



# Strategic Plan

FY 2026 – FY 2030

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## I. Overview

The National Mediation Board (NMB) is an independent Executive Branch agency established by the 1934 amendments to the Railway Labor Act (RLA) of 1926. The 1934 amendments to the RLA established the NMB's duties and responsibilities as they related to the railroad industry in the United States. In 1936, the RLA was amended to include the airline industry.

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. Board Members provide overall leadership and strategic direction for the Agency, while the General Counsel and Department Directors implement the programmatic responsibilities of the Agency.

In compliance with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular No. A-11, NMB has developed and formalized a process to review, evaluate, and modify its strategic plan. Senior management is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the RLA mandated programs as well as applicable federal directives and initiatives. Program and administrative evaluations are ongoing, and specific milestones are reviewed throughout the year.

### Strategic Plan Timeline:

**October:** Board Members and department directors review the Agency mission statement, goals, and objectives to ensure the Board remains in alignment with the RLA, the President's Management Agenda, and current government-wide programs and initiatives.

**November and December:** Evaluations and assessments are conducted by each program and support office area. Proposed changes, suggestions, or deletions are reviewed by the Board for final approval.

**February:** Concurrent with the President's Budget, the Strategic Plan is published on the NMB website.

## II. Mission

NMB promotes harmonious labor relations in the airline and railroad industries in the United States in order to avoid an interruption to commerce or to the operation of any carrier engaged therein. As statutorily required, NMB spans the breadth of labor relations in the airline and railroad industries. This responsibility covers questions concerning whether workers are represented and which group or individual may represent them, to the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements, to the resolution of questions regarding performance under established collective bargaining agreements as well as the supporting services that ensure the capacity to realize these goals in an efficient manner.

The RLA directs NMB to:

- Facilitate the orderly determination of representation in the airline and railroad industries in the United States;
- Mediate the settlement of disputes related to pay, work rules, and working conditions, and to develop innovative approaches to dispute resolution and problem solving for carriers and organizations in the airline and railroad industries in the United States;

- Facilitate the arbitration and settlement of disputes arising from the implementation or interpretation of existing agreements covering rates of pay, work rules, and working conditions.

### **III. Enterprise-Wide Commitment**

NMB continues to build upon its nearly 100 years of success by adhering to its statutory mission.

*Personnel:* NMB is committed to recruiting and maintaining a professional, experienced workforce to conduct the important work of protecting interstate commerce.

*Public Service:* NMB strives for excellence by providing unique representation, mediation, and facilitation services, and arbitration administrative support to the parties and the public.

*Collaboration:* NMB fosters an environment adhering to government regulations and practice resulting in a team that provides essential services to the Agency's stakeholders.

*Transparency:* NMB provides information and data in order to inform the public, Congress, and stakeholders about its activities.

### **IV. Organizational Structure**

NMB consists of seven organizational units:

- Office of the Board
- Office of Legal Affairs, including Representation Services, led by the General Counsel
- Office of Mediation Services
- Office of Arbitration Services
- Office of Administration
- Office of Fiscal Services
- Office of Information Services

### **V. Stakeholder Engagement**

NMB stakeholders include carrier and organizational members in the airline and railroad industries, lawyers, arbitrators who practice RLA-related work, Congressional oversight committees, and members of the public. NMB communicates with stakeholders through a number of active avenues, all of which channel information, assessments, and recommendations to the Agency.

#### **Public Information**

NMB maintains three public information streams.

- Website: [NMB.gov](https://www.nmb.gov) provides agency information to stakeholders and the public, including avenues for agency contacts and feedback regarding representation actions, Board actions, and Presidential Emergency Board reports.

- Knowledge Store: Research tool for NMB’s Section 3 practitioners involved in the arbitration process, stakeholders, and the public. Stakeholders have the ability to upload information into this tool.
- Information Hotline: [infoline@nmb.gov](mailto:infoline@nmb.gov) or 202-692-5050 are public information hotlines available for questions related to NMB practices and procedures.

