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Reimagining Defense Advisory Boards

Lessons Learned for Leaders in the U.S. Department of Defense

On January 30, 2021, five days after being sworn in, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin suspended all U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) external advisory boards and committees pending a “zero-based review” of all such boards, regardless of whether they were subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), which governs the behavior of many federal boards.¹ The FACA database, maintained by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), listed

more than 40 active defense advisory boards at the time of the Secretary’s decision.²

These boards of outside advisors were intended to provide insights to DoD. Scientists, policy advisers, and leaders from the business and academic communities, among others, made up these boards, which contributed to major DoD decisionmaking. This has been their function since the first DoD advisory board was founded.³

However, some had argued that the boards had become ineffective.⁴ Furthermore, critics argued that the boards too often turned into small bureaucracies or landing pads for political allies seeking to boost their résumés.⁵

DoD faces many challenges, including great-power competition, developing and sustaining alliances, sustaining and modernizing equipment, and creating a positive work environment for its military and civilian personnel.⁶ External ideas and

KEY FINDINGS

- Our research revealed that the structure of a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) advisory board—the design of its charter, the relationship with senior DoD officials, the selection of members, and the choice of projects—should be designed to meet the board’s underlying goals.
- An ideal defense advisory board project topic is an issue the Secretary is deeply invested in addressing, one DoD cannot solve on its own, and one specific enough so board members understand what is asked of them.
- Prioritizing diversity involves including groups that have historically been excluded from national security decisionmaking and examining projects through how their recommendations will affect different groups unevenly.
- The board chair establishes the culture of the board and should possess the management skills to lead a diverse board and create a culture of inclusivity.
- Successful boards need to overcome bureaucratic challenges, including administrative processes imposed by DoD.

Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
DFO	designated federal officer
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FACA	Federal Advisory Committee Act
FFRDC	federally funded research and development center
GSA	U.S. General Services Administration
NDS	National Defense Strategy
UARC	university-affiliated research center

advice from leaders of successful enterprises could be especially valuable as DoD addresses these issues.

We embarked on this exploratory study to examine how DoD can reap increased benefits from boards of external advisers. We aimed to draw on ideas and lessons learned from previous boards and looked at various DoD discretionary boards of external advisers.⁷ We began by searching for existing literature—such as previous studies, scholarly articles, and reports—on this topic, but we found a dearth of literature about the use of advisory boards across DoD or within the military services. As a result, we augmented the limited literature available with literature from outside DoD about how advisory boards can be effective to large organizations and by conducting a series of interviews. The interviews allowed us to learn what worked well on previous defense advisory boards, what could be enhanced or dispensed of, and how boards might be reconfigured. We reviewed the charters, membership balance plans, key reports from several DoD advisory boards, and government documents about FACA boards and nongovernmental articles about effective advisory boards. This report synthesizes our findings and recommendations.

Government advisory boards of external advisers are often subject to FACA, a law that aims to ensure that the public is aware of and has an opportunity to participate in meetings between federal agencies and its advisory boards. We conducted our research with an awareness of FACA's rules and the limitations on whether our recommendations could be implemented by DoD. We did not consider whether any specific defense advisory board should exist or be dissolved; such decisions are for the Secretary and the military

services or other governing body, as is the case for congressionally mandated boards. During our research, we were aware of ongoing DoD activities, including both the zero-based review and an effort to collect best practices for DoD to apply to its advisory boards. Our research benefited from some of this work.

We interviewed current and former DoD officials, including individuals who previously served as senior sponsors to advisory boards or who currently serve as designated federal officers (DFOs), a role that will be discussed later in this report; former members of DoD advisory boards; and other outside experts.⁸ Many of our interview subjects currently have or previously had roles on the four boards under the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Defense Business Board, Defense Innovation Board, Defense Policy Board, and Defense Science Board). We also conducted a few interviews with individuals who served with or on other boards to collect relevant responses across a wide range of DoD advisory boards. These other boards include the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, Army Science Board, Defense Intelligence Agency Science and Technology Advisory Board, and U.S. Strategic Command Advisory Group. All interview participants allowed us to publish their names under the agreement that we would not attribute any comments, findings, or ideas in this report to any specific individual listed. The box on the next page lists our interview participants.

This report has two sections. The next section that follows provides lessons learned from our research; we focus on the most important issues that were raised by the interviewees and additional analysis and findings. The last section provides recommendations and conclusions for DoD based on these lessons learned. Two appendixes provide more information: Appendix A includes the Secretary's January 30, 2021, memo, and Appendix B contains our interview protocol.

Lessons Learned

We present the key lessons that emerged from our research. Based on responses from interviewees,

Interview Participants (in alphabetical order)

- **Monica Bacheler**, Designated Federal Officer, Defense Policy Board
- **Steve Blank**, Silicon Valley entrepreneur, served on the Defense Business Board
- **James Chow**, vice president, Project AIR FORCE, RAND Corporation; former chair of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board
- **Kevin Doxey**, Designated Federal Officer, Defense Science Board
- **Jennifer Hill**, Designated Federal Officer, Defense Business Board
- **Shirley Jones**, national president, Blacks in Government
- **Frank Kendall**, Secretary of the Air Force; former Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics; former member, Army Science Board and Defense Intelligence Agency Science and Technology Advisory Board; consultant, Defense Science Board
- **Steve Kitay**, senior director, Azure Space (Microsoft); former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy
- **Colleen Laughlin**, Designated Federal Officer, Defense Innovation Board
- **Ashley Llorens**, vice president, distinguished scientist, and managing director, Microsoft Research Outreach; served on a Defense Science Board summer study
- **Joshua Marcuse**, head of Strategy and Innovation for Google's global public sector business; former executive director, Defense Innovation Board
- **Brig. Gen. (ret.) Bruce McClintock**, leader, RAND Space Enterprise Initiative; served as an adviser on the U.S. Strategic Command Advisory Group
- **Michael McQuade**, vice president, research, Carnegie Mellon University; former member of the Defense Innovation Board
- **Lindsay Rodman**, executive director, Leadership Council for Women in National Security; former Special Assistant to the Under Secretary for Defense for Personnel and Readiness
- **ADM (ret.) Gary Roughead**, former Chief of Naval Operations; former member, Defense Policy Board
- **Christine Wormuth**, Secretary of the Army; former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

NOTE: Some designated federal officers invited their staffs to join our interviews. We thank them for their participation.

themes that emerged centered on board makeup and the member-selection process. We learned that the topic that the board focuses on should affect its design, the criteria for selecting a chair, and member selection. The respondents indicated a need to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion and to overcome administrative and bureaucratic challenges. Thus, we address how boards can achieve different goals for boards diversity, and ways to overcome logistical burdens.

