

Update on Nuclear Regulatory Commission Licensing Efficiency 2026

Summary Report



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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary:.....	3
1. Motivation for Update	4
2. Summary of 2023 report.....	4
3. Updated Findings and Recommendations for 2026	6
Challenge 1	6
Challenge 2	7
Challenge 3	7
Challenge 4	8
Regulatory Engagement Plans (REPs)	8
Audits.....	8
Project Management	9
Office of the General Counsel (OGC)	10
Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS).....	10
Other identified issues	10
Conclusion.....	16

Executive Summary:

Over the past decade, a series of actions by Congress, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), and licensees have achieved significant progress in NRC licensing. In the last two years, both the Accelerating Deployment of Versatile, Advanced Nuclear for Clean Energy Act of 2024 (ADVANCE Act) and Executive Order 14300 have directed more efficient licensing with ambitious timelines.

The Nuclear Innovation Alliance (NIA) conducted anonymized interviews with various new reactor applicants to gauge the licensing process and build on our research.¹ This report summarizes the major insights with respect to progress against prior licensing efficiency recommendations, as well as new recommendations. The summary and recommendations presented in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of any particular interviewees, but instead are NIA's insights and synthesis of the conversations.

These interviews were designed to build on topics and recommendations in NIA's previous licensing efficiency report in 2021, its Advanced Reactor Licensing Efficiency workshop in 2022 and the subsequent report in 2023. The interviewees have experience from prior licensing activities as well as current engagements. This range of experience allowed NIA to better understand the changes that have occurred within the last few years. Many interviewees praised the current licensing environment and felt it was the best it had been in decades. However, there is still room for improvement, which is the focus of this report. The insights presented here complement our 2025 report, [*Advancing Regulatory Efficiency: Lessons and Opportunities in NRC Licensing Practice*](#).

Communication and project management were major themes from the 2023 report and remained so in the interviews. Effective two-way communication between the NRC and applicants is essential to efficient licensing. For example, the applicant needs to communicate clearly and in a timely fashion with the NRC on their status through timely updates to regulatory engagement plans (REPs). On the regulator side, the NRC needs to better establish internal communication pathways at all levels. This report provides recommendations on communication and best practices for REPs, audits, NRC project manager (PM) issues, NRC's Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS).

¹ NIA published [*Promoting Efficient NRC Advanced Reactor Licensing Reviews to Enable Rapid Decarbonization*](#) in December 2021 and a [*Licensing Efficiency Workshop Report*](#) in 2023

1. Motivation for Update

Improving the efficiency of NRC licensing has been a priority for the NIA since its inception. There is a public interest in effective and efficient licensing because there is a public interest in achieving energy security while reducing carbon emissions as quickly as possible. Improvements are needed on three timescales. For the near term, dozens of new reactor developers are engaging one-on-one with the NRC to obtain approvals under existing rules. For the medium term, NRC is engaged in multiple rulemakings to improve regulatory efficiency. In the long term, NRC and license applicants need to move to standardization to achieve high-volume licensing. This report focuses on the near term.

This report is an update of the previous reports on licensing efficiency that NIA published in 2021 and 2023. Since the 2023 Report, the ADVANCE Act was enacted, and a series of Executive Orders (EOs) were issued, both of which encouraged more efficient licensing reviews. In May of 2025, the EOs instructed the NRC to significantly reduce new reactor licensing timelines from 24 months to 18 months. This accelerated pace requires greater preparation and timeliness on the part of both the applicant and the NRC. Whereas the 2023 licensing efficiency report was based on a Chatham House² rule workshop, NIA determined that one-on-one anonymized interviews with individual companies would provide greater insight than another workshop. Many companies have made noteworthy progress in the NRC licensing process since the last report, which allowed for more detailed one-on-one conversations.

