

Office of the Inspector General
2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey

Executive Summary

April 2021



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Executive Summary

Beginning in the Fall of 2020, Willis Towers Watson partnered with the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) to assess the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) safety culture and climate as well as other aspects of employee experience such as engagement. This survey served as a follow-up to the 2015 DNFSB Culture and Climate Survey. Willis Towers Watson conducted the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey for approximately 95 employees in January of 2021. The survey was designed based on information gathered from leadership interviews and staff focus groups. The analysis from the interviews and focus group meetings aided in the development of the survey instrument.

Overall summary-level results show specific strengths and areas of improvement for the DNFSB. Results are analyzed looking at benchmark comparisons against the Willis Towers Watson's U.S. National Norm, the U.S. Research and Development (R&D) Norm, the U.S. Transitional Companies Norm, and the 2015 DNFSB Culture and Climate Survey results. Following normative and historical analysis, open-ended responses to the survey are reviewed.

Overall findings indicate that the DNFSB has made great progress since the 2015 survey. Based on survey results, overall strengths and opportunities, and areas at risk are addressed and suggestions for action planning are provided.

Purpose of Survey and Background

In the Winter of 2021, Willis Towers Watson assisted the OIG in assessing the DNFSB's safety culture and climate. The OIG commissioned Willis Towers Watson to conduct a survey to assess the safety culture and climate as well as other aspects of employee experience such as engagement at the DNFSB.

- Willis Towers Watson conducted the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey for approximately 95 employees in January of 2021. Through this research initiative, the OIG's goals were to:
- Measure the DNFSB's safety culture and climate to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement;
- Compare the results of this survey against the previous survey conducted in 2015; and,
- Provide, where practical, benchmarks for the findings against other similar organizations and from Willis Towers Watson's database, and establish a safety index for comparison with future survey data.

To achieve these goals, the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey consisted of four distinct activities:

1. A review of the existing research on safety culture and climate.
2. Evaluation of the 2015 Culture and Climate Survey results.
3. A qualitative design phase where a sample of DNFSB employees and leadership were interviewed and focus group meetings were held.
4. A quantitative component consisting of a survey administered to all permanent full-time and part-time DNFSB employees.

A better understanding of the DNFSB's safety culture and climate will facilitate identification of agency strengths and opportunities for improvement. Agency program and support offices can use this information to develop action plans, as warranted. In addition, the OIG plans to use the survey results in connection with risk assessments to help inform its annual audit planning and review, and update as appropriate, agency management challenges.

Survey Design

As previously discussed, the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey consisted of four phases. Leadership interviews, employee focus groups and Willis Towers Watson's review of the 2015 Culture and Climate Survey results served as the basis for designing the survey questionnaire. Results from the most recently available Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) were also examined. The questions that served as the basis for the 2021 survey included items from the 2015 survey, which were either previously selected from Willis Towers Watson's normative database or custom items tailored to address the unique topic of the DNFSB's safety culture and climate.¹

During the survey design process, some additional survey questions were added as a result of feedback received during the interviews with senior management and staff focus group meetings. Likewise, some questions were removed or reworded because some concepts previously assessed have been addressed or are no longer relevant. Specific items on the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) from Willis Towers Watson's benchmark library were also added to the survey. Additionally, an open-ended response question was added to the end of the survey to give respondents an opportunity to provide their written feedback on improvements for the DNFSB. In all, the 2021 survey contained 64 separate items, as compared with 75 items in 2015. The 2021 survey items were broken down across 14 distinct categories.

This Executive Summary highlights the results of the DNFSB's survey. The overall results are examined first, looking at specific areas of strength and opportunities for improvement at the DNFSB. Category and item-level results are compared to the Willis Towers Watson's U.S. National Norm, the U.S. R&D Norm, the U.S. Transitional Companies Norm, and the 2015 DNFSB Culture and Climate Survey results.² The COVID-19 specific items will be compared to the Willis Towers Watson's COVID-19 Lockdown Period Norm.³ Following internal comparisons, a high-level thematic analysis of the responses to the survey's open-ended response question will be presented.

