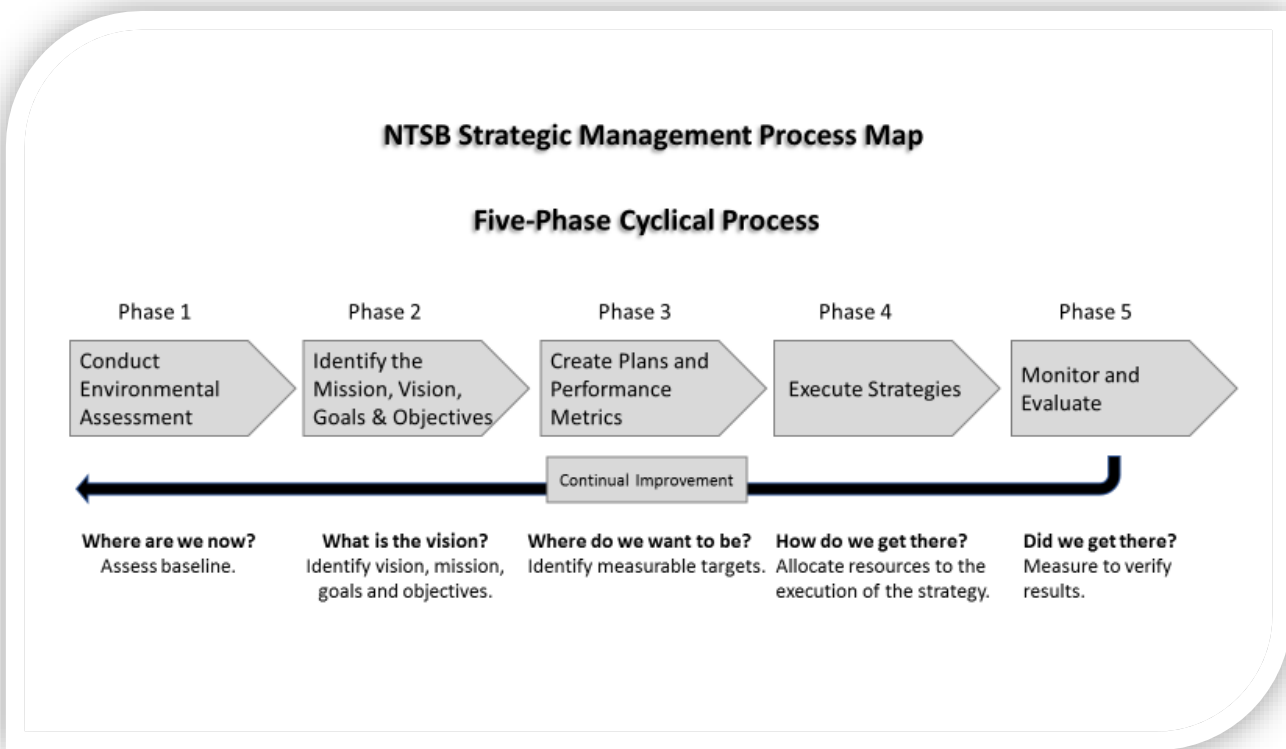


Figure 2: NTSB Strategic Management Process Map

Management Review and Data Reliability

We use a quarterly data-driven review process. Data management is key to determining performance outcomes. Currently, the data are reviewed and verified by the Office of Strategic Initiatives and are finalized with the Managing Director.

Measuring our Success

The strategic plan serves as the foundation for establishing long-term and outcome-related priorities and for developing performance goals, objectives, and metrics by which we can gauge our success. We have developed a performance-based culture on which agency management and staff have focused for the past several years.

We define our performance goals annually and evaluate our progress toward achieving them through performance 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

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 believe that our results-oriented culture will continue to evolve and promote better governance in the future, leading to further improvements in transportation safety.

Key Challenges Affecting Achievement of Strategic Goals

Our ability to achieve our strategic goals may be influenced by the changing balance of the transportation industry; by the activities of other federal, state, and local government; by shifts in national priorities and the Coronavirus pandemic response; and by the availability of resources. Budgetary constraints, including fluctuations in appropriations, present a major challenge. Additional challenges include recruiting, retaining, and developing highly skilled and diverse staff, particularly when competing against the private sector.

Addressing Our Challenges

We addressed the challenges described above through effective open communication while in extended telework status during the Coronavirus pandemic, improved employee engagement, and long-range planning. Long-range planning in human capital management, core operations, and national changes during the pandemic ensured that we are ready to deal with future investigative and operational needs. Effective communication at all levels of the organization helped to improve our strategic outlook. We devoted time and resources to thinking strategically, promoting employee engagement, and encouraging staff development. With the creation of our new internal agency website, InsideNTSB, we've established a broader communication tool for employees to stay informed and provide feedback to the agency.