The goal of the one-on-one conversations was to review the previous challenges and recommendations from the 2023 report to determine what has changed and what remains the same in the current licensing environment. The conversations, which took place between October and December of 2025, reviewed the four major challenges discussed in the 2023 report as well as additional issues. The following section summarizes the 2023 report findings to set the stage for the new recommendations and insights.

2. Summary of 2023 report

The [*2023 Licensing Efficiency Report*](#) built on the prior 2021 Report, [*Promoting Efficient NRC Advanced Reactor Licensing Reviews to Enable Rapid Decarbonization*](#). The 2021 Report included recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of reactor licensing reviews for both new reactor license applicants and the NRC. The 2021 Report highlighted the importance of various stakeholders sharing experiences and insights.

² "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed." per chathamhouse.org

NIA held the 2022 workshop under the Chatham House rule to allow open discussion of both positive and negative experiences with the licensing process. The participants included stakeholders from industry and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The goal of the workshop was to enable participants to collaboratively identify challenges and focus on solutions to address those barriers.

Recommendations emerged from five major topic areas discussed during the 2022 workshop:

1. Achieving and maintaining alignment between the applicant and NRC on the licensing review process and creating clear lines of communication
2. Preparing the application content and performing the safety review based on clear, definitive, and consistent expectations
3. Ensuring efficient use of staff resources as the NRC receives an increasing number of new reactor license applications
4. Developing processes to identify and resolve challenges encountered during reviews
5. Ensuring uniform understanding and expectations on the role of specific NRC offices and committees in the licensing process

The findings of the workshop identified four challenges from industry's perspective of working through the NRC process:

1. NRC staff discomfort or unwillingness to make preliminary technical or policy decisions during the pre-application process
2. Lack of alignment between NRC staff and management on technical or policy questions
3. Lack of formal processes to appeal or request formal review of NRC technical or policy questions
4. Protracted or delayed identification, discussion, and resolution of technical and policy questions

These challenges are related to communication and process issues across both the applicant and the NRC. Gaps in communication between various levels of the NRC result in inconsistency between applicant outcomes. With the understanding of these challenges, NIA produced recommendations for the applicants, NRC staff, and the Commission. These recommendations focused on REPs, audits, NRC PMs, the NRC's OGC, and the ACRS.

3. Updated Findings and Recommendations for 2026

This section contains three main subsections. The first is an evaluation of the four challenges identified in 2023. Next are the key focus areas for recommendations identified from the 2023 report: REPs, audits, NRC PMs, OGC and ACRS. The last subsection evaluates new areas of interest identified by interviewees in 2026. At the end of this section is a table that summarizes the 2023 challenges and the associated recommendations, the current status, and new NIA recommendations in 2026. To determine the status, interviewees were asked whether the same challenges remain, what progress has been made, whether the earlier recommendations are still valid, and what new recommendations are warranted. NIA learned that while many of the challenges from the 2023 report remain, there has been significant progress, and some new challenges have emerged. Thus, NIA recommends continued improvements in some areas identified in the 2023 report, as well as new areas for improvements.

Challenge 1

NRC staff discomfort or unwillingness to make preliminary technical or policy decisions during the pre-application process

According to interviewees, progress has been made, but this still remains a challenge. The NRC significantly improved staff-applicant interaction by clarifying the definition of consulting in the July 2025 procedure, *Driving Regulatory Decisions Through More Effective Communications*.³ This procedure provided examples to the NRC staff on precisely how they could better explain regulatory pathways without violating the restrictions on staff consulting.

Interviewees emphasized that during pre-application, one should not expect to receive a regulatory decision from the staff on a specific issue. Many noted that to achieve some degree of certainty, a white paper or topical report is the best course of action. Whereas white papers simply provide an opportunity for an applicant to provide details to the NRC and receive some feedback, topical reports require a formal NRC response. NRC responses to topical reports can result in an agency position that can be referenced in license application documents. Applicants should also consider using NRC's LIC-116 Preapplication Readiness Assessment to receive formal NRC feedback on potential issues. Providing a robust readiness assessment to the NRC allows for further analysis from the staff.