¹ Item: An item is a survey question. Similar items are grouped together to create survey categories.

² The U.S. National Norm is comprised of organizations representing a broad spectrum of industries across the United States. The U.S. R&D Norm is comprised of a representative sample of the U.S. research and development workforce weighted according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. The U.S. Transitional Companies Norm is comprised of companies across industries that experienced significant changes, such as reorganization, widespread layoffs, acquisition, changing from a privately-owned company to a publicly-owned company, or being bought out by the employees.

³ The COVID-19 Lockdown Period Norm consists of employee survey results in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and comprises opinions from over 500,000 respondents across 108 unique companies from a cross-section of industry sectors. Data collected from March through December of 2020.

Survey Results in Brief

Survey Administration Summary

The OIG's 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey had a two-and-a-half-week administration period from January 12 to January 29, 2021. All permanent full-time and part-time employees who had been with the agency for at least 60 days were eligible to participate.⁴ From the 95 employees invited to participate, 78 employees completed the survey, for an overall return rate of 82 percent. This return is higher than the 2015 completion rate of 74 percent participation (Exhibit 1).

External Benchmark Summary

When compared to the U.S. National Norm, the overall category scores for the DNFSB are more favorable (percentage of employees responding favorable to a given set of questions) in 5 out of 12 comparable categories. None were significantly more favorable (utilizing statistical significance at the 95 percent confidence level, an industry standard).⁵ Similar to previous years, the category with the most favorable score compared to the U.S. National Norm is Quality Focus, which is 20 points significantly above the norm (Exhibit 3). Similarly, when comparing the DNFSB survey scores with the U.S. R&D Norm, 5 out of 12 categories score above the norm, with six below the norm. No statistically significant differences from the U.S. R&D Norm were found (Exhibit 4). Compared to the U.S. Transitional Companies Norm, 8 out of 9 comparable categories scored above the norm, with statistically significant differences in the Communication, Leadership, and Supervision categories (Exhibit 5).

Historical Comparison Summary

The historical comparison from 2015 to 2021 shows improvements across all categories, with statistically significant increases in 6 out of 12 comparable categories. The largest improvements compared to 2015 were Leadership, Ethics and Professionalism, Change Management and Diversity (Exhibit 6).

Sustainable Engagement and Safety Results Summary

Generally, engagement scores remained a strength for the DNFSB, with slight improvements in five out of six survey items, continuing to score favorably compared to benchmarks. The DNFSB compares very well against benchmarks for belief in the goals and objectives of the organization (Exhibit 7).

⁴ To ensure survey respondents had an appropriate amount of experience working at the DNFSB, only those who had started working at the DNFSB 60 or more days prior to the start of the survey administration were sent an invitation to participate in the survey.

⁵ Statistical Significance: Statistical Significance is a statistical test that is run to find out the likelihood that a result or relationship is caused by something other than mere random chance. A confidence level is a type of interval estimate. Using a confidence level of 95 percent, this means that we can be 95 percent sure that a result from a statistical analysis is not due to random chance.

Perceptions of the DNFSB safety culture appear strong. Findings from this year's safety index will serve as a baseline for comparisons with future survey data (Exhibit 8).

Open-Ended Responses Summary

An open-ended response question was added to the end of the 2021 survey to give DNFSB employees an opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions. Respondents were asked to provide ideas or suggestions on what they think would make the DNFSB a more successful and better place to work. Respondents comments most on issues related to staff relations, communication and hiring practices.

Survey Results Summary

In summary, the results of the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey show strong improvements since the 2015 survey. Improvements were made in all survey categories and only two survey items decreased from 2015. Compared to external benchmarks, the DNFSB's greatest strengths focus on work quality and supervision. Whereas, areas of opportunity concentrate on empowerment, change management, leadership, and development.

Integrating Findings

To help integrate these findings into the DNFSB's culture, the Willis Towers Watson survey team will hold Results to Action Workshops for DNFSB leadership. The workshop will provide an overview of the DNFSB's overall survey results, and help leaders understand, interpret, and prioritize their agency's survey results. Further, DNFSB leadership will be given guidance on creating, implementing, and communicating action plans to drive real change.