Different Boards Serve Different Goals

Each current and former DoD official described how the structure of the board—the design of its charter, the relationship with senior DoD officials, the selection of members, and the choice of projects—is tailored to meet the board's underlying goals. As a

result, a board comprising technical experts might be able to chart a path for DoD through a new emerging-technology field but would be unable to design the key concepts in an upcoming National Defense Strategy (NDS). The boards are not expected to do all things, so each focuses on specific topics by leveraging the experiences that members bring to the table.

Interview participants described several functions of advisory boards and noted that charters and board member selection are determined by the functions of the board, which may include the following:

- Advise on improvements to processes (e.g., acquisition, human capital, decisionmaking).

- Advise on improvements to policy (e.g., DoD’s approach toward 5G, expeditionary basing, transgender troops).
- Advise on improvements to technology (e.g., implementing artificial intelligence [AI] across mission areas, leveraging the commercial space sector, bioengineering).⁹

Interview participants explained that boards serving these three functions can be used for near-term decisions (such as improvements to the efficiencies or effectiveness of existing programs), long-term decisions (such as developing the next generation of something), or over-the-horizon visioning (reinventing the paradigm or imagining future DoD missions or functions).

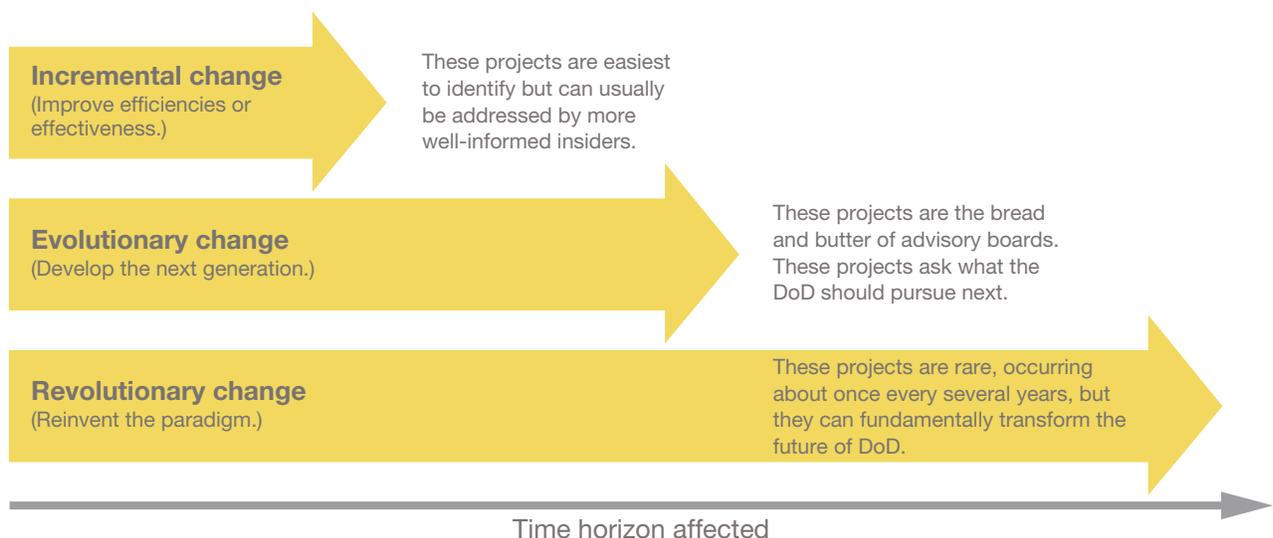
Figure 1 shows the different types of decisions and corresponding levels of change that can be supported by defense advisory boards. Interview participants said that using boards to suggest improvements in efficiency or effectiveness is often a poor use of outside advisers and the talent they bring. They noted that contractors, federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs), or other DoD insiders are often better positioned to provide this guidance. Interview participants emphasized that boards should instead be used to help DoD transform its approaches, and a board filled with members who specialize in process improvements

would be ill-equipped to tackle revolutionary topics. They also acknowledged that some boards are mandated along with their topics.

When describing DoD’s use of advisory boards to date, interview participants described three models, each with a different membership focus.¹⁰ The first was called a *kitchen cabinet*, a term most often used to describe the Defense Policy Board. In this model, the board comprises former cabinet-level and senior government officials who can serve as a sounding board of peers to the Secretary. The second model, the *lessons learned board*, offers insights from outside the DoD ecosystem, as seen in the Defense Business Board. In this model, the board comprises leaders from business or academia who provide recommendations based on their experiences in other large organizations. The third model, described as a *board of experts*, provides technical advice on highly specialized topics, such as science or health care. This model describes the Defense Science Board and other military service science boards that bring together experts from across scientific or technical disciplines. Some boards, such as the Defense Innovation Board, are hybrid models (in this example, of the latter two models).

The differences between these models can be understood in the responsibilities they take on. For instance, if the boards under the three models were each tasked with considering the NDS, the kitchen

FIGURE 1
Three Levels of Change Supported by Defense Advisory Boards



cabinet would respond with ideas for what DoD should include in the upcoming strategy. The lessons learned board would recommend required changes to DoD operations to achieve its current NDS. Finally, the expert board would return with a list of technologies that DoD needs to pursue to accomplish a particular NDS goal. All three approaches, which require a different members in different boards to achieve results, are useful and provide value to DoD.

Because advisory boards serve the Secretary or a senior sponsor, they risk becoming irrelevant if the Secretary or senior sponsor does not see their value. Interview participants described that this scenario occurs when a new senior sponsor arrives who neither values advisory boards nor disbands them. In this scenario, boards continue to operate but without purpose.¹¹ The lesson here is that DoD officials should consider *why* a board is needed to design the right board for the right functions.