To achieve our long-term vision, we must effectively plan and communicate while maintaining our primary commitment to improving transportation safety.

Performance Management and Reporting

Our strategic objectives support and complement our strategic goals. We review performance metrics and targets to assess program effectiveness and to consider how risks and opportunities impact our ability to achieve our strategic goals and objectives. This assessment allows the agency to adjust and improve performance throughout each year, as well as to reevaluate our strategic plan objectives and metrics, if necessary.

FY 2020 was the first year for reporting on our newly revised strategic plan. Our targets this fiscal year were developed with a baseline as we reviewed and evaluated our operations, products, process, and the impact of that review and evaluation on our employees. Working on improvements and determining the underlying issues was important in our analysis. By focusing on an agile approach to improvements, we developed cross-agency working groups and teams to evaluate specific processes and products.

We met all eight metrics as we established future goals to improve.

Table 1. FY 2020 Performance Metrics Results at a Glance.

Measure	Measure Name	Office(s)	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result	Met, or Not Met
1.1.1	Study and Implement an Improved Investigation Timeliness Process	HS & MS	Study and implement an improved investigation timeliness process	AS implemented ARTP MS implemented D-Ramp	Met
1.2.1	Study and reduce the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) responses backlog	Agency (CIO Leads)	Establish new backlog baseline	Baseline Established as <200	Met
2.1.1	Establish a safety actions program to document all safety actions resulting from investigations	Agency	Establish program guidelines	Operations Bulletin developed and awaiting approval	Met
2.1.2	Establish agency-wide Board Meeting Criteria	Agency (MD Leads)	Study and develop Board Meeting criteria	Operations Bulletin developed and awaiting approval	Met
2.1.3	Refresh agency external website to improve search capabilities	CIO & SRC	Implement Phase 1	Phase I: Search Capabilities Implemented	Met
3.1.1	Implement an interactive employee intranet site	SRC & CIO	Implement new website	Website launched	Met
3.1.2	Improve employee engagement as measured by employee surveys	Agency (MD Leads)	Baseline	Offices selected FEVS questions for improvement to establish baseline	Met
3.2.1	Revise the Strategic Human Capital Plan	Agency (MD Leads)	Plan Completed	Phase 1 completed	Met
3.2.2	Improve diversity and inclusion as measured by employee participation and survey feedback	Agency (EEODI Leads)	Baseline	Offices selected FEVS questions for improvement to establish baseline	Met

Goal 1: Improving Processes

Strategic Objective 1.1: Improve the Timeliness of Investigations

We aim to improve the timeliness of our accident investigations by applying data-driven tools and structured techniques that improve the investigative process. We evaluated current investigation processes of two modal offices to ensure appropriate investigation scope and remove report-review bottlenecks. A data-focused review of aviation and marine investigations and the use of our new investigative case management system has allowed us to better understand how to improve the timeliness of those investigations.

The results were improved investigation processes by the Office of Aviation Safety (AS) and the Office of Marine Safety (MS). AS used a new Aviation Report Timeliness Project (ARTP) to train staff and to initiate process changes to accident and incident reports. MS completed an implementation review of the delegated briefs processes and reports. MS also initiated the Delegated Report Agreement Meeting Plan (D-Ramp) process to address timeliness issues in completing major investigation reports.

Performance Metric 1.1.1: Study and Implement an Improved Investigation Timeliness Process

Table 2. Performance Metric 1.1.1

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
AS & MS	N/A	Implement an improved investigation timeliness process	AS implemented ARTP MS implemented D-Ramp

Accomplishments

In FY 2020, we took steps to help us define and implement new ways to improve investigative processes for aviation and marine investigations. The following are examples of some activities that each office completed.

- AS implemented the ARTP for all its divisions, as follows:
 - The office developed a template concerning safety risk assessment and risk control planning structured techniques for accident launches during the Coronavirus pandemic.
 - It developed a launch assessment tool for other modal offices to use during the pandemic.
 - It implemented work plans for all investigations.
 - It developed new technical area process manuals based on ARTP.
- MS implemented D-Ramp process to improve the timeliness and quality of accident reports that will be delegated for adoption at the Office Director level. In

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most cases, this process improved product quality and shortened the time required for in-office reviews.

- Staff used D-Ramp to review 17 investigations (about 60 percent of the delegated investigations) in FY 20.
- Of the investigations, 60 percent were completed in less than eight months indicating that the use of a D-Ramp resulted in improved overall timeliness.
- In most cases, shorter-term D-Ramps resulted in improved product quality and faster MS Management reviews.