Qualitative Design Phase: Interviews and Focus Groups

For the qualitative design component of the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey, Willis Towers Watson conducted phone interviews with senior leadership and virtual focus group meetings with staff. In total, six leadership interviews and three focus group meetings were conducted. The analysis from the interview and focus groups aided in the development of the survey instrument. The primary emphasis for these sessions was to inform the design of the 2021 survey instrument. Further, the meetings helped Willis Towers Watson gather information and understanding regarding what new themes (or categories) may need to be explored as well as what themes (or categories) may now be less relevant and thus subject to removal from the survey instrument.

Key findings from interviews and focus groups include:

- **Communication:** Most leaders and employees mentioned vast progress made in this area. Some indicated that the addition of a communication lead for the Board Members has helped, while others said that the Acting Chair's communication style was perceived as much more trustworthy.⁶ Feedback from employees at lower levels indicated that they may be still missing out on key information.
- **Talent Management and Development:** Employees felt that there are good employees at the DNFSB, but there are some skills sets that are not fully represented at the agency. Development was seen as a bright spot.
- **Differing Views Processes:** Most employees said they feel able to progress through decisions without the need for formal channels to deal with differing views. Many saw this ability to work together towards a common goal as an important part of the culture of the DNFSB, focused on its safety mission. However, others felt bigger issues do not make their way all the way up to the Board-level and do not always trust those at higher levels.
- **Empowerment:** Leaders and employees shared that there is a high sense of empowerment in their work. Leaders suggested that empowerment was a key attraction factor for new employees.
- **Engagement:** Leaders understood that in the past morale may have been negatively impacted by the Board's direction and decisions. However, with the recent leadership changes at the Board level, leaders believed employees were reengaged in their work and morale was improving.⁷ Employees agreed that recent changes in leadership had led to better connections with the overall direction of the DNFSB.
- **DNFSB Image and Ethics:** Leaders mentioned that certain events over the last several years have lessened the perceived importance of the DNFSB's recommendations and its ability to influence the Department of Energy's stance on key issues. However, some felt this had been improving recently. Employees highlighted a consistently strong perception of ethics in the people they work with.
- **DNFSB Mission and Strategic Plan:** Though most leaders agreed that the mission was still a source of strength for the DNFSB, most acknowledged that the most recent former Chairman's

⁶ The Board refers to the DNFSB Board Members in place at the time of the survey (Ms. Roberson, Ms. Connery, and the Acting Chairman, Mr. Summers).

⁷ In August 2020, Chairman Bruce Hamilton resigned from the DNFSB. Mr. Thomas Summers served as Acting Chairman following Mr. Hamilton's departure in early September of 2020.

position regarding the relevance of the DNFSB had led to questions about the role of the DNFSB. However, the then acting Chairman's commitment to the mission of the agency had helped alleviate some of those concerns. Employees said they have always been focused on the mission of the organization. However, some did feel that some of the Board-level plans were not necessarily as aligned to the mission as they thought it should be.

- **Working Environment:** Along with issues of trust between staff and the Board, leaders overwhelmingly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic had completely upended the work environment. Though the reaction to the pandemic was slow at first, eventually protective measures were implemented which led to staff feeling much more at ease and supported. At the time of the interviews and focus groups, the working environment had stabilized, though many challenges remained around technology enabling employees to be productive. However, employees did not believe the pandemic had a major impact on the work environment as they felt all were appropriately focused on the mission and were able to connect as needed leveraging technology.
- **Quality Focus:** Leaders and employees expressed that there is a high level of quality at the agency and that employees are capable of taking on the complex challenges of the work. Some leaders mentioned that the quality of the work being delivered had never been better. Some employees felt that there is not enough focus on moving things along in a timely manner.
- **Safety Culture:** Employees expressed that they generally feel they can speak up, but some had concerns that people who do raise issues can be labeled as troublemakers.
- **Operating Efficiency and Procedures:** Employees were feeling the strain of greater expectations with fewer employees to do the work. Many felt supported by colleagues but not always by those several levels above.
- **Leadership:** Most leaders and employees agreed that the Board had a few turbulent years which led to some poor views of leadership from staff. However, current views on leadership of the Board seemed to be noticeably improving with the Board in its current form.
- **Change Management:** Leaders and employees agreed that the DNFSB had experienced a significant amount of change in the last few years. Pandemic-related change topped the list, however Board-level change was quite prevalent as well.