Additionally, interviewees encouraged applicants to use the pre-application time to demonstrate their broad technology approach instead of focusing on nitty gritty technical details. They felt that a broader technology approach better fit with what the staff were able

³ [NRC's Office of Executive Director for Operations Procedure P0235](#)

to discuss during the pre-application period. The applicant should use pre-application to provide for mutual education, help establish relationships with the NRC, and understand the next steps in the process so both sides can properly prepare and allocate staffing resources.

NIA has found that topical reports, white papers, and readiness assessments are excellent tools for pre-application and recommends greater use of all to help facilitate discussions on technical and policy matters during pre-application.

Challenge 2

Lack of alignment between NRC staff and management on technical or policy questions

Interviewees found that this was still an issue partly because interpretation of regulations can vary depending on the reviewer. Some felt that staff could be distracted by subjects that were not directly relevant to the review. However, interviewees noted that management has recently been more cognizant of timing and budget, has been providing clearer direction to staff on this front, and staff has therefore become more focused on adhering to schedules than had been the case in applicants' prior experiences. This change signals some cultural changes, which is positive and in line with NIA's report on [*Improving Nuclear Regulatory Commission Organizational Culture*](#). Lack of alignment between NRC staff and management can cause delays. It is important to have clear schedules and open communication to facilitate better alignment and timely decisions.

NIA recommends firm and efficient schedules, agreed upon by both NRC and the applicant. For example, when a topical report is submitted, the staff and applicant should agree on specific dates for the staff to provide questions, to meet with the applicant, and to produce a draft evaluation. A well-defined schedule will assist the NRC staff in focusing on relevant review areas.

Challenge 3

Lack of formal processes to appeal or request formal review of NRC technical or policy questions

Interviewees had mixed views on whether this was still a challenge. Some felt that it was often difficult to understand the hierarchy of the NRC and whom to address with concerns. Others felt it was simply "go up the chain of management." It is important to understand and respect the management hierarchy in fairness to the staff. In its 2023 report, NIA recommended applicants seek to proactively develop lines of communication at all levels as early as practicable and maintain these lines of communication throughout the review process. This could significantly help with understanding the formal processes.

NIA recommends NRC develop an organization chart for each project and direction for how to escalate issues. NRC needs to keep it up to date to reflect any re-organization or staff changes. It is important that the staff are enabled to make decisions while the applicant also understands the correct appeal processes.

Challenge 4

Protracted or delayed identification, discussion, and resolution of technical and policy questions

One concern that interviewees noted was that sometimes information was not shared until the end of pre-application, which caused surprises. Furthermore, they found that after long response times the information NRC provided was not always clear. Some felt part of the delays may be attributed to management turnover and lack of information sharing. Interviewees noted that management turnover can cause issues with the staff being able to rely on management decisions.

NIA recommends establishing a clearer response schedule to which both parties agree and creating better transition processes to ensure information is shared properly during staff and management turnover. The significant staff changes and re-organization across the NRC in the past year make this recommendation especially important.

Regulatory Engagement Plans (REPs)

In 2023 NIA recommended “Applicants should work with the NRC to ensure that the REP has achievable, measurable milestones and that both applicants and the NRC will be held accountable to milestones if there are deviations from the schedule”. Since then, interviewees have found that the REPs are valuable for helping NRC plan resource allocation, although their value depends on the applicant updating them as needed. Several interviewees recommend that NRC consider making it a requirement for applicants to do a REP. Interviewees also pointed to NEI 18-06 REP guidance as helpful, but they would like to see NRC establish clearer criteria and share lessons learned.

NIA continues to recommend REPs for the benefit of applicants and the NRC and supports having NRC require them. NIA also recommends the applicant update REPS as often as needed to help NRC ensure resources are properly allocated. NRC should create REP guidance on lessons learned and best practices. Finally, NRC should consider creating a dashboard on their website with the current status of all REPs, which will help NRC, industry, and the public track licensing progress.