## VI. Strategic Goals

Administrative guidance for performance management and analysis encourages the establishment of strategic goals and measures. NMB strategic goals are clearly established by statute and relate directly to the statutory mission of the Agency.

- Effectuate freedom of association and employee rights of self-organization where a representation dispute exists. Employees have the right to select, change, or remove a bargaining representative through a free and fair election process.
- Mediate disputes arising out of the negotiation of terms and working conditions of new or revised collective bargaining agreements.
- Prompt resolution of disputes regarding the interpretation or application of existing agreements.

## VII. Program Goals, Objectives, and Measures

NMB has adopted OMB’s program definition as “any organized set of activities directed toward a common purpose or goal that an agency undertakes and describes an agency’s mission, functions, activities, services, projects, or processes.”

Under this definition, NMB has three statutorily required programs: Representation, Mediation, and Arbitration.

### Legal Affairs and Representation

#### Office of Legal Affairs

#### Representation Strategic Goal

The Railway Labor Act, at Section 2, Fourth, provides employees with the freedom of association and right to self-organization where a representation dispute exists. Section 2, Ninth, requires NMB to resolve representation disputes upon request. NMB effectuates these statutory requirements by determining whether the statutory showing of interest has been met, conducting free and fair representation elections, certifying the results of elections, and handling inquiries or challenges to elections.

#### Representation Program Goals

**Objective:** Prompt investigation of representation disputes and definitive resolution of employees’ representation status for collective bargaining purposes.

**Note:** For all Representation matters, “respond” indicates contact with the party requesting service or information. Supplying all requested information or services

may vary in time depending upon the complexity of the request and other factors related to the request.

*Measures:*

- Respond to representation applications within two business days of receipt by NMB.
- Assign an NMB attorney to investigate representation matters within two business days following the initial NMB response, unless the NMB declines to process the application.
- NMB's determination of whether there is sufficient showing of interest to warrant further investigation will be made within 45 calendar days of docketing, unless the case is complex.
- Certification or dismissal will be issued the next business day after an election ballot count.
- All non-appellate representation cases will be completed within 90 calendar days of docketing.

**Objective:** Maintain concise, relevant representation-related reference materials to accurately research a timely response to inquiries.

*Measures:*

- Conduct semi-annual reviews of the Representation Manual and website, updating where appropriate.
- Conduct ongoing reviews of the Representation "Frequently Asked Questions" section on the NMB's website and create other reference materials where appropriate.

### **Legal Affairs Strategic Goal**

Provide efficient and accurate support to the Board and other Departments in mission-related areas, such as litigation and Presidential Emergency Boards (PEB). Fulfill other statutory requirements, such as effectively managing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) program, Ethics Program to ensure compliance with government ethics laws and regulations, and preserving the neutrality that is fundamental to the Board's role.

### **Legal Affairs Program Goals**

**Objective:** Prompt and efficient assistance to PEBs by Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) staff.

*Measures:*

- Maintain continuous industry and agency communication at a level that provides early preparation for PEB management.
- Two OLA attorneys will serve as counsel to every PEB to provide necessary support and continuity through the statutory process.

**Objective:** Efficiently manage FOIA and Ethics programs, providing timely and accurate responses and advice by OLA staff.

*Measures:*

- Process FOIA requests based on statutory deadlines, accurately analyze exemptions, and other legal principles in responses.
- Regularly review FOIA requests to determine what, if any, documents could be posted in NMB's FOIA Reading Room website to comply with the law.
- Ensure timely completion and evaluation of required financial disclosures.
- Accurately respond to requests for ethics opinions regarding outside employment and invitations, to avoid conflicts of interest.

**Objective:** Enhance the efficiency and productivity of OLA staff through targeted development opportunities, performance management, and use of appropriate technology.