Conclusion of Qualitative Phase

An overall review of the focus groups and interview comments showed that the DNFSB remains a great place to work within the U.S. government. However, the DNFSB has experienced significant changes recently as a result of changing or incongruent Board priorities and initiatives. These changes have been perceived to be somewhat dramatic in recent years and largely negative. That said, recent changes in the Board were viewed as more positive and renewed confidence in senior leadership.

Survey Development

The survey instrument was developed based on Willis Towers Watson's research into safety culture; the qualitative review of prior survey questionnaires; the qualitative interview and focus group meetings; and Willis Towers Watson's survey experience in other government and private sector organizations.

Willis Towers Watson grouped the survey questions into 14 categories, representing the major topic areas of the DNFSB's Safety Culture and Climate. A list of the categories, along with a brief description of the items each category contains, is provided below. For each category, the average favorable response was calculated; Exhibit 2 of this report shows the percent-favorable response for each survey category. Beginning at Exhibit 3, 2021 survey results are compared with Willis Towers Watson Norms (U.S. National Norm, U.S. Research and Development Norm, and U.S. Transitional Companies Norm) and historical results from 2015.

Survey Categories

Categories retained from the 2015 survey:

- 1. Change Management:** Assesses the way changes are communicated and implemented. This category also examines the perception of the pace of change within the DNFSB and whether things at the DNFSB will change for the better or worse in the next year.
- 2. Communication:** Evaluates the availability and efficacy of information about matters affecting the agency, and information employees need to do their job. It also assesses the degree of openness of communication from leaders as well as believing the information that they receive.
- 3. Diversity:** Evaluates whether leaders and supervisors support equal opportunity and are accepting of different gender, people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds or lifestyles. Also addresses whether the DNFSB's environment is accepting of ethnic differences and whether people are treated with dignity and respect.
- 4. Development:** Assesses recruitment and retention of talented employees, development of employees to their full potential, and perceptions of career progression within the DNFSB. Also provides employees the opportunity to identify barriers to attending DNFSB-sponsored and other publicly/privately offered training courses.
- 5. Empowerment:** Assesses the amount of authority employees have to do their jobs, the trust they receive from management, the openness to discuss differing opinions, the ability to openly and confidently raise issues, and whether the DNFSB's climate allows one to be innovative.
- 6. Ethics/ Professionalism:** Examines whether employees are held to same ethical standards, leadership displays ethical standards, and whether leadership is generally respected by employees.
- 7. Operating Efficiency/ Procedures:** Assesses efficient operations, sufficient resource allocations, streamlined and effective workflow, and effective decision-making.

8. **Leadership:** Probes employees' views of overall leadership within the DNFSB, including management style, and respect for diversity, clarity of strategy, confidence in decisions made, and sincere interest in employee well-being.
9. **Quality Focus:** Explores employee views on the quality of the DNFSB's work as well as the sacrifice of quality work due to the need to meet metrics or the need to satisfy a personal or political agenda.
10. **Retention:** Assesses whether employees are seriously considering leaving the organization.
11. **Supervision:** Examines employee perceptions of their immediate supervisors' technical competency; confidence in their decision-making; availability; communication skills; people management and team-building skills; and their level of effectiveness when working with people of different gender, racial/ethnic background, or lifestyle. And explores the DNFSB's recognition for quality of performance.
12. **Sustainable Engagement:** Assesses the level of the DNFSB employees' connection to the organization, marked by being proud to work at the DNFSB, committing effort to achieve the goals (being engaged) having an environment that support productivity (being enabled) and maintaining personal well-being (feeling energized).

New categories:

13. **Safety:** Evaluates employees' perceptions of the DNFSB's safety culture and the DNFSB's commitment to nuclear safety. It also measures perception regarding how safety issues are investigated and resolved by management.
14. **COVID-19:** Assesses issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including how well the agency is communicating and keeping employees informed, adapting its procedures, and providing employees with support.