Audits

NIA previously recommended that applicants and NRC use audits to support licensing reviews for specific, complex technical issues; document best practices for audits; and update NRC audit guidance. While interviewees noted substantial success with recent audits, it appears there is still little clear guidance or sharing of best practices. Interviewees found audits to be very helpful, but caution that they need to have a clear end point. They can become expensive and drawn out if the endpoint is not well defined. Interviewees noted that it is the PM’s responsibility to focus the staff on meeting the objective of the audit.

Overall, the interviewees strongly prefer the audit process to the request for additional information (RAI) process. The audit process is more timely, effective, more of a technical

exchange than a regulatory milestone, and appears to help NRC write the final safety evaluation more efficiently. The technical exchange is valuable because it allows NRC reviewers to address questions in a less formal manner, which accelerates the process. However, it can be hard to keep track of the status of an audit. Unlike the RAI process, the audit questions from the NRC do not have a required time limit for applicant responses. Thus, the applicant must also play an important role in keeping the process on track and timely.

NIA urges the NRC to update clear audit guidance to benefit both the staff and applicants. NIA recommends using regularly scheduled calls between NRC and the applicant to go through the status of the audit and close out or review open items. In addition, the NRC could develop a tool like the eRAI (electronic request for additional information). eRAI is an NRC electronic tool that is used to help track the status of RAIs including initiation, monitoring, and tracking of these RAIs and their response. Creating an audit version of this would act as a database that tracks progress of items throughout the audit process. NIA also recommends that applicants respond to NRC audit questions openly and in a timely manner to help facilitate useful discussions and conclusions with the NRC.

Project Management

In 2023 NIA recommended that NRC prioritize improving project management performance by ensuring that NRC PMs have the skills, tools, resources, training, and experience to successfully manage licensing reviews. Interviewees noted that they have seen PMs move around based on shifting priorities (e.g., an experienced PM was moved to another project so now they have a less experienced PM). Accordingly, the new PM has to learn the technology and project progress while managing it at the same time. This can cause delays, especially if the less experienced PM does not effectively manage the scope of the technical reviewers' work. Additionally, interviewees found that some PMs lacked sufficient regulatory background to understand the regulatory basis for certain NRC actions, making it difficult to resolve issues that arose from different interpretations of regulatory requirements.

NIA recommends that NRC improve PM training, documentation of best practices, mentoring and peer learning to improve licensing efficiency. NRC should continue to pay for PMs to be Project Management Professional (PMP) certified or offer an NRC version of the PMP training in addition to receiving training on regulations and nuclear technology. This requirement of PMP-type training would help ensure that all PMs receive the same baseline instruction. The applicants should also provide technology training to the NRC on their designs for both technical staff and PMs, if possible. The training should be recorded, and, as applicable, protected as proprietary information, such that it can be shared with new NRC staff that join a project without increasing the educational burden on applicants. NIA encourages applicants and PMs to meet regularly to ensure timelines and deliverables are on track and well understood.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

In 2023 NIA recommended that NRC work to clarify the role of OGC. From our interviews, lack of clarity on OGC's role remains an issue. Interviewees said that when OGC objected to an action, it was not always clear why. Additionally, many found it hard to get in contact with OGC or even to find out how to contact them. However, some interviewees said that OGC was starting their reviews earlier in the process than had been the case historically, leading to fewer delays.

NIA recommends that NRC continue to clearly define the role of OGC and specifically how and when to contact OGC. NRC should identify issues that require OGC input, such as policy decisions and regulatory interpretations, and establish timelines for reaching and communicating those decisions. It would be helpful for NRC staff to be better educated on when to pull in OGC on an issue. Additionally, guidance is needed for how applicants can request formal written legal interpretations, which would still be sent to NRC staff, who would coordinate with OGC before responding. Furthermore, OGC should continue to start their review early and in parallel with technical staff, where possible, to help ensure a timely schedule. Once OGC has made a decision, it should be clearly explained to the applicant.

Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards (ACRS)

In 2023, NIA recommended that the Commission clarify their expectations of ACRS, ACRS's interactions with NRC staff and applicants, and the scope of ACRS reviews and recommendations. NIA recommended that the Commission should take a more active oversight role of ACRS activities to ensure that the Committee is effectively and efficiently performing its statutory mission and providing valuable recommendations to the Commission on reactor licensing activities. Interviewees noted that ACRS has improved by reviewing fewer topical reports and white papers. Many said that, like OGC, ACRS should be involved early on to make the best use of everyone's time. ACRS's actual schedule is unclear to interviewees because the current 18-month license application review schedule does not include ACRS.

NIA recommends the Commission continue to define ACRS's role and provide clear direction implementing ACRS's statutory mission as defined or amended by Congress. Additionally, the Commission should create a more transparent license application review schedule that incorporates the ACRS timeline.

Other identified issues

Throughout the interviews, participants raised the following issues that are important to add to the findings of this report.

Many of the interviewees were worried about the staffing levels at the NRC. OGC staffing has decreased more than 50% since 2023. There seems to be fewer technical staff available, which could lengthen review times with the increasing number of applications expected. In

addition, many of the applications are based on new technologies, requiring applicants to educate NRC on the technology. If technical staff depart from the NRC, then the applicant must familiarize a new staff member, which can slow down discussions and progress. Some mentioned that the NRC should consider a retention bonus or flexibility in salary to help retain NRC staff. At the NRC Regulatory Information Conference in March 2026, NRC noted that they have been able to use ADVANCE Act authorities to provide bonuses to some staff.

NIA encourages NRC to continue and expand this practice. This was also a recommendation in NIA’s [Improving NRC Organizational Culture](#). Several other recommendations on retention from that report are worth highlighting here: expanding technical leadership pathways; adopting the Office of Personnel Management “special rates”; improving the performance appraisal process; strengthening opportunities for mentorship, student loan repayment and industry site visits; and continuing to celebrate and reward exceptional staff achievements.

The NRC has become better about clarifying responsibilities and reducing “bring me a rock” interactions. For years, applicants complained that the NRC did not provide sufficiently clear expectations of what information applicants needed to provide. Interviewees noted significant improvement on this front. Interviewees emphasized the importance of maintaining the momentum of positive change, with the agency increasingly focused on shared success with industry on licensing. The strongest NRC critics are the ones with the least experience actually engaging with NRC. It is the applicant’s responsibility to make their safety case to NRC. If the regulatory and safety experts at NRC deem an issue to be safety related, the applicant needs to be responsive, and NRC needs to be willing to listen.

Some interviewees expressed concerns that the massive rule rewrite directed by EO 14300 will cause delays because it may change settled licensing pathways. Specifically, some interviewees worry they will need to submit exemption requests once the rules become final, in order to comply with the new regulations. The current Presidential Administration has reduced the transparency of NRC rulemaking, so some stakeholders are anxious there will be insufficient time for them to provide input. **NIA recommends some sort of safe harbor for applicants making progress under existing rules, so they could be grandfathered in if those rules that were relied upon in an application are revised.**

Below is the table of prior recommendations, status as of 2026, and NIA’s new recommendations.

Previous Recommendations	Status as of 2026	New Recommendations
Challenge 1: NRC staff discomfort or unwillingness to make preliminary technical or policy decisions during the preapplication process Applicants should prepare applications	The NRC helpfully clarified the definition of consulting in the July 2025 procedure, <i>Driving Regulatory Decisions Through More Effective Communications</i> . This remains a challenge, but progress has been made.	NIA continues to recommend that applicants provide the necessary information to support licensing determinations by NRC. NIA recommends greater use of topical