*Measures:*

- Department leadership will identify opportunities for training and development as needs are identified through the performance management process.
- Understanding of Emergency Board procedures by all OLA staff in the event it is necessary to execute simultaneous, multiple Boards that are created to adhere to statutory timelines.
- Ensure consistency and availability of answers for the public and staff regarding Ethics programs.

## **Mediation**

### **Office of Mediation Services**

Under the RLA, Section 6, organization and carrier representatives must bargain over what are known as "major disputes" on rates of pay, work rules, and working conditions that ultimately result in new or amended collective bargaining agreements. In the area of major disputes, NMB works to resolve these disputes between the parties resulting in agreements that are subject to ratification by labor and management. The RLA clearly establishes the duties of the parties to exert every reasonable effort to make and maintain agreements and to settle all disputes. Ultimately, it is the parties who maintain control of when and if they reach mutual agreement on collective bargaining terms through mediation under the RLA. NMB also offers additional dispute resolution programs to the parties through our Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Services program (e.g. Grievance Mediation (GM)).

Under the RLA, contracts do not expire but instead become amendable and the status quo is maintained during bargaining. Mediation management calls for close monitoring of cases and regular reviews of case strategy. The goal of the RLA is to preserve the stability of the labor relations environment during collective bargaining and avoid interruption to the railroad and airline operations and the supply chain.

## **Mediation Strategic Goal**

Timely resolution of disputes arising out of the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements. The RLA requires mandatory mediation prior to the exercise of self-help.

## **Mediation Program Goals**

**Objective:** Provide mediation services to assist parties in resolution of contract labor disputes when direct negotiations have been unsuccessful.

### *Measures:*

- Docket within two days applications for Mediation or ADR Services with date stamp, and review for accuracy and appropriateness for mediation.
- Assign a mediator to docketed cases within five business days of the date on which the case was docketed.
- Contact the parties involved in the case within five business days from the date on which the mediator is assigned.
- Provide an initial case report, to include a case management strategy, within five business days following the first meeting with the parties.
- Update case report within five business days from the date any meeting with the parties concludes.
- Frequent reviews of the case management system, progress on mediation, and reporting compliance by senior leadership.
- Quarterly case reviews evaluate the status of all one year or older cases, assess and revise the case management history, and create a plan to reach resolution.
- Board Members receive the review quarterly.

**Objective:** Provide appropriate and effective mediator training and continuous development.

### *Measures:*

- Annually, senior leadership will review and update any standard training requirements for mediators.
- Mediators will utilize cost-efficient online training opportunities as necessary.

**Objective:** Provide ADR programs that offer innovative mediation and problem-solving methods to the parties to improve their ability to resolve disputes expeditiously.

### *Measures:*

- ADR methods and techniques will be reviewed periodically to ensure the program reflects current best practices.
- Mediators will introduce ADR services upon initial contact on mediation cases.

**Objective:** Improve efficiency and effectiveness of NMB programs by utilizing technological resources.

*Measures:*

- Evaluate existing OMS systems annually for improvement and compliance with agency policies.
- Consult NMB Office of Information Services staff for IT resources relevant to mediation.

## **Arbitration**

### **Office of Arbitration Services**

Once a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) is ratified, disputes arising over the interpretation of the CBA are referred to as “minor disputes.” As required by Section 3 of the RLA, arbitrators are selected by the parties. NMB assigns the arbitrator to decide minor disputes in the rail industry and their fees are paid by NMB appropriations.

The NMB maintains a roster of arbitrators available to arbitrate in both the railroad and airline industries. The parties often are looking for arbitrators with a background in these two industries. Many of the arbitrators on the NMB roster have experience in either rail or air or both. Upon request, the Office of Arbitration Services provides a randomly generated strike list of qualified arbitrators to assist the parties with their selection.

Grievance Mediation allows parties to voluntarily agree to use NMB mediators to resolve minor disputes outside of arbitration. This program reduces the backlog of cases waiting to be heard in arbitration. It also reduces arbitration expenses which benefit both the parties and the taxpayers, and often lead to a faster, more durable resolution of disputes.

