Connect

Keeping Employees Informed

THE ACCELERATOR

Every day across the Nuclear Security Enterprise, people are acting as change-makers – whatever their role, and wherever their domain. In the face of a rapidly evolving nuclear security environment and at a time when the enterprise is being asked to do more now than any time in the last 30 years, we are in many ways more energized than ever. In this and future editions of The Accelerator, we will highlight and applaud that energy, knowing that we must continue to advance a responsive enterprise that is flexible and resilient.

Below, see what your peers are doing to improve the way we work – we hope you enjoy. Please send us your feedback! If you would like to nominate a colleague or team to be featured in a future edition, please contact savannah.maclean@nnsa.doe.gov.

W88 transportation during lightning warnings

By: **Josh Crooks,** Director of Modernization Programs, Pantex

During the summer months, the Texas panhandle experiences frequent and severe storms and lightning, impacting operations at Pantex. When lightning is detected, nuclear weapons movements are halted or severely curtailed, which can significantly impact production.

Starting in FY 2022, my fellow Pantexans and I have worked hard to increase production rates, especially for the W88 Alt 370 Modernization Program. We began by questioning some long-held assumptions about the ability of W88 Handling Gear to fully protect nuclear components. Our conclusion was that there is not a specific technical reason to halt movements during storms, as the containers are robust and can effectively protect movements of the W88 during lightning. The NNSA Nuclear Explosive Safety Division and Safety Analysis Engineering organizations reviewed the findings and CNS revised its operating procedures to permit movements of W88 Re-entry Body Assemblies in Handling Gear during lightning warnings. This change significantly reduces downtime and dramatically improves productivity for this stockpile Modernization Program.

Weapons production technology and nuclear training

By: **Kristi Daugherty,** Deputy Director of TechSource; **Ray Ferry**, Program Manager/ALDWP-TAO at Los Alamos National Laboratory; and **Bob Putnam,** Director of Technical Applications Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory

Our Weapons Production Technology and Nuclear Training (WP-TNT) Program, a collaboration between Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and TechSource, has significantly enhanced our future in weapons production by fostering a synergistic blend of academic collaboration, technological advancement, and talent engagement. The program helps create relationships with science and engineering students at all levels, offering internship opportunities, subject-matter-expert mentorship, additional educational prospects, opportunities for future employment, and – for those hired – security clearances. To date, we have conducted approximately 84 interviews at universities, resulting in 36 offers and 27 hires for LANL.

The collaboration has expedited engagement, completing contracts in 60 days or less, on average. We scope projects under the WP-TNT Program to promote exploration into focused areas of need such as metrology, machining, assembly, casting, robotics, welding, quality control, and other technologies of interest, depending on the scope of work at a particular university. To date, we have kickstarted nine technology projects at five universities in just two years. These projects have resulted in technological advancements that support current operational needs at institutions like Montana State University, Texas A&M University, the University of Texas at El Paso, Arizona State University, and Auburn University.

The program's strategic and holistic approach, with 32% interview-to-hire rate, ensures that LANL and the wider nuclear weapons complex remain at the forefront of innovation and development, powered by a core of enthusiastic, skilled, and security-cleared young professionals.

"Since my involvement in the WP-TNT Project, I have been impressed with the students that are participating in our work. They are hardworking, articulate, curious, and creative. It is a lot of fun to work with students who are enthusiastic about our NSE work!" – Ray Ferry

Improving the open solicitation process for financial assistance

By: **Betsy Snell,** *Program Manager, Office of Management and Budget, Learning and Career Management; and* **Yolanda Robinson-Freeman,** *Acting Director, Office of Partnerships and Acquisition Services*

Applications for Financial Assistance submission deadlines associated with competitive Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) have historically lasted just 45 – 60 days, often resulting in few applications, weak proposals, and late submissions.

To increase the application pool and the quality of proposals, NNSA's Office of Management and Budget collaborated with the Office of Partnership and Acquisition Services to streamline the NOFO process and extend the submission timeframe. This new initiative allows Applications for Financial Assistance to be proposed during the "open" period for a NOFO over a rolling five-year period, allowing for applications to be submitted and reviewed based on key dates and available funding. This process removes redundant review requirements while promoting accountability and standardization of review actions. It is expected to reduce the solicitation timeline from 190 days to 163 days, resulting in fewer missed deadlines. Additionally, providing more frequent application due dates rather than infrequent hard deadlines gives eligible applicants ample time to build consortia partnerships necessary to develop a strong proposal in response to the NOFO, thus improving the quality of applications.

This initiative has eased the barrier of application deadlines for Minority Serving Institution Partnership Program (MSIPP) partners, and we expect valuable partnerships to continue between MSIs and the Nuclear Security Enterprise, improving the agility and integrity of the Program and increasing the successful impact of the MSIPP.

EMDI token recipient

Rocio Bolivar, the Contractor Human Resources Branch Manager in NNSA's Office of Partnership and Acquisition Services, was nominated by her leadership for her dedication in addressing the challenges associated with several EMDI recommendations. Working alongside NNSA's M&O partners, Rocio facilitated the return of retired M&O employees for mission-critical work, assisted in modifying pension plans, adjusted compensation controls, improved benefit packages, and is now working to improve the Intergovernmental Personnel Assignments and rotations programs across the enterprise. Her commitment to process improvement and policy change will have a lasting impact on our organization.

Rocio received a token of appreciation from Daryl Hauck, NNSA's Sandia Field Office Manager, on October 3rd, 2023.

For information on employee recognition tokens, etc., please contact **Savannah Maclean** savannah.maclean@nnsa.doe.gov.

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