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

We continued the review and evaluation of our FOIA process to further decrease the FOIA backlog. Reviewing and processing FOIA requests in a comprehensive and timely manner reflects our core value of transparency. We set a target of reducing the current FOIA backlog of cases and establishing a new baseline for the number of requests we have on hand. To achieve this target, we determined that we needed to update training and review current FOIA processes across the agency. In FY 2020, we handled more than 1500 new FOIA requests, while reducing the existing backlog; we also established a new backlog baseline of under 200 cases.

Performance Metric 1.2.1: Study and reduce the FOIA responses backlog

Table 3. Performance Metric 1.2.1

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency (CIO Leads)	N/A	Establish new backlog baseline	Baseline established to <200 cases FY 2020 backlog cases at less than 200 cases

Accomplishments

- Reduced FOIA backlog from 945 cases to less than 200 cases. This constituted a 77 percent reduction in the backlog during FY 2020, culminating in a 90 percent reduction since FY 2017.
- The Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) worked with our Office of General Counsel to develop FOIA training for the agency. All managers and staff completed the new training and reviewed and updated their FOIA processes and plans based in accordance with the training.

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 what we do. 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's experience.

Strategic Objective 2.1: Improve the effectiveness of agency products

Our primary products for improving transportation safety are our safety recommendations. These recommendations can be issued at any time during an NTSB investigation and are carefully tracked within the agency. Other organizations involved in our investigations may implement safety improvements within days of an accident's occurrence, 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. We evaluated current documentation processes for recording these improvements. The result was the development of a new definition for safety actions to improve agency standardization. An operations bulletin was also developed to specify the new process for documenting and reporting these safety actions; the operations bulletin is currently being routed around the agency for approval.

We also reviewed one of our most important means of delivering NTSB products: public Board meetings. These 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 prior to its adoption. 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 caused us to rethink how we select accident investigations and studies for Board meetings, as well as how those meetings are conducted. We reviewed and evaluated the effectiveness of how we use this tool to communicate with the public, industry, and lawmakers. The results were the development of criteria and standards for determining how investigation reports and studies will be selected for discussion at a Board meeting. An operations bulletin was developed to specify the new criteria and standards and the process for applying them; this document is currently being routed around the agency for approval.

Finally, to continue our communication to best serve the transportation industry, the public, lawmakers, and those impacted by transportation accidents, we began an update of our external agency website. We determined that this update should be addressed in two phases. Phase 1 was completed this fiscal year and included an update to improve users' ability to search for and analyze data and a new query tool, [Case Analysis and Reporting Online \(CAROL\)](#), that allows users access to the full spectrum of public data related to our investigations. Users are able to query investigative and safety recommendation data across all modes (rail, pipeline, hazardous materials,

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marine, highway and aviation).¹ The new site readily shows the breadth of our work on such issues as fatigue, distraction, impairment, and other factors that cross modal lines. Phase 2 of the update will occur in FY 2021 and will include additional enhancements.

Performance Metric 2.1.1: Establish a safety actions program to document all safety actions resulting from investigations

Table 4. Performance Metric 2.1.1

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency	N/A	Establish program guidelines	Operations Bulletin developed and awaiting approval

Performance Metric 2.1.2: Establish agency-wide Board Meeting Criteria

Table 5. Performance Metric 2.1.2

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency (MD Leads)	N/A	Study and develop Board Meeting criteria	Operations Bulletin developed and awaiting approval

Performance Metric 2.1.3: Refresh agency external website to improve search capabilities

Table 6. Performance Metric 2.1.3

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
CIO & SRC	N/A	Implement Phase 1	Phase I: Search Capabilities Implemented

Accomplishments

- A safety actions operations bulletin submitted for review and approval.
 - Some offices updated discussion meetings to include newly proposed definitions and criteria.
- The Board Meeting Criteria Workgroup developed a worksheet to rank the criteria based on a collaboratively developed weighting scheme and ranking; all modal offices and the Office of Research and Engineering demonstrated how investigations would be ranked.
 - Each office ranked investigations within their mode only.
 - Criteria and worksheet were presented first to senior leadership and then to the Chairman.
 - A draft operations bulletin was developed and is currently being routed for review and approval.

¹ NTSB New Release, [NTSB Moves Forward in Meeting Federal Data Strategy, Requirements for Open Data](#)

- The Office of Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Investigations (RPH) applied the criteria to an investigation to determine whether to present it for a Board meeting.
- NTSB.gov search capabilities were updated using the CAROL Query.

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

Employee engagement is key to us meeting our goal of becoming the number one small agency in the federal government.² We will gauge our success using a newly implemented employee intranet site and various employee surveys (via that site) and the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS).

We implemented a new employee website, InsideNTSB, which offers a new updated format, look, and platform for ease of use. We developed a strategy and began implementation of legacy portal data migration to the website. Agency management staff have provided positive feedback on the new intranet site capabilities and use. We continue to provide information to workforce via InsideNTSB at an effective pace and platform.