Grievance Mediation is used extensively in the airline industry as a vehicle to resolve minor disputes. Under the RLA, airline arbitration is not paid from the annual NMB appropriation. Therefore, the grievance mediation process is a win-win for both management and labor because it allows them to avoid the high cost of arbitration.

### **Arbitration Strategic Goal**

Facilitate the settlement of disputes arising from the implementation or interpretation of existing collective bargaining agreements covering rates of pay, work rules, and working conditions.

### **Arbitration Program Goals**

**Objective:** Ensure the prompt resolution of minor disputes in the rail industry by monitoring arbitrator compliance with the 60-90-120-day rule.

*Measures:*

- Within 60 days of the assignment of a case, the case must be scheduled for a hearing or decided.
- If a case is scheduled for a hearing, the hearing must be held within 120 days of the date of assignment.

- If a case has been heard, the decision must be rendered within 90 days of the date of the hearing.

**Objective:** Promote roster expansion and arbitrator development to provide the parties with high-quality arbitrators.

*Measures:*

- Expand the list of RLA arbitrators qualified and available to the parties. Requirements include 10 years of industry experience or related labor management experience.
- Provide data to the parties on the distribution of cases relative to the number of arbitrators on the roster.

**Objective:** Focus on timely resolution of “minor” disputes.

*Measures:*

- OAS Director will meet periodically with stakeholders and other rostering entities to discuss innovations in arbitration.
- Focus on continuous improvement by posting quarterly data online regarding the types of disputes heard in railroad arbitration, which is generated from the NMB Subject Codes, the number of Special Board of Adjustment (SBA) and Public Law Board (PLB) cases docketed, and the number of cases docketed on the four divisions of the National Railroad Adjustment Board (NRAB). NMB’s annual report summarizes the fiscal year data.

## VIII. Support Office Goals, Objectives, and Measures

- Office of Administration (OA)
- Office of Fiscal Services (OFS)
- Office of Information Services (OIS)

### Strategic Goal

To increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Agency operations, and to ensure compliance with federally mandated programs and initiatives.

**Objective:** As responsible stewards of federal funds, NMB strives to minimize costs and risks within the statutorily required programs, while maximizing value for the American taxpayer. Each support office is responsible for:

- Careful oversight and management of programs and assets.
- Effective internal and external communication.
- Collaborating on agency priority goals.
- Ensuring compliance, transparency, and accountability.

*Measures (Administration):*

- Outstanding customer service is delivered to internal and external customers.

- Recruit and retain a high performing, highly qualified workforce.
- Reporting requirements for human resources policies and programs meet statutory and regulatory standards.

*Measures (Fiscal Services):*

- Adhere to all audit and fiscal controls through oversight of internal controls, transparency, and accounting standards.
- Execute mission and statutory responsibilities through appropriate budget formulation and execution of financial responsibilities.

*Measures (Information Services):*

- Protect against cybersecurity threats through improved IT capacity.
- Innovation is integrated into Agency business processes and federal IT functions.
- Agency policies and procedures comply with directives from OMB, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the National Archives.
- Document, approve, and monitor IT hardware and software configurations.
- Oversight of third-party software vendors to mitigate cybersecurity supply chain risks.
- Appropriately maintain NMB network and IT infrastructure to minimize disruption to the Board’s operations and transition to a “resilience-first” Disaster Recovery Model.

## **IX. Major Management Priorities & Challenges**

Costly operational updates associated with maintaining a secure IT infrastructure to support the Board’s entire operation requires a growing share of the budget. Development of a customized electronic voting platform to conduct representation elections continues. The costs associated with federally contracted electronic services to support our human resource and procurement functions has also increased. System security costs continue to escalate in an environment of expanding threat. Finding innovative solutions to these changing requirements is the major management priority for this strategic plan.