Selecting Board Members

The methods DoD uses to identify prospective board members influence the result, including whether the board includes members from outside DoD's ecosystem, what expertise they possess, and whether members from historically excluded groups are included. We found that DoD has not intentionally excluded any specific method for recruiting board members. Current and former DoD officials also described using the only methods they knew, however, the methods they have chosen have limitations, especially in supporting diversity.

When DoD identifies prospective board members, it is required to use each board's

membership balance plan, a legally required document that describes how each board will "attain fairly balanced membership."¹² The membership balance plan describes how the government considers a cross-section of qualified individuals who have the interest and qualifications needed to serve in advisory boards.

Interview participants suggested that membership balance plans be redesigned to include diversity across racial groups and genders; age groups or leadership seniority; and former members of the military, DoD civilians, and those without DoD experience.¹³ Participants stated that diversity cannot merely be a "nice to have," but, if DoD is serious about creating inclusive boards, diversity principles should be written into the boards' membership balance plans.

Our interviews revealed that DoD recruits board members from either existing networks of individuals serving on boards and the senior sponsor or through searches for leading experts in specific disciplines. In social science research, these recruiting approaches are called the *snowball method* and the *judgment method*, respectively.¹⁴

In the *snowball method*, a small group of people creates a list of individuals, who then recommend new names for the list, resulting in the list continuing to grow like a snowball. One limitation of this method is that it includes people who are already in the network of the creators of the list, so DoD may not reach as many prospective members from outside its existing ecosystem. This method can also limit access to people from historically excluded groups if the initial list lacks diversity.

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The *judgment method* involves searching for recognized experts in a specific field, such as diplomacy or science. One limitation of this method is that the resulting list of nominees may lack multidisciplinary representation and racial and gender diversity. Often, the experts identified in each field do not include groups of persons who have been historically excluded from that field.

The merging of the snowball and judgment methods creates a third option, the *cluster method*, in which DoD develops a list of topics (called *clusters*) that it wants to find experts in, and then uses another method to find experts. The cluster method enables the creation of a multidisciplinary list of names (such as a combination of regional experts and technologists); however, this approach still includes the limitations of the previous two methods.

Another option is *public self-nomination*. In this method, individuals from across diverse demographic groups and disciplines self-nominate, possibly through a website, to be on a board.¹⁵ Historically, DoD has not considered self-nominations as an alternative to identify board members. However, interview participants from outside DoD indicated that this method could help overcome the challenges inherent to the previously described methods, were DoD willing to consider the logistics of implementing this approach. This approach could offer DoD access to individuals from outside the defense ecosystem—people with whom the department might not otherwise have contact—which could increase the diversity of the candidate pool. Table 1 describes these four methods and provides examples, strengths, and limitations of each option.

Interview participants from historically excluded groups described experiencing “board fatigue” when they are constantly asked to sit on panels, working groups, and boards. This is the result of DoD being familiar with these individuals as representing one of the few members of their demographic. DoD officials similarly described a pattern of going to the same candidates—because the officials have previously identified these individuals as having a specific perspective—and having difficulty finding enough candidates from across demographics. This board fatigue could be alleviated if DoD vastly widened the pool of candidates to include experts from outside its ecosystem. One way to accomplish this would be self-nomination through a public website.

Chair Selection Considerations

The advisory board chair has only two legal responsibilities under FACA—attend meetings and certify the minutes.¹⁶ Yet interviewees described chair selection as being critical to determining the effectiveness of the board. Interviewees revealed that a highly successful chair performs the following functions:

- building a relationship between the senior sponsor and board
- creating a culture of collaboration and inclusion across board members
- building rapport with DoD officials across echelons to grow a board’s understanding of an issue.

The chair is an intermediary between the board members and the Secretary. In performing

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TABLE 1
Methods for Identifying Prospective Board Members

Method	Snowball	Judgment	Cluster	Self-Nomination
Description	A group of people recommend a list of names; those people provide additional recommendations. The list grows as more people are contacted for recommendations.	People who do not have preexisting relationships with DoD are selected based on their known expertise.	Topics (clusters) are identified; then the user finds people that fit within each cluster. Identifying candidates may employ another method.	People apply for board membership through a public website, where they submit their résumé and indicate interest in particular boards.
Example	The Under Secretary of Defense provides the DFO the names of five people for the board. Three of the people are not available, so they each recommend three additional names for consideration.	The DFO creates a list of recognized experts in a given field.	The DFO decides to find experts in four world regions (Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East) and three technology topics (AI, biotech, and satellites).	DoD creates a public website where anyone can apply for any board at any time. Applicants are reviewed on a rolling basis as new members are needed.
Strengths for DoD	This is a fast method for identifying people who meet the expertise requirements desired.	This method prioritizes persons with expertise.	If clustering is used with the snowball or judgment method, then clustering has broadened the range of persons who will be identified.	This method increases opportunities for multidisciplinary teams, diversity across all attributes, and inclusion of voices from outside DoD.
Limitations for DoD	The list is limited to people who are already connected to the initial contact, which may restrict access to historically excluded groups while limiting DoD to those already inside the defense ecosystem rather than true external advisers.	The resulting list may include people who lack multidisciplinary skills, particularly those in disciplines that have not previously engaged in the topic area. This method may prioritize experts in the “old way” of a discipline because of their fame and status over emerging leaders who represent the discipline’s future. This method may continue to exclude historically excluded groups, unless the user deliberately seeks such individuals to be included.	Clustering will still rely on another method and will inherit the limitations of that second method. Plus, choosing the wrong clusters could result in a board not postured for the topics needed in the future.	Creating and managing this system would require resources. Although the candidate pool would be wide and diverse, users remain susceptible to applying bias in selecting candidates.

