

NMB STRATEGIC PLAN

2011 - 2016



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I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The National Mediation Board (NMB) herewith presents its 2011-2016 Strategic Plan. This plan continues the emphasis on the agency's statutory mission, and it offers a pathway to strengthening the non-statutory programs which have become central to the NMB's ongoing relationship with parties in the airline and railroad industries.

Economic uncertainty continues to face the two industries, making it imperative that the NMB maintain its traditional high level of service in the areas of Representation, Mediation, and Arbitration, while continuing to innovate and offer value-added services to the parties. This agency strategic plan is predicated upon the knowledge that improving our services will positively impact to our customers.

Driven by high profits in the railroad industry and by the first round of post-bankruptcy bargaining in the airline industry, expectations of employees in both industries will likely create difficulties in reaching agreements. Due to the increasing complexity and difficulty of the bargaining process, it will be necessary for the agency to pursue creative and effective strategies for working with the parties in order to maintain harmony in the airline and railroad labor-management arena. This strategic plan reflects that need for creativity and effectiveness.

The 2011-2016 National Mediation Board Strategic Plan addresses a period of time in which there will be continued challenges for the Board and for the airline and railroad industries it serves. The five years preceding the development of this Strategic Plan saw significant disruptions and trauma for the industries.

In the period from 2005-2010, legacy and regional airlines entered and exited bankruptcy, the customer base of the airlines was diminished, and a commercial atmosphere was created that has been described by airline officials as "worse than the catastrophe after 9/11." The most optimistic projections for the years 2011-2016 do not foresee a full recovery for the airline industry. This cloudy forecast combined with the number of carriers and unions who will be in collective bargaining during the period suggest a period of challenge for the NMB.

During a time when the airlines struggled, the railroads experienced significant growth, due in great part to rising fuel prices that crippled the airlines and shifted truck traffic to the rails. Most industry analysts suggest that the freight railroads will continue to enjoy a period of strong performance during the 2011-2016 time frame, but a soft economy overall will challenge both the freight and passenger railroads.

STRATEGIC GOALS

The Administration approach to performance management and analysis, encourages the establishment of strategic goals, program goals, and measures that lend themselves to trend analysis instead of snapshot, report card activity reports. In this strategic plan, the NMB has adopted the standard definitions of goals and programs detailed in Circular A-11, Part 6, distributed in August, 2009, by the Office of Management and Budget. In this document, Strategic Goals are overall agency goals that “group multiple program outcome goals.” Program Goals are specific to programs and address performance in areas that are of particular “scope . . . and independence” under the control of programs. Performance Goals in this document “target levels of performance over time” for each of the programs.

For purposes of this strategic plan, the NMB has adopted the definition of “program” supplied by OMB: a program is “. . . any organized set of activities directed toward a common purpose or goal that an agency undertakes [Programs] may describe an agency’s mission, functions, activities, services, projects, and processes.”

Using this definition, the NMB programs addressed in this strategic plan are as follows, grouped under existing agency departments:

Chief of Staff

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Document and Records Management
- Public Information
- Research

Office of Administration

- Budget and Finance
- Facilities and Property Administration
- Personnel and Human Resources
- Training and Development
- Procurement and Contracting

Office of Arbitration Services

- Arbitration

Office of Mediation and ADR Services

- Mediation
- Alternative Dispute Resolution

Office of Legal Affairs

- Representation
- Legal Affairs

Due to the size of the NMB (51 employees), programs routinely are housed in one Office, but are supported by employees in other Offices. For example, ICT is housed in the office of the Chief of Staff, but the agency CIO is in the chief administrative officer and Director of Administration Services, and Personnel/HR functions are housed in Administration Services but are administered in consort with the Office of the Chief of Staff.

This plan is in conformance with the spirit and letter of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993; OMB Circular A-11 Preparation of Submission of Strategic Plans, and Annual Program Performance Reports and Executive Order 13450 – Improving Government Program Performance.

II. HISTORY

The NMB is an independent Executive Branch agency established by the 1934 amendments to the Railway Labor Act of 1926. In 1936, the Act was expanded to include the airline industry. Pursuant to the RLA, the NMB's integrated dispute resolution processes are designed to promote three statutory goals.

The NMB's statutory goals are:

- The effectuation of employee rights of self-organization where a representation dispute exists;
- The resolution of disputes arising out of the negotiation of new or revised collective bargaining agreements (major disputes);
- The resolution of disputes over the interpretation or application of existing agreements (minor disputes).

The NMB is headed by a three-member Board appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The Board members annually self-designate a Chairman. The Board Members provide overall leadership and strategic direction for the Board, but have delegated day-to-day oversight and administration to the Chief of Staff and the General Counsel. The Chief of Staff along with the Departmental Directors and General Counsel direct the program operations, which include the Office of Mediation and Alternative Dispute Resolution Services, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of Arbitration Services, and the Office of Administration.