Survey Administration

The DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey was administered January 12 to January 29, 2021. All permanent full-time and part-time DNFSB employees who had been with the DNFSB for 60 or more days were eligible to participate. Of the 95 employees invited to participate, 78 completed surveys,⁸ for an overall return rate of 82 percent.⁹ This return is higher than the 2015 survey administration (74 percent participation in 2015) and continues to be more than sufficient to provide a reliable and valid measure of the current attitudes and perceptions of DNFSB employees.

Exhibit 1

Participation Rates

Administration: January 12 – 29, 2021

		<u>Outgoing</u>	<u>Returned</u>
DNFSB 2021	82%	95	78
DNFSB 2015	74%	107	79

⁸ A valid survey is when the individual selects at least one coding question and at least one opinion question. Self-select coding can result in sub-group participation amounts not adding up to the overall DNFSB total.

⁹ Willis Towers Watson's global return rate is 80%.

Overall Category Scores

“Total Favorable” in the results charts that follow is the combination of the “Agree”/ “Tend to Agree” responses. The Question Mark “?” response column is composed of employees who do not know or do not have an opinion to the question. “Total Unfavorable” are employees who responded with a “Tend to Disagree” or “Disagree” response to the question. For negatively worded items, the rules just mentioned are reversed. The average favorable response score for each category was calculated and is provided below. In terms of absolute favorable scores, all but the Change Management category demonstrate majority favorable scores (defined as greater than 50 percent favorable responses), with the most favorable being Diversity at 81 percent favorable.

The category scores range between 50 to 81 percent favorable, with Diversity, Sustainable Engagement Safety, COVID-19 and Supervision characterized by employees as most favorable, with scores at 79 percent or higher. The remaining categories range from Ethics/Professionalism at 77 percent to Change Management at 50 percent (the lowest-scoring category). When reviewing category scores, caution should be exercised in the absence of historical or external benchmarks.¹⁰ Some categories have a propensity to receive low or unfavorable category scores, so when reviewing these scores without a benchmark, one may draw an inaccurate conclusion.

Exhibit 2

Category Scores

DNFSB Overall 2021

Category	Total Favorable Score
Change Management	50
Communication	62
COVID-19	80
Diversity	81
Development	61
Empowerment	70
Ethics/Professionalism	77
Leadership	75
Operating Efficiency/Procedures	63
Quality Focus	75
Retention	62
Safety	71
Supervision	79
Sustainable Engagement	80

¹⁰ The Safety and COVID-19 categories were new features of the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey. Historical comparisons to the 2015 Climate and Culture survey are not available for these categories. The three main normative benchmarks used in this analysis (U.S., R&D and Transitional norms) are also not available for these two categories. Historical comparisons exist for all other survey categories, each with coverage across at least 2 out of 3 of the main norms discussed here.

Comparison of the DNFSB with the U.S. National Norm

Willis Towers Watson norms are based on a weighted sample of employee responses categorized by nation, industry, function, or performance. The first benchmark the DNFSB is compared with is the U.S. National Norm. This norm is composed of organizations representing a broad spectrum of industries across the United States and is updated annually. The norm includes 147,268 cases (weighted average) from individual participants. Employees in the norm are Hourly, Salaried, Exempt, and Non-Exempt up to and including Executives. Organizations in the norm are weighted to ensure proper proportionality.

Statistical Significance

When a percent favorable or unfavorable response between two groups is displayed, a statistical test is conducted by Willis Towers Watson to determine whether the difference in scores represents a “real” difference in opinion, rather than attributing the difference to random chance. A statistically significant difference is one that is large enough, given the size of the groups being compared, to be unlikely to be caused by chance. Statistically significant differences are therefore thought to be indicators of real difference between two groups being compared. A statistically significant difference indicates there is less than a 5 percent chance the difference occurs randomly. Please note that in the charts throughout this report, statistically significant differences are indicated by dark colored (green or red) cells with an asterisk next to the value.