SOURCE: Snowball, judgment, and cluster methods were adapted from Harrell and Bradley, 2009, pp. 31–32. Self-nomination was adapted from RAND interviews.

this function, the chair should have the ability to understand the needs of the Secretary or help the senior sponsor (if it is someone other than the Secretary) realize the Secretary’s goals for DoD. Some interview participants indicated that the chair should arrive to the board with an understanding of the NDS, National Security Strategy, and inner workings of DoD, while other interview participants cited examples of highly effective chairs who learned these things after beginning to serve. Our interviews revealed a set of attributes, listed in the box on p. 8,

that would be beneficial for board chairs. None of these attributes, however, are “must haves.” The list provides a guide for senior sponsors, the ultimate decisionmakers of which of these attributes is more important for a specific board’s chair.

Interview participants, particularly those who previously served as board members or who had roles external to DoD, indicated that the chair establishes the culture of the board, and a key factor is whether the chair has the management skills to lead a diverse board and create a culture of inclusivity. Interview

Attributes When Considering Advisory Board Chairs

- Open-minded to new ways of thinking and doing business
- Independent of conflicts of interest
- Unbiased by the “old way” of doing things
- Willingness to be actively engaged
- Understands DoD missions and the NDS
- Ability to build rapport with the Secretary and senior officials
- Has an active security clearance
- Has status and prestige to attract and recruit board members
- Demonstrated success in creating a culture of inclusivity in diverse teams

SOURCE: RAND analysis based on interviews.

participants emphasized that a chair should be able to actively engage board members both from underrepresented groups (including historically excluded groups) and younger age groups so that they understand the value they bring and are not intimidated. A Harvard Law School forum described that chairs can affect diversity and inclusion success on corporate boards by regularly ensuring these principles are communicated and included in the agenda. One method it described for accomplishing this is by asking questions that lead board members to find practical solutions to problems.¹⁷ An ineffective chair, even if the board is diverse, can be a detriment to the board’s overall effectiveness and its ability to engage diverse viewpoints.

The chair also has an important role in building rapport across DoD echelons, from the senior sponsor’s level to the most junior briefers. The chair—and all FACA board members—are legally restricted in their interactions with DoD officials. However, during meetings, when DoD officials present their insights, the chair has an opportunity to establish rapport to elicit insights that might not have been evident in prepared briefing remarks.

As listed in the attributes above, chairs should be actively engaged, including being passionate about

the board’s work and willing to commit the time needed to ensure board success. Some interview participants described chairs who write the board’s reports themselves and spend significant time supporting the board’s activities.

According to interview participants, the chair’s status or prestige—another characteristic listed in the box above—influences the board’s ability to attract and recruit highly regarded board members. An interview participant said, “A mid-level chair will bring a mid-level board, while a high-level chair will bring a high-level board.” Although DoD—and not the chair—selects the board members, the chair’s name recognition may affect the department’s ability to attract members. A chair without prestige might lead prospective members to decline. A challenge here is that someone with senior prestige may invest in approaches that worked over past decades but not necessarily new emerging approaches that help meet future objectives. This desire for a prestigious chair should not conflict with the need for someone who is genuinely open-minded and who has an intellectual curiosity for finding new approaches for DoD.

Lastly, DoD has different needs for each board, so no one-size-fits-all approach works for board chairs. We offer these lessons for senior sponsors to apply to their respective board’s mission.

Diversity as a Mindset

Interview participants emphasized the importance of diversity on advisory boards. They noted that diversity leads to a wider variety of perspectives—a key reason for using external boards in the first place. However, through interviews early in this study, we discovered that, for defense advisory boards, diversity is a mindset that either exists or does not. In many cases, DoD advisory boards have not had a diversity mindset or only focus on diversity in a narrow way. For some boards, the language might be present, but the mindset is absent. Interviewees indicated that when DoD boards consider diversity, they historically tend to think in terms of political party, civilian/military affiliation, and, more recently, gender. However, diversity on advisory boards can also focus on groups that have been historically excluded because of race, ethnicity, or sexual

orientation. Furthermore, diversity *and inclusion* are not exclusively about representation on board membership but also about projects that boards take on and the people affected by that work.

Interview participants described diversity as affecting DoD boards across two different axes. First, DoD should aim to include groups historically excluded from national security decisionmaking. Including more-diverse representation on board memberships is one method to achieve this goal. Having historically excluded voices on advisory boards offers DoD viewpoints that have traditionally been outside the department’s ecosystem—thus fulfilling an underlying goal of using external advisers. It also simultaneously stimulates the pipeline of future leaders. True diversity goes beyond having a single individual from an underrepresented group on a board. Such tokenism can impede broader discussion: In the words of a senior adviser for Bain Consulting:

Only is lonely. Lone diverse [board members] instinctively self-censor, resulting in the loss of potentially valuable and distinctive contributions to the discussion. The remedy to this is to have enough diversity to create a feeling of safety in numbers—when everyone is different, no one is different.¹⁸

Diversity on advisory boards is not about having one or two women or members who are people of color. Instead, it is a conscientious and concerted effort to create boards that include various demographic groups to participate in the national security ecosystem.

Second, because boards focus on topics that could unevenly affect different demographic groups, boards should examine their projects through a lens of how their recommendations will affect different groups. For example, recommendations on DoD’s future posture in Africa, the Middle East, or Asia will affect women and minority populations differently than it would U.S. or local leaders. Not properly understanding those differences could lead to dangerous conditions for these populations, U.S. national security, and regional security. DoD’s recent Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military provides an example

of an advisory group that was formed with this lens. On technology-related topics, the same lens would consider how a lack of diversity in the U.S. technology sector is influencing technology solutions being imagined for DoD today and how biased data could lead to poor results for DoD systems. Figure 2 shows the implications of a lack of diversity in either or both axes.