Previous Recommendations	Status as of 2026	New Recommendations
that enable efficient NRC staff review NRC should provide clear feedback to applicants and ensure internal agency alignment. The NRC should develop regulatory guidance for NRC staff on providing preliminary decisions on policy and technical questions during the pre-application and application review process.	Many noted that to achieve some amount of certainty, a white paper or topical report is the best course of action.	reports, white papers, and readiness assessments to help facilitate technical and policy discussions during preapplication.
Challenge 2: Lack of alignment between NRC staff and management on technical or policy questions - Applicants should develop lines of communication with NRC staff and management - NRC should develop internal lines of communication to ensure consistency and predictability	Interviewees found that this was still an issue partly because interpretation of regulations can vary depending on the reviewer. However, interviewees noted that management now tended to be more cognizant of timing and budget.	NIA recommends establishing a clearer schedule that both parties agree to. For example, when a topical report is submitted, the staff and applicant should agree on specific dates for the staff to provide questions, to meet with the applicant, and to produce a draft evaluation.
Challenge 3: Lack of formal processes to appeal or request formal review of NRC technical or policy questions - Applicants should appropriately escalate licensing concerns - NRC should have regular updates with	Interviewees had mixed views on whether this was still a challenge. Some felt that it was often difficult to understand the hierarchy of the NRC and whom to address with concerns.	NIA recommends an organization chart for each project and direction for how to escalate issues. As NRC is in the process of reorganizing itself, NIA encourages applicants to continue to learn and understand the organizational structure and

Previous Recommendations	Status as of 2026	New Recommendations
applicants on regulatory issues.		the appropriate points of engagement.
Challenge 4: Protracted or delayed identification, discussion, and resolution of technical and policy questions - Applicants should meet licensing deadlines and milestones. - NRC should increase accountability for NRC staff technical reviews	Some interviewees felt that this was still an issue because occasionally information was not shared until the end of pre-application, which created surprises. Others noted that delays may be attributed to management turnover and lack of information sharing.	Both the applicant and the NRC need to be held accountable for their timelines. NIA encourages the applicant to set realistic timelines and communicate as issues arise. NIA recommends establishing a clearer response schedule that both parties agree to and creating better transition processes to ensure information is shared properly during staff and management turnover.
Use of Regulatory Engagement Plans (REPs) <i>Applicants should prioritize the development of detailed REPs that provide insights on licensing strategy, submissions, and plans for reducing both technical and policy licensing risk throughout the preapplication and application review process. Applicants should work with the NRC to ensure that the REP has achievable, measurable milestones and that both applicants and the NRC will be held accountable to milestones if there are deviations from the schedule. Regular communication between the applicant and NRC about the REP should be prioritized by all stakeholders and the REP or other alignment documents should be</i>	Interviewees have found that the REPs are valuable for helping NRC and applicants plan resource allocation, although their value depends on the applicant updating them as needed. Interviewees also pointed to NEI 18-06 REP guidance as helpful, but they would like to see NRC provide clearer criteria and share lessons learned.	NIA recommends continued use of REPs that are updated as often as needed to help NRC and the applicant ensure resources are properly allocated. NRC should create guidance on REP lessons learned and best practices. Finally, NRC should consider having a dashboard on their website with the current REPs to help NRC, industry, and the public track licensing progress.