Exhibit 3

Categories vs. Benchmarks

DNFSB Overall 2021 Category Scores vs. U.S. National Norm

Category	Total Favorable Score	U.S. National Norm
Change Management	50	-9
Communication	62	-1
COVID-19	80	n/a
Diversity	81	1
Development	61	-2
Empowerment	70	-3
Ethics/Professionalism	77	0
Leadership	75	2
Operating Efficiency/Procedures	63	-4
Quality Focus	75	20*
Retention	62	-5
Safety	71	n/a
Supervision	79	6
Sustainable Engagement	80	1

Each category score is represented by a green bar in the graph. The DNFSB scored less favorably in 6 of the 12 categories available, with no statistically significant differences. Five categories scored above the norm, with one significant difference as represented by the asterisk. Quality Focus is a

great strength for the DNFSB compared to the U.S. National Norm, with the category scoring 20 points significantly above the norm. Unlike in 2015, the DNFSB employee opinions are no longer significantly less favorable overall than what would typically be observed amongst the U.S. National population.

Comparison of the DNFSB with the U.S. Research and Development Norm

The U.S. R&D Norm is comprised of a representative sample of the U.S. research and development workforce weighted according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. This norm contains a representative sample of organizations throughout the U.S. and includes 12,321 entities (weighted average) that perform R&D functions. When comparing the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey scores with the R&D Norm, 5 of the 12 available categories score above the norm. While six score below the norm. No statistically significant differences were found. Whereas in 2015, 11 out of 14 categories scored below the U.S. R&D Norm, with statistically significant differences in five of those categories. Vast improvements across categories compared to 2015 suggest that the DNFSB is closing the previously large gap with the industry.

Exhibit 4

Categories vs. Benchmarks

DNFSB Overall Category Scores vs. U.S. Research & Development Norm

Category	Total Favorable Score	U.S. Research & Dev. Norm
Change Management	50	-1
Communication	62	-10
COVID-19	80	n/a
Diversity	81	-1
Development	61	2
Empowerment	70	-3
Ethics/Professionalism	77	-3
Leadership	75	0
Operating Efficiency/Procedures	63	1
Quality Focus	75	4
Retention	62	-5
Safety	71	n/a
Supervision	79	5
Sustainable Engagement	80	1

Comparison of the DNFSB with the U.S. Transitional Companies Norm

The U.S. Transitional Companies Norm is comprised of a weighted average of 47,598 employee survey results from organizations across a range of industries that have experienced significant changes impacting all employees. Such changes can include, but are not limited to, significant reorganization, bankruptcy, widespread layoffs, acquisition, changing from a privately-owned company to a publicly-owned company or vice versa, or being bought out by the employees. In addition, these companies generally report financial performance indicators (e.g., return on invested capital, net profit margin) that are below relevant industry averages for at least a 36-month period. To develop this norm, publicly available sources of financial data are researched to obtain company performance information for client organizations. When comparing the 2021 DNFSB Safety Culture and Climate Survey scores with the transitional norm, 9 of the 10 available categories score above the norm. With statistically significant differences in three categories. The most favorable differences are in Communication, Leadership and Supervision.

Exhibit 5

Categories vs. Benchmarks

DNFSB Overall 2021 Category Scores vs. U.S. Transitional Companies Norm

Category	Total Favorable Score	U.S. Transitional Norm
Change Management	50	n/a
Communication	62	26*
COVID-19	80	n/a
Diversity	81	10
Development	61	7
Empowerment	70	2
Ethics/Professionalism	77	7
Leadership	75	19*
Operating Efficiency/Procedures	63	n/a
Quality Focus	75	n/a
Retention	62	-4
Safety	71	n/a
Supervision	79	14*
Sustainable Engagement	80	7

Comparison of the DNFSB 2021 Results with the DNFSB 2015 Results

The historical comparison of results from 2021 to 2015 is favorable across all categories. The DNFSB has improved in all 12 comparable categories, with statistically significant improvements in six categories. The largest improvements are in Leadership, scoring 28 points significantly higher, and in Ethics/Professionalism, improving by 26 points. Change Management, Diversity, Communications and Quality Focus also showed significant improvements, with scores increases between 15 to 21 points.