III. MISSION

The NMB is committed to fulfilling its statutory responsibilities in facilitating harmonious labor-management relations within two of the nation's key transportation modes—airlines and railroads.

IV. VISION

The NMB will build on its seventy six years of success by providing integrated dispute resolution processes to meet its statutory objective of minimizing work stoppages in the airline and railroad industries.

V. Core Values

Human Capital – The NMB is committed to recruiting and maintaining a workforce that is second to none in talent, training, and diversity. We will promote an environment that fosters the continuous development of leadership, technical skills, and professional skills in all employees.

Public Service – The NMB will strive for excellence to the public by providing high quality products and timely services.

Collaboration – The NMB will foster an open environment where teamwork is utilized and where professional relationships are based on mutual trust, respect, support, cooperation, and communication.

VI. STRATEGIC GOALS

STRATEGIC GOAL 1 - *Promote amicable resolution of major disputes between labor and management.*

- Objective: Resolve major labor management disputes through the use of statutory mediation and alternative dispute resolution processes.
- Strategies: Review agreements to determine the likelihood of using NMB services.
- Increase mediator training and development.
- Increase outreach to parties before contract amendable dates.
- Promote the use of and provide ADR services to labor and management.
- Outcomes: Increased mediator ADR case activity rates.
- Increased use of ADR techniques in A cases.
- Continued high rates of contract settlement without self-help.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2 - *Investigate and resolve representation disputes.*

- Objective: Conduct investigations and issue decisions in a timely manner.
- Strategies: Evaluate the quality of representation casework regularly.
- Provide sound and well supported guidance to the parties.
- Evaluate ways that technology can be used to investigate disputes.

Outcomes: Reduced time between docketing and representation election.
Increased use of technology to aid in resolution of investigations.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3 - *Improve, strengthen and minimize processes for resolving minor disputes.*

Objectives: Provide high caliber arbitrators on roster.
Use Information and Communication Technologies to control and track contractor work.
Reduce the "cases pending" numbers at the end of each fiscal year.
Encourage timely settlement of minor disputes.

Strategies: Promote the benefit of expanding arbitrator selections.
Engage in expanded arbitrator training.
Promote the use of expedited arbitration and grievance mediation as an alternative to arbitration.
Fully integrate the Arbitrator Work Space into the business of the Office of Arbitration Services.
Review and revise mandatory time frames for performance.

Outcomes

- Increased number of cases settled by expedited arbitration and grievance mediation.
- Increased use of video conferencing and other online tools.
- Majority of cases closed within 90 days of hearing.
- Fewer cases pending at the end of each fiscal year.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4 – *Provide Efficient and responsible stewardship of the NMB’s fiscal and human resources.*

Objective:

- Recruit, retain and develop a highly skilled, motivated and diverse workforce that advances NMB’s mission and embraces its core values.

- Embrace prudent outsourcing to enhance capabilities in human resources, budget, and finance.

- Embrace cloud options for agency ICT functions, including e-mail and agency records and documents.

Strategies:

- Increase staff development and training.

- Increase outreach activities to recruit a diverse candidate pool.

- Establish and maintain a comprehensive information technology enterprise.

Outcomes:

- Integrated and outsourced human resources functions.

- Integrated and outsourced travel functions.

- Full integration of agency ICT functions into the cloud.

VII. STRATEGIC PLAN LINK TO ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLANS

The NMB will formulate performance measures for its strategic goals and each of the related performance goals. The performance measures will be identified in the annual budget submission. The measures will be used to determine the level of achievement related to the outcome goals. These measures will be assessed using information in the Board's case management and other management systems which will demonstrate clearly sustainable outcomes.

VIII. EXTERNAL FACTORS

The goals and objectives identified in this strategic plan represent the NMB's best effort to plan for the future. However, the NMB's ability to accomplish its goals and objectives is dependent upon a number of external factors that are not within the agency's control:

- Budget – Adequate funding for the maintenance of necessary staff and support functions is essential.
- Cases – A stable case load is assumed. An unexpectedly large increase in number and/or complexity of cases could impede our ability to meet our goals and objectives
- Legislative Changes – Statutory changes to either the agency's enabling legislation or to other statutes that directly impact the agency could affect the agency's ability to meet its goal and objectives.

IX. PROGRAM EVALUATION

In developing the goals and objectives in this plan, the NMB analyzed the needs and desires in the two industries it services. The strategies described will enable the NMB to be more responsive to its customers.

The agency will conduct an annual review of the strategic plan to make adjustments, if necessary.