Our interviewees—especially persons from historically excluded groups—indicated that, to achieve the optimal benefits of diversity, boards need to make *inclusivity* a focus area. Additionally, they noted that, unless inclusivity is created by the chair, it would not exist. They also said that inclusivity must be *intentional*. They noted that recruiting and appointing diverse candidates is insufficient if they come into an environment that does not emanate inclusivity. Interviewees described their experience as token representatives of their demographic group in a room of extremely experienced—and sometimes famous—leading experts in national security or other fields, saying that they did not immediately feel comfortable speaking up. There was a sense of “who am I to tell Henry Kissinger that I think he’s wrong?” Interview participants identified the following

FIGURE 2
Risks and Opportunities for Diversity on External Advisory Boards

Board members are diverse	Yes	Tokenism—representation exists for representation’s sake	Opportunity for new perspectives to engage in complex systems thinking
	No	Risk for myopic, short-sighted, and unimaginative advice	Graybeards—people with experience in leadership positions—apply old thinking to new environments
		No	Yes
		Boards consider how topics will affect diverse groups unevenly	

Although greater diversity benefits DoD, board membership also provides benefits to the members themselves in terms of increased understanding of DoD's priorities, functions, and decisionmaking; increased prominence in the defense ecosystem; and a stronger professional network.

tangible steps that defense boards can take to create inclusivity for all members:

- When members from historically excluded groups or younger people are recruited, the person recruiting them should clearly establish which aspects of the candidate's expertise are most valued and unique to the board. Specific feedback, such as "you will be our board's only astrophysicist" or "you will be the only member with field experience in terrorist-controlled territories," establishes the person's differentiated value in the larger group, so the new board member feels comfortable speaking with authority in their area of expertise. On a scientific board filled with scientists or a policy board filled with former diplomats, this differentiation helps the individual begin to engage in group discussions on topics in which they feel the most knowledgeable.
- The chair can create an environment in which everyone feels that their perspective is valued. Interview participants explained that this environment must be intentionally created; otherwise, it would not exist. Chairs might create such an environment by privately asking new members what is on their mind and stating how their perspective is valued. Chairs can use this tactic during sidebar breaks in conversation, and then encourage members to share ideas with the group after

the break instead of putting a person on the spot during a public discussion.

Interview participants added that, although greater diversity benefits DoD, board membership also provides benefits to the members themselves in terms of increased understanding of DoD's priorities, functions, and decisionmaking; increased prominence in the defense ecosystem; and a stronger professional network. If these benefits are offered only to persons from demographic groups that already have strong networks and mentorship in the defense community, DoD will fail to develop future leaders from other demographic groups. The result reinforces complaints that we heard from DoD officials about the lack of "pipelines" of diverse candidates to choose from.

We found that diversity and inclusion affect nearly every topic in this project, including those that boards are tasked to address and the selection of chair, DFO, and members.

Choosing and Designing Board Projects

We asked interview participants to describe the attributes of an ideal project topic, where *project* is loosely defined as an issue that a senior sponsor tasks a board to address. (Some boards provide reports or briefings as a distinct end point of a project, while others examine enduring issues continuously over time.) They responded that an ideal defense advisory

board project consists of an issue that the Secretary is deeply invested in addressing, one that DoD cannot solve on its own, and one that is specific enough so that board members understand what is asked of them. Sometimes the issue may cross departments and agencies, and the board's value is in assisting DoD in clarifying how DoD could contribute to the interagency community.

One interview participant discussed the value of boards addressing “seam issues” or “something that isn't squarely DoD's responsibility.” Numerous other participants described great-power competition as a seam issue in which DoD has a role, but no one department is the lead. Other proposed seam issues include critical infrastructure in the homeland and cyber, and recent examples of successful seam-issue projects involved 5G and AI. These topics share the common thread of the project needing to be scoped narrowly enough to ensure that the board can focus on providing tangible and valuable advice to the Secretary.

A good project has at least one of these attributes:

- emerging trends
- topic requires outside expertise
- topic extends beyond DoD
- topic that the commercial sector or other sectors have already tackled
- topic benefits from third-party (neutral observer) perspectives
- game changers.

Interview participants also described topics that boards *should not* be tasked with. This list included political topics; topics for which senior DoD officials are not open to the full range of options (“never ask a question you don't want an answer to”); or topics that pose outsized opportunities for conflicts of interest (such as areas of current or future acquisitions). Interview participants recommended avoiding topics that would lead to incremental change, because they said these are better suited to be addressed by contractors, FFRDCs, or university-affiliated research centers (UARCs).

Lastly, interviewees described senior sponsor engagement and interest as critical because the involvement influences how topics are scoped, the types of products that the board is expected to

produce, how the board crafts its recommendations, and whether those recommendations will be implemented.

Considerations for Effective Board Administration

The DFO is a statutory role required of all FACA boards. Some interview participants described this as a compliance role, responsible for ensuring that boards comply with the legal requirements of FACA. Several interview participants described additional responsibilities, such as building the right relationships between the board and DoD; helping the board “stay plugged into what's happening” in DoD; and identifying key issues in the department. These additional roles—which involve less bureaucracy and more strategy—were described as executive director functions. Some boards merge these functions within the DFO position, one board created a position specifically for these roles, sometimes these functions are conducted by the chair or senior sponsor, and sometimes no one conducts these additional functions. GSA's description of the legal requirements of the DFO is in the left column of Table 2, and some of these additional important functions described by interview participants are in the right column.

In this framework, the DFO is legally a compliance or risk-management position. The additional functions—not legally required—involve creating a strategic vision and building relationships. Some interview participants noted the difficulty—if not impossibility—to find a single person who can excel in both sets of functions, often because the attributes needed to succeed at one set conflict with the other.

An ideal DFO is a detail-oriented person who can manage bureaucratic processes with ease and confidence. This person does not need to be particularly high-ranking in DoD but needs to have a deep understanding of FACA. An ideal candidate to fill these additional functions (right column) would be a strategic thinker who thrives at building relationships across groups of people who are not natural peers. The DFO role and the role that

TABLE 2

DFO Legal Responsibilities Plus Additional Functions Proposed by Interviews

DFO Legal Requirements	Additional Functions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure compliance with FACA and any other applicable laws and regulations. • Call, attend, and adjourn committee meetings. • Approve agendas. • Maintain required records on costs and membership. • Ensure efficient operations. • Maintain records for availability to the public. • Provide copies of committee reports to the Committee Management Officer for forwarding to the Library of Congress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strategic vision for the board and identify high-priority topics to address. • Act as DoD's liaison to the board and the board's liaison to DoD. • Design approach to each project and identify who the board should meet with from DoD. • Socialize the board's thinking and final recommendations to solicit feedback or build buy-in.

SOURCES: (left column) GSA, "The Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) Brochure," webpage, February 26, 2019; (right column) RAND analysis of interviews.

oversees the additional functions require working with the most senior-level DoD officials, but the nature of those working relationships may differ greatly. In many cases, the additional functions in the right column of Table 2 are spread among the DFO, chair, and senior sponsor.