Exhibit 6

Categories vs. Benchmarks

DNFSB Overall 2021 Category Scores vs. DNFSB Overall 2015

Category	Total Favorable Score	DNFSB Overall 2015
Change Management	50	21*
Communication	62	20*
COVID-19	80	n/a
Diversity	81	21*
Development	61	11
Empowerment	70	14
Ethics/Professionalism	77	26*
Leadership	75	28*
Operating Efficiency/Procedures	63	13
Quality Focus	75	15*
Retention	62	15
Safety	71	n/a
Supervision	79	9
Sustainable Engagement	80	5

Sustainable Engagement and Safety Indexes

Sustainable Engagement Historical and Norm Breakdown

The engagement index is composed of six questions that are shown in Exhibit 7. Exhibit 7 compares the DNFSB historical engagement scores and across normative benchmarks. Most engagement items have improved from the 2015 survey, with improved scores in 5 out of 6 items. The ability to sustain the level of energy needed throughout the day has slightly declined from 2015, likely due to the increased demands of working from home during the pandemic. The strong connection to the mission at the DNFSB, remains a strength and continues to significantly surpass all three norms.

Exhibit 7

Sustainable Engagement

DNFSB Overall 2021 vs. Benchmarks

	Total Favorable	DNFSB Overall 2015	U.S. National Norm	U.S. R&D Norm	U.S. Transitional Norm
Sustainable Engagement	80	5	1	1	7
1 I believe strongly in the goals and objectives of the DNFSB.	96	2	10*	10*	16*
11 I am proud to be associated with the DNFSB.	82	11	-6	-6	-4
20 My work gives me a sense of personal accomplishment.	81	5	-3	-3	1
37 I am able to sustain the level of energy I need throughout the work day.	82	-4	0	1	1
41 I have the work tools and resources I need to achieve exceptional performance.	74	6	-2	1	5
50 There are no substantial obstacles at work to doing my job well.	65	11	7	0	22*

Safety Index Scores

A new feature introduced in the 2021 survey, the safety index, is comprised of five questions that are shown in Exhibit 8. These survey items were developed to evaluate employees' perception of the DNFSB safety culture, including how safety issues are investigated and resolved and how comfortable employees feel to raise safety and quality concerns. Findings from this year's safety index will serve as a baseline for comparisons with future survey data.¹¹

Exhibit 8

Safety

DNFSB Overall 2021

		Total Favorable
Safety		71
16a	Employees are encouraged to communicate ideas to improve: Nuclear safety	81
16b	Employees are encouraged to communicate ideas to improve: Nuclear security	47
31	I am confident that safety issues that are reported to the DNFSB's current Board are appropriately resolved.	71
38	I am confident that safety issues that are reported to management are appropriately resolved.	78
42	I believe a culture exists in the DNFSB that is conducive to raising safety and quality concerns.	81

¹¹ Based on post-survey feedback from employees, Willis Towers Watson is recommending the item 16b be removed from future surveys as Nuclear Security is not part of the DNFSB's mission. This should be kept in mind when reviewing this year's low score for that item.

Open-Ended Response Item

An open-ended response question was added to the end of the 2021 survey to give DNFSB employees an opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions. Respondents were asked to provide ideas or suggestions on what they think would make the DNFSB a more successful and better place to work. Of the 78 respondents to the survey, 48 (62 percent) provided a survey comment to this question. A high-level thematic analysis was performed to identify common themes.¹²

Written comment highlights

The top three themes identified in the written comments were on staff relations, communication and hiring issues. A brief description of each of the top three themes is provided below:

- 1. Staff relations:** About 40 percent of respondents who provided a written comment focused on staff relations. Respondents voiced that a lack of trust exists between offices. Staff acknowledged unhealthy divisions and staff silos. However, many were hopeful that the new Executive Director of Operations position will improve overall staff relations.
- 2. Communication:** 38 percent commented on communication. Staff are looking for more timely and consistent communication from senior management about organizational changes and more clear and direct messaging from the Board on their mission and objectives. Technical staff would also like to meet and interact with the Board more frequently and receive greater insight into decision-making from senior management.
- 3. Hiring Issues:** 29 percent commented on hiring issues. Respondents are concerned with delays in hiring, especially around the timely hiring of Resident Inspectors. Many called for more streamlined and efficient internal and external hiring processes.

