



Office of the Assistant Secretary
for Preparedness & Response
Washington, D.C. 20201

National Preparedness and
Response Science Board
Washington, DC 20201

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Robert P. Kadlec, MD, MS
Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Dr. Kadlec:

The National Preparedness and Response Science Board (NPRSB) formed the Future of the NPRSB Working Group (FNWG) in 2015. The FNWG was launched in response to the Board's collective observation that the traditional pipeline and processes for requests made to the NPRSB for advisory review and recommendations had steadily diminished. This trend seemed contrary to significant current activities within the areas of public health preparedness and response, which are ideal opportunities for NPRSB participation. The intent of the FNWG was to identify topics and processes by which the NPRSB, within its charter and legislative mandate, could more fully benefit the mission space of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR). The purpose of this letter is to communicate three recommendations of the FNWG that have been reviewed and endorsed by the Board.

Recommendation 1 – Formalize Standing Working Groups

Fueled by a desire to more fully contribute, the NPRSB recommends a structural modification whereby the NPRSB would establish additional standing working groups (WGs). The following three standing WGs are recommended as a potential starting point:

1. Public health emergency risk detection and assessment
2. Operational readiness and response capacity and capabilities
3. Recovery, resiliency, and risk reduction

Working group membership would include a subset of the NPRSB membership, Ex-Officio members or their representatives, invited subject matter experts and ASPR staff members. Each WG would maintain a regular meeting schedule to engage with appropriate ASPR and partner agency staff, to ensure that an ongoing information exchange and interactions between experts from public and private sector organizations is maintained, , and to offer forums for dialogue within the WG. Each WG would periodically report back to the full Board to share findings and issues identified. These deliberations would be compiled into meeting summaries to be shared with ASPR leadership and other interested parties.

This model encourages multiple avenues for conversation between experts of varied perspectives around focused topics pertinent to the Office of the ASPR. This standing WG model would result in better-informed and more fully engaged voting and Ex-Officio members. It would be reasonable to assume that this would translate into a more impactful contribution by the NPRSB to the mission space of the ASPR, albeit with a greater commitment by Board members. Fortunately, the Board conveyed willingness to increase effort if that investment would translate into greater impact on national preparedness and response.

Recommendation 2 – Reinstate the Security Clearance Requirement for NPRSB Members

In the past, NPRSB members received security clearances when joining the Board. The previous administration phased out security clearances and deemed them unnecessary. Now members neither undergo the clearance process nor receive security clearances. Given the current issues facing the country, including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive (CBRNE) threats, the FNWG believes the NPRSB would be more effective at conducting assessments and making recommendations if classified information could be reviewed and considered. We ask that this decision of the prior administration be revisited and reconsidered.

Recommendation 3 – Hold More Frequent In-Person NPRSB Meetings

Whether for the purpose of orienting new members with the rest of the Board or to deliberate on a work group report, remote teleconference and webinar meetings fail to offer the powerful synergy of in-person meetings. The value of proximity, captive attention, and fully interactive dialogue between Board members, federal Ex-Officios and content experts during in-person meetings, from the perspective of the Board, is “priceless.” We ask that in-person meetings be recognized for the

added value they provide, and that they be used strategically to facilitate the effectiveness of the NPRSB and its WGs. We recommend at least two in-person meetings be held a year.

In addition to these three recommendations, the FNWG developed a list of topics signifying the greatest potential impact for public health preparedness and response in the near-term, and it is attached to this letter as an Appendix. The topics that emerged from FNWG deliberations are those viewed as highest priority for action by the ASPR. The order of the topics indicates their relative importance based on the frequency of work group members selecting them as a top issue of significance. Order aside, given further development, any of the topics listed in the Appendix would provide an excellent foundation for a meaningful task request from the ASPR.

On a personal note, it has been a privilege to serve as a member and the Chair of the NPRSB. There are few places where one can collaborate with such a diverse group of some of our nation's brightest minds. I have also developed tremendous respect for the unwavering dedication and tireless work of the professionals within the Office of the ASPR and its partner agencies; an extraordinary effort which unfortunately is not always visible to the public and many of our elected officials. Perhaps we can consider how a more robust schedule for public in-person meetings might be leveraged to inform and engage others, including the public, in our collective work in support of a nation prepared.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Krug, MD
Chair, NPRSB

Enclosures