The Challenge of Bureaucracy

Although achieving the full benefits of DoD advisory boards requires strategic thinking, relationship-building skills, and a willingness to try new approaches, interview participants indicated that a successful board also needs to overcome bureaucratic challenges.

When DoD advisory boards are subject to FACA, interpretations of this law, along with rules imposed by DoD, have added administrative burdens that several interview participants described as unnecessary and a hurdle to boards' effectiveness. FACA creates guidelines for how advisory boards must maintain their membership balance, establish charters, and keep detailed records. DoD has also added rules and administrative hurdles that were described to us as slowing down the business of advisory boards. Examples of these burdens include

- long wait times to onboard new members
- annual requirement to renew advisory committee membership (no annual renewal is required by FACA)
- errors and lack of user friendliness in DoD's FACA paperwork portal

- lack of standardization across forms and processes creates extra work, errors, and additional processes.

Some FACA boards mitigate these challenges by using subcommittees, which provide a mechanism for faster access to new experts. FACA allows for subcommittees, which can be formed to address a specific board project or be standing subcommittees that address enduring topics. Subcommittee members need not be board members. The board can assign a small number of board members to a subcommittee, and then can recruit new subcommittee members who are not on the board and who go through a shorter administrative onboarding process than full board members.

Another administrative challenge involves requiring communication with the public. Interview participants described a lack of clarity regarding which types of engagements must be publicly transparent. FACA requires board deliberation be

Interview participants indicated that a successful board also needs to overcome bureaucratic challenges.

open to the public (except when classified). Interview participants asked whether an email thread, a phone call, or any number of other coordinating methods constitute a “deliberation.” They stated that boards need the ability to do project work but lack clear guidance about when these discussions meet the thresholds of either FACA or the Government in the Sunshine Act, which establishes rules for government transparency and openness.¹⁹ Some boards conduct all their work at classified levels, which negates the need for such clarification, but other boards strive for public transparency and would benefit from guidance on how to do so in ways that allow the board to operate effectively.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In this project, we aimed to develop ideas and recommendations on the future design, structure, composition, and scope of defense advisory boards within the limits of FACA and to inject new ideas and innovation into DoD. The lessons learned led to several recommendations to accomplish this goal for DoD:

- Perform an analysis of alternatives of approaches to develop a repeatable process for seating multidisciplinary boards infused with individuals external to DoD. This could result in changes to existing recruitment processes or implementing new technical solutions (e.g., a public-facing website for self-nominations), or any combination thereof.
- Select chairs who are enthusiastic about engaging across echelons of DoD and who excel at building rapport across diverse teams. These chairs would demonstrate a willingness to listen to all stakeholders and carefully consider these inputs in the context of the board topic. Having the attributes identified in Box 2 would enable this approach.
- Use membership balance plans to address diversity across historically excluded groups and gender.

- Include in board charters a requirement to consider how the board’s recommendations may create uneven effects across different demographics.
- Create a mechanism for a board to go on hiatus if the Secretary or senior sponsor does not want to engage the board. This creates a mechanism to “turn boards on and off” rather than keeping them operating under a disinterested senior leader. This mechanism should consider congressional and presidential equities as appointment authorities.
- Conduct a review of DoD’s FACA implementation to minimize hurdles and mitigate administrative bureaucracy.
- Increase use of subcommittees to access larger pools of talent.

The Secretary’s zero-based review offers a once-in-a-generation chance to reimagine advisory boards for the future of DoD. The challenges facing DoD are too massive, too complex, and too important for DoD to tackle alone. American ingenuity thrives across the nation’s sectors, and advisory boards comprising people outside DoD offer the department access to talent, ideas, and networks. DoD has the opportunity to achieve the full benefits of these forums.

Appendix A. Secretary of Defense Memorandum

The Secretary of Defense’s January 30, 2021, memorandum calling for the “zero-based review” of DoD advisory boards is included here for reference. The memo’s attachment listing 42 boards is summarized below the memo in Table A.1. This table identifies which boards are discretionary, who sponsors each board, who has member appointing authority for each board, and if the board is subject to the zero-based review.

FIGURE A.1
Secretary of Defense Memorandum



SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

11/30/21

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: DoD Advisory Committees — Zero-Based Review

Advisory committees have and will continue to provide an important role in shaping public policy within DoD. That said, our stewardship responsibilities require that we continually assess to ensure each advisory committee provides appropriate value today and in the future, as times and requirements change.

I am aware of and appreciate earlier review efforts to reshape how we use advisory committees and consider the tangible benefits they bring to the Department. Nevertheless, I am directing a zero-based review of all DoD advisory committees, to include any advisory committee that is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) (5 U.S.C., Appendix). This review will, by definition and intent, focus our advisory committee efforts to align with our most pressing strategic priorities and the National Defense Strategy.

The Interim Director of Administration and Management (DA&M), in consultation with the Acting General Counsel of the DoD (GC DoD) will lead this review, and I am asking for your personal attention in this effort. As an interim step, I am directing the immediate suspension of all advisory committee operations until the review is completed unless otherwise directed by myself or the Deputy Secretary of Defense. In addition, the DA&M, who exercises the Secretary of Defense statutory and regulatory authorities pertaining to the FACA, will not, for the duration of the review, establish or renew a DoD advisory committee unless authorized by myself or the Deputy Secretary of Defense.

I also direct, no later than February 16, 2021, the conclusion of service for all DoD advisory committee and subcommittee members currently serving on DoD advisory committees where the DoD approving authority is the Secretary of Defense or where statute authorizes another DoD civilian officer or employee, or Active Duty member of the Armed Services to act as the DoD approving authority. Each Component head ("DoD Sponsor") that sponsors a DoD advisory committee subject to this review, will ensure that appropriate letters are sent no later than February 26, 2021 to each advisory committee or subcommittee member thanking them for their service. The Interim DA&M will provide each component head the required letter that must be signed by the DoD Sponsor.