¹² A thematic analysis is a form of qualitative analysis used to identify patterned meanings across a qualitative dataset. For this report, all 48 comments were analyzed and sorted into themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly.

Conclusion

The goal of this year's study is to better understand the perceptions of employees as they relate to the safety culture and climate of the DNFSB. As a follow-up to the last survey, the results of this study allow for a measure of progress given the many changes the DNFSB has gone through.

Overall Observations

- The results show consistent and strong improvement since the 2015 survey. Every single category has improved and almost every question has improved over time.
- The largest improvements focus on perceptions of the Board and management as seen in the Ethics/Professionalism and Leadership categories. Many more now feel the Board acts ethically and are respected by employees. Further, perceptions of management have improved dramatically for their interest in employee wellbeing and recognition for diversity.
- Sustainable Engagement, a strength in the 2015 survey, continues to be strong with a 5-point improvement and continues to score favorably compared to benchmarks. The DNFSB compares very well against benchmarks for belief in the goals and objectives of the organization and, however, is lower than the benchmarks on pride in the organization even as this improved since 2015.
- Diversity has seen a very large improvement since 2015 with an especially large increase in perceptions that employees are treated with dignity and respect regardless of their position or background. Perceptions of management supporting equal opportunities for all have improved to be in line with the U.S. and R&D norms.

Overall Strengths to Maintain

The below aspects of the safety culture and climate have been identified as strengths to be maintained by the DNFSB:

- **Quality Focus:** While quality was identified as a strength in the 2015 survey, scores have improved significantly in 2021, especially for not sacrificing quality of work to meet established metrics or political needs. 9 out of 10 respondents rate the quality of work done in their unit as excellent.
- **Supervision:** All questions on supervision have improved since 2015 with the largest increases in recognizing high-quality performance and helpfulness of performance reviews. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents say they have confidence in their supervisors, and they communicate effectively.

Overall Opportunities for Improvement

Despite the significant improvement in most areas of the survey, the results do highlight several opportunities to further improve the culture at the DNFSB. These opportunities include:

- **Ethics/Professionalism:** The perception that all employees are held to the same standard of ethical behavior is one of only two questions to see a decline in favorability since the 2015 survey.
- **Sustainable Engagement:** The only other question to decline since 2015 focuses on the ability to sustain the level of energy needed throughout the workday.
- **Empowerment:** Only half of the survey respondents believe the DNFSB has established a climate where employees can challenge the traditional ways of doing things. While this question improved since 2015, it remains well below external benchmarks.
- **Development:** Some of the lowest scores in the survey assess the extent to which the DNFSB is recruiting, developing and retaining the right employees.
- **Change Management:** Despite significant improvement from 2015, less than half of the survey respondents feel changes are well implemented (significantly below the U.S. benchmark).
- **Leadership:** While several aspects of leadership have improved (e.g., respecting the value of human differences, confidence in leaders), the DNFSB is still well below benchmarks for the belief that management provides a clear sense of direction.
- **Operating Efficiency/Procedures:** Work processes allowing employees to be efficient and having sufficient staff continue to be among the least favorable questions and below external benchmarks.

Potential Focus Areas Moving Forward

The DNFSB should consider the following focus areas moving forward:

- **Empowerment:** Evaluate the current environment/method for employees to safely communicate ideas of improvement and concerns to the DNFSB's Board and senior management team.
- **Change Management:** Ensure employees understand changes, how decisions are made, and how changes/decisions relate to the mission.
- **Leadership:** Review how strategic decisions are cascaded down within the agency. Ensure agency goals and objectives are well-defined and consistent with the mission.
- **Development:** Create and communicate clear goals for human capital (e.g., staff size and skills needed now and in the future). Improve employees' understanding of their career paths and opportunities for growth and development, and review hiring processes and procedures.