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. The results were an agency-wide effort to focus on selecting FY 2019 FEVS questions which each office believed to be the lowest for their office.³ Each office worked to focus on the response rates and improving the scores through various activities. With the Coronavirus pandemic, the offices continued to focus on engagement in more adaptive ways. With these challenges, each office provided creative ways to engage with employees while in full-time teleworking status.

² 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](#).

³ Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, FY 2020 FEVS survey was delayed. Offices used the most recent data from FEVS and other internal agency survey responses.

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Offices provided creative ways to keep staff engaged. Some of the in-person activities were modified to be held online visually through the agency’s Microsoft Teams platform. Group activities included all hands staff meetings, meet-and-greets for new employees, and other social gatherings.

Performance Metric 3.1.1: Implement an Interactive Employee Intranet Site

Table 7. Performance Metric 3.1.1

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
OCIO	N/A	Implement new website	Website launched

Performance Metric 3.1.2: Improve Employee Engagement as Measured by Employee Surveys

Table 8. Performance Metric 3.1.2

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency (MD Leads)	N/A	Baseline	Employee engagement questions selected and offices began evaluation

Accomplishments

- Implemented strategies to improve the virtual workspace for employees during the Coronavirus pandemic increasing their connection with peers, supervisors, and senior leaders.
 - Some offices held lessons-learned meetings and staff presented management process improvements to address the issues that were identified.
 - MS worked with the Office of Administration, Human Resources Division to develop a staff survey to address specific questions. Additional offices developed office feedback forms to solicit comments.
 - Offices held All Hands meetings to discuss the FEVS Survey results and questions. Offices solicited ways to improve on the questions, including employee response rates.
 - Offices in max telework due to the Coronavirus pandemic held Microsoft Teams social events and gatherings to boost employee engagement.
 - The Office of Administration reestablished their Popcorn Wednesdays to provide an online social event, providing staff an opportunity to connect with others long distance.
 - AS distributed cameras to staff for use when teleworking and encouraged the use of cameras to improve engagement in meetings

- The Managing Director (MD) ensured that senior leadership engaged with employees through communication, coaching, mentoring, appropriate conflict-resolution strategies, and staff development opportunities.
 - Some offices added FEVS engagement metric to Executives' and Managers' performance objectives.
- The MD continued to promote collaboration within the agency to enhance employee engagement and inclusiveness. The Chairman and senior leadership provided activities that promoted communication throughout the agency, such as the Chat with the Chairman series, various brown bag events, and a speaker series through max telework.

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 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. Through our evaluation, we determined that agile approach in updating the document was needed. Phase I was developed in FY 2020 and included offices developing 5-year workforce/staffing plans and office strategic plans that focused on aligning the workforce results with the agency's newly developed strategic plan.

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. The results were an agency-wide effort to select FY 2019 FEVS New IQ questions that each office believed to be the lowest for the agency. The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity Diversity and Inclusion (EEODI) provided offices three questions and New IQ categories that could be used for their evaluation. Those categories included fairness, openness, and cooperation.

Each office focused on the response rates and improving the scores through various activities. During the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, the offices continued to focus on diversity and inclusion in more adaptive ways. With these challenges, each office provided creative ways to engage with employees while in full-time teleworking status.

The Office of EEDOI provided specific Diversity and Inclusion and New IQ-focused training, webinars, and activities to reflect issues, concerns, and topics during the Coronavirus pandemic. The Office of EEODI and the NTSB's Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council (DIAC) worked with offices to address specific questions and how to address the responses.

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Performance Metric 3.2.1: Revise the Strategic Human Capital Plan

Table 9. Performance Metric 3.2.1

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency (MD Leads)	N/A	Plan Completed	Phase I completed

Performance Metric 3.2.2: Improve diversity and inclusion as measured by employee participation and survey feedback

Table 10. Performance Metric 3.2.2

Offices	FY 2019 Result	FY 2020 Target	FY 2020 Result
Agency (EEODI Leads)	N/A	Baseline	Diversity and Inclusion questions selected and offices began evaluation

Accomplishments

- Offices completed the newly developed 5-year workforce staffing plans to provide input on the Strategic Human Capital Plan. Offices also developed office level strategic plans in alignment with the newly developed strategic plan and workforce staffing plans.
- Offices collaborated with the DIAC to learn about barriers to equal opportunity employment, the status of agency's upper mobility program(s), and various tools to promote diversity and inclusion.
- Office participation in the DIAC to perform hiring barrier analysis and developed plans for improvement.
- Managers participated in EEODI-led training. Offices encouraged staff to take specific Diversity & Inclusion training that was provided.
- RPH completed a climate assessment; defined inclusion strategies with its leadership team; completed a professional development seminar with the support of a consultant affiliated with the Partnership for Public Service; and implemented inclusive improvement strategies within RPH.