

Workforce Development Report 11-26-2024
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Milestone 1 – Background familiarization

Workforce development is critical to currently funded new boat construction and existing submarine fleet maintenance. As a result, BlueForge Alliance (BFA), the prime integrator for the Submarine Industrial Base (SIB) workforce development, was awarded a contract for \$951 million in September 2024. The extent of the need is great - the U.S. Navy Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) states “Our national security demands 140,000 skilled workers over the next ten years.” Every partner discussion I have attended regarding the NCSF resource center has indicated workforce development is a priority – potentially as high as the center itself. The national workforce development effort is a clear benefit to the NCSF because it (1) can easily be integrated into the project at this early stage and (2) has immediate funding availability.

Based upon NCSF desire to incorporate workforce development aspects into the facility and the urgency from a national security perspective, I started research in the area with minimal references and few external contacts. I learned that the NCSF team had previously held discussions with external workforce development resources early in the NCSF project and some notes of the discussions were internally shared (informally) at that time. The location of these notes is unknown, they have not been reviewed and are likely only currently helpful for continuity purposes. Both the national MIB / SIB efforts and the NCSF project have dramatically progressed since these discussions.

Over the last month discussions were held with most of the NCSF team members previously involved in workforce development with the goal of understanding the previous actions and strategy, the external resources developed and any on-going activities. It was found that all members have largely stopped workforce development efforts for the project. However, they remain interested in the area and are potentially willing to assist NCSF in this area in the future. One member continues to work workforce development elements for veteran-related NC state projects that are focused more in the Triangle area. Most other information gathered from these discussions was deemed too outdated to be useful.

Recommendations: (1) solicit background information from one remaining team members that has been unavailable, (2) keep open communications with those team members continuing to work in the area, and (3) add SIB workforce development as separate mission area for the NCSF project (currently included as subpart of the facility development mission).

Milestone 2 – Develop key contacts and initial discussion

Existing contacts within both BFA and the MIB should lead to the identification of the appropriate personnel for initial discussions. The Naval Submarine League (NSL) conference two weeks ago was important because it provided both a contact with both groups and an understanding of the relationship between the two groups. Both groups were interested in the NCSF project, but the MIB conference personnel expressed a much higher desire to work with NCSF and requested we contact them in the near term. I was directly to contact the MIB Youth & Educational Program Coordinator and facilitate a discussion. The MIB regional manager who was on-site at the conference stated that MIB drives the workforce development efforts and MIB tasks BFA to implement. In other words, contacting MIB first could lead to a top-down approach. An initial introductory email has already been sent to MIB and I am waiting on a response. Additionally, a connection with a high-level MIB consultant (retired admiral) was also developed at NSL which may provide an alternate introduction.

The NCSF project has already partnered with Cape Fear Community College (CFCC) who has extensive experience in nuclear industry training and open to new curriculum development to support MIB / SIB efforts. CFCC currently is in partnership and trains personnel for GE-Hitachi (GEH). GEH operates the largest Wilmington-area nuclear and aerospace manufacturing facility. By scaling, in-roads could also be made to access the state-wide NC Community College system either through CFCC or directly through their offices in Raleigh.

I believe there will be a warm reception by the MIB after initial discussions. This could result in a range of support from advisory with valuable industry referrals or (potentially) a near-term funding source. The funding and need for workforce development exists now, so pursuing national funding presents an immediate opportunity (in comparison to waiting for state appropriations in a future budget). Additionally, the MIB facilitates supply-chain company interactions which could lead to key introductions to potential exhibit partners. Based on conference discussions with major MIB suppliers, there is a “high interest” in MIB workforce development as compared to more of an “openness to discussions” on support for the NCSF facility from a submarine technology perspective. The industry is clearly mobilizing to support MIB needs, but it also likes the innovative approach of the currently-envisioned technology center. If you separate the two aspects the story it is less compelling to industry.

Recommendations: (1) further develop a MIB contact and conduct an introductory discussion, (2) determine interest in workforce development by other federal program offices (i.e. MIB needs are similar to those of the commercial nuclear industry) and (3) assess the possible options for near-term, lower-level MIB funding (to evaluate the incorporation of workforce development elements into the NCSF facility design).

Milestone 3 – Develop strategy for extent of incorporation into project

To be developed as the result of discussions.