A list of the affected DoD advisory committees, to include those not subject to the FACA, is attached. Please note the only advisory committees and/or committee members not subject to the zero-based review or conclusion of service are described in the attachment. In addition, each Component head, no later than February 28, 2021, will certify to the Interim DA&M that no other advisory committee has been established and utilized within the Component where at least one advisory committee member is not a full-time or permanent part-



time Federal civilian officer or employee, or Active Duty member of the uniformed services. If the Component established or utilized such an advisory committee, then it will be suspended until the Interim DA&M, in consultation with the Acting GC DoD, determines the advisory committee's status. The Interim DA&M will notify me no later than March 15, 2021 of any such identified advisory committee and its status.

With regard to the zero-based review, each DoD Sponsor will conduct an in-depth business case of every sponsored advisory committee, supported by fact-based evidence for continued utilization of the advisory committee. Each business case should consider, but is not limited to: review of the committee's mission and function as it relates to DoD strategic priorities and National Defense Strategy; potential functional realignments to create a single cross-functional advisory committee; and potential legislative changes to non-discretionary advisory committees to properly align them with our strategic priorities. Each DoD Sponsor will provide his or her business case(s) to the Interim DA&M based on the tier-review schedule described in the attachment.

The Interim DA&M, in consultation with the Acting GC DoD and following the tier-review schedule, will review each DoD Sponsor's business case and make final recommendations to me on each DoD advisory committee, to include retention, realignment, termination, changes to mission or functions, membership balance, membership size, and possible legislative changes to non-discretionary advisory committees. Following appropriate discussions, I will take action on the Interim DA&M recommendations.

This process shall ensure that advisory committee and subcommittee member appointments comply with all applicable federal statutes and regulations, to include DoD policies and procedures. DoD Sponsors, in consultation with the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for White House Liaison, will develop potential member candidates that conform to the advisory committee's membership balance plan or, in the case of those not subject to the FACA, statutory requirements. All member and subcommittee member appointments will be approved by me or the Deputy Secretary of Defense using the DoD Appointment Approval Instrument prepared by the DoD Advisory Committee Management Officer, in consultation with the Office of the GC DoD. In addition, all committee and subcommittee work will be based on written terms of reference unless otherwise provided for by statute or Presidential directive. No committee or subcommittee member will perform any work until properly appointed, unless they have an active appointment.



Attachment:
As stated

TABLE A.1

DoD Advisory Boards and Attributes

Name	Discretionary	Sponsor	Member Appointment Authority	Subject to Zero-Based Review
Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery	No	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Advisory Committee on Industrial Security and Industrial Base Policy	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Air University Board of Visitors	Yes	Secretary of the Air Force	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Armed Forces Retirement Home Advisory Council	No	Director of Administration and Management	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Army Education Advisory Committee	Yes	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Board of Regents, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense and statute	Yes
Board of Visitors for the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation	No	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense, statute, and Congress	Yes
Board of Visitors for the U.S. Air Force Academy	No	Secretary of the Air Force	President of the United States and Congress	Yes
Board of Visitors, Marine Corps University	No	Secretary of the Navy	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Board of Visitors, National Defense University	Yes	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Board on Coastal Engineering Research	No	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Advisory Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Advisory Committee on Investigation, Prosecution, and Defense of Sexual Assault in the Armed Forces	No	General Counsel of the Department of Defense	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Advisory Committee on Military Personnel Testing	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Business Board	Yes	Deputy Secretary of Defense	Secretary of Defense	Yes

TABLE A.1—CONTINUED

Name	Discretionary	Sponsor	Member Appointment Authority	Subject to Zero-Based Review
Defense Health Board	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Innovation Board	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Policy Board	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Policy	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Defense Science Board	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Department of Defense Board of Actuaries	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Department of Defense Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care Board of Actuaries	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Department of Defense Military Family Readiness Council	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Statute and Secretary of Defense	Yes
Department of Defense Wage Committee	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Education for Seapower Advisory Board	Yes	Secretary of the Navy	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Inland Waterways Users Board	No	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	Yes
National Intelligence University Board of Visitors	Yes	Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security	Secretary of Defense	Yes
National Reconnaissance Advisory Board	No (not subject to FACA by statute)	Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security	By statute the Director, National Reconnaissance Office	Yes
National Security Agency Emerging Technologies Board	No (not subject to FACA by statute)	Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security	By statute the Director, National Security Agency	Yes
National Security Education Board	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Statute and President of the United States	Yes
Ocean Research Advisory Panel	No	Secretary of the Navy	Statute, Secretary of Defense	No ^a
Reserve Forces Policy Board	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Homeland Security	Yes ^b
Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program Scientific Advisory Board I	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment	Statute, joint approval by Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy in consultation with Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency	Yes ^c

TABLE A.1—CONTINUED

Name	Discretionary	Sponsor	Member Appointment Authority	Subject to Zero-Based Review
Table Rock Lake Oversight Committee	No	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	No ^d
U.S. Air Force Scientific Advisory Board	Yes	Secretary of the Air Force	Secretary of Defense	Yes
U.S Army Scientific Advisory Board	Yes	Secretary of the Army	Secretary of Defense	Yes
U.S. Strategic Command Strategic Advisory Group	Yes	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	Secretary of Defense	Yes
Uniform Formulary Beneficiary Advisory Panel	No	Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness	Secretary of Defense	Yes
United States Military Academy Board of Visitors	No	Secretary of the Army	President of the United States and Congress	Yes
United States Naval Academy Board of Visitors	No	Secretary of the Navy	President of the United States and Congress	Yes

SOURCE: Adapted from Secretary of Defense, 2021.

^a Currently no active members appointed by the Secretary of Defense.

^b Only members appointed by the Secretary of Defense.

^c Only members appointed by the Secretary of Defense.

^d Advisory committee concluded its mission.

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

This appendix contains the interview protocol we used for this study. We conducted semi-structured interviews, which means this protocol served as a structure for the interviews, but questions may have been asked in a different order than shown here, and interviewers may have asked follow-up questions not listed based on the responses of the interview participants. All interviews began with the Introductory Remarks section.

Introductory Remarks

This interview is voluntary. You may choose whether you want to participate, and you may decline to answer any questions without giving a reason. We will take notes; this interview is not being recorded. We will use all the interviews we conduct to create a publicly available, unclassified report.

We will not quote you or attribute any comments to you—either by name or inference—without your expressed permission. In the report, we would like the option to include a list of the names and positions (title and organization) of the people we interviewed during this study. You are free to decline. Do we have your permission to identify you in that list?

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview questions

1. Ask respondent's current role and relevant prior roles.
2. What has been your experience working with defense advisory boards?
 - a. Ask what roles the respondent has held vis-à-vis defense advisory boards.
 - b. Ask about the nature of the respondent's experience working with defense advisory boards (positive versus negative experience; productive versus bureaucratic experience, etc.).
3. If you consider the ecosystem of external advisors to DoD, including FFRDCs, UARCs, HQEs [highly qualified expert], and FACA advisory boards, what unique role *could* FACA advisory boards play that is different or unique from these others?
 - a. Ask for comparisons: How is the unique role of FACA boards different from each of these other examples?
4. When FACA advisory boards are working well—when a board is really thriving—what is the board doing?

- a. What are those attributes of a “thriving” board?
- b. What specific activities or tasks or types of projects is a “thriving” board engaging in?
5. Diversity is a priority area for this administration. In what ways should boards consider diversity?
6. Thinking about the problems most facing DoD today and over the next ten years, what topics would be most appropriate for FACA advisory boards to take on?
 - a. Why did you choose these topics? What common attributes do these topics share?
 - b. What types of topics would you recommend are not well-suited for FACA advisory boards?
7. Historically, different DoD advisory boards have existed in different parts of DoD, including in OUSD(P) [Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy], OUSD(R&E) [Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering], Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. To what extent does the choice of where to house a FACA advisory board determine the usefulness of the board?
8. When FACA boards are less effective, we can imagine causes that are internal to the board (e.g., board members too busy to participate; infighting; the board is slow to make progress) and causes that are external (e.g., DoD sponsors are not engaged; board is being filled with unqualified or controversial persons because of political favors, etc.).
 - a. Starting with internal factors, what are lessons learned or best practices for how boards can operate effectively?
 - b. Now thinking about external factors, what are lessons learned or best practices for how DoD can manage boards to maximize their effectiveness?
9. Thinking about examples from recent or distant history, what are examples of situations where a DoD FACA board truly excelled? It could be a board during a certain era or a specific project. Which examples would you choose, and why?
 - a. What are the attributes of these cases that led that example to really shine?
 - b. What factors converged to allow this success to happen?

Notes

¹ Secretary of Defense, “Memorandum for Senior Pentagon Leadership, Commanders of the Combatant Commands, Defense Agency and DoD Field Activity Directors: DoD Advisory Committees—Zero Based Review,” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, January 30, 2021.

² FACA Database, “All Agency Accounts,” webpage, undated.

³ The first board we found documentation of was the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, founded in 1944. See Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, “Welcome to Air Force Scientific Advisory Board,” webpage, undated.

⁴ Steve Blank, Raj Shah, and Joe Felner, “Pentagon Advisory Boards Need to Offer 10x Ideas, Not 10% Ones,” *Defense One*, January 30, 2021.

⁵ Jack Detsch and Robbie Gramer, “Pentagon Purges Leading Advisors from Defense Policy Board,” *Foreign Policy*, November 25, 2020; Robert Burns, “Pentagon Installs 2 Trump Allies on Defense Advisory Board,” *Associated Press*, December 4, 2020.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, Washington, D.C., 2018.

⁷ Not all of DoD’s advisory boards are discretionary nor consist primarily of external advisors, and our study omitted those different types of boards. Boards of Visitors, for example, were not in our scope; because half their members, or more, might be members of the legislative branch or their delegates, Boards of Visitors may or may not find this study’s findings and recommendations useful. Similarly, for nondiscretionary boards—such as those mandated by statute—the Secretary of Defense may lack the authority to implement specific changes that are recommended in this report and may lack the authority to select the members of such boards. Other types of commissions or boards may similarly fall out of the scope of this study.

⁸ The GSA Committee Management Secretariat provides training, advice, and guidance to federal agencies’ FACA boards. We tried multiple times to request an interview with a GSA official, but the agency did not respond to our requests.

⁹ We did not conduct interviews across the full range of DoD’s advisory boards, and some boards may exist for more functions than are listed here, such as academic advisory boards that advise on educational curricula or mandated oversight boards.

¹⁰ These three models may not cover the full range of DoD advisory boards, only the boards for which we conducted interviews.

¹¹ Nondiscretionary boards, such as those mandated by statute, would be required to operate irrespective of DoD leadership.

¹² Committee Management Secretariat, Office of Committee and Regulatory Management, *Federal Advisory Committee: Membership Balance Plan*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Services Administration, Office of Governmentwide Policy, Office of Committee and Regulatory Management, January 2011; and “Federal Advisory Committee Act: From Title 5—Appendix,” webpage, undated.

¹³ This is not an exhaustive list. These are the attributes raised during interviews.

¹⁴ Margaret C. Harrell and Melissa A. Bradley, *Data Collection Methods. Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Groups*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TR-718-USG, 2009.

¹⁵ Additional research is needed to determine if the benefits of implementing this approach outweigh the cost in resources to manage the website and a searchable database. Partnering with GSA to use the established board website is an option.

¹⁶ “Federal Advisory Committee Act: From Title 5—Appendix,” undated.

¹⁷ David Mills, Rachel Middleton, Harsonal Sachar, and Russell Reynolds, “Driving Diversity and Inclusion—the Role for Chairs and CEOs,” *Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance* webpage, April 3, 2019.

¹⁸ Mills et al., 2019.

¹⁹ “The Government in the Sunshine Act: 5 U.S.C. § 552b,” 1976.

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About This Report

On January 30, 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin halted all the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) external advisory boards and committees. In a letter issued that day, he ordered "a zero-based review" of all such boards. In this report, RAND Corporation researchers detail an exploratory study to reveal lessons learned for how DoD can improve its advisory boards. They conducted 16 interviews with current and former DoD officials to learn what worked well, what could be enhanced or dispensed with, and how boards might be reconfigured. This report outlines a set of lessons learned and recommendations.

The research reported here was completed in October 2021 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

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