Previous Recommendations	Status as of 2026	New Recommendations
<i>updated by applicants in consultation with the NRC (i.e., treated as a living document) if plans or resource availability require changes to the licensing strategy</i>		
<i>Use of the Audit process Applicants and NRC should explore the use of audits to support licensing reviews for specific, complex technical issues. Applicants and NRC should document best practices for audits and update NRC guidance on the preparation of regulatory audit plans, audit management, and documentation of audit findings. Lessons learned from using licensing audits should be incorporated into guidance documents</i>	While interviewees noted substantial success with recent audits, it appears there is still little clear guidance or sharing of best practices. Interviewees found audits to be very helpful but caution that they need to have a clear end point. They can become expensive and drawn out if the endpoint is not well defined. Interviewees noted that it is the PM's responsibility to focus the staff on meeting the objective of the audit. The interviewees strongly prefer the audit process to the request for additional information (RAI) process but note that it is harder to keep track of the status.	NIA continues to urge the NRC to create a guidance document for implementing the audit process. NIA also recommends using regularly scheduled calls between NRC and applicant to go through the status of the audit (closed/open items). In addition, the NRC could develop a tool like the eRAI application. This would act as an audit database that tracks progress by item.
<i>Importance of NRC PMs NRC should ensure licensing reviews are managed by consistently high-quality NRC project managers and that NRC project managers have the skills, tools, resources, training, and experience to successfully manage licensing reviews. NRC should prioritize the training and organizational management of NRC project managers as essential technical and professional</i>	Interviewees noted that they have seen PMs move around based on shifting priorities (e.g., an experienced PM was moved to another project so now they have a less experienced PM). The new PM has to learn the technology and project progress while managing it at the same time. Additionally, interviewees found that some PMs lacked sufficient regulatory background to understand	NIA continues to see areas of improvement for PMs and recommends NRC continue to pay for PMs to be PMP-trained or offer an NRC version of PMP training in addition to receiving training on regulations and nuclear technology. The applicants should provide technology training meetings to the NRC on their designs, when possible. These meetings should be recorded and

Previous Recommendations	Status as of 2026	New Recommendations
<i>positions on licensing reviews similar to subject matter experts on technical topics. NRC should assess the current training and support programs for project managers and provide additional tools, resources, peer learning, and training to increase the overall quality and consistency of NRC project managers.</i>	the regulatory basis for certain NRC actions, making it difficult to resolve issues that arose from different interpretations of regulatory requirements. Many PMs would also benefit from project management training, documentation of best practices, and peer learning.	include both technical staff and PMs. NIA encourages applicants and PMs to meet regularly to ensure timelines and deliverables are on track and well understood.
<i>Office of General Counsel The Commission should clarify the role of Office of General Counsel (OGC) in licensing reviews so that applicants and staff understand the roles, responsibilities, scope, and best practices for engagement.</i>	There is still lack of clarity on OGC's role. Interviewees found it unclear why OGC objected to some actions and not others. Additionally, many found it hard to get in contact with OGC or were unaware of how to contact them. However, some interviewees said that OGC was starting their reviews earlier in the process than had been the case historically, leading to fewer delays.	NIA recommends that NRC continue to clearly define the role of OGC and how and when to contact OGC. Established timelines and guidance would be beneficial for both NRC and applicants. OGC should continue to start their review early and in parallel with technical staff where possible, to help ensure a timely schedule. Once OGC has made a decision, it should be clearly explained to the applicant.
<i>Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards The Commission should clarify the role of ACRS to applicants and staff so they can maximize Committee effectiveness in licensing</i>	Interviewees noted that ACRS has improved by reviewing fewer topical reports and white papers. ACRS should be involved early on to make the best use of everyone's time. There is some confusion about the ACRS schedule for reviews.	NIA recommends the Commission continue to define ACRS's role and provide clear direction while implementing ACRS's statutory mission as defined or amended by Congress. Additionally, the Commission should create a more transparent license application review schedule that incorporates both ACRS.

Conclusion

Both the NRC and applicants have made progress toward more efficient licensing, but further progress is still needed. This report and prior NIA licensing efficiency reports highlight the importance of effective communication and collaborative problem solving between both NRC and the industry, as well as excellent project management. Both applicants and the NRC play important roles in continuing to create a more effective and efficient process.

This report evaluates earlier and current challenges, highlights progress, reaffirms previous recommendations, and sets forth a variety of new recommendations for both applicants and the NRC. Applicants must continue to focus on submitting high-quality documents. The NRC must continue to clarify roles of staff, management, ACRS, and OGC while establishing clear communication channels throughout the agency. Both audits and REPs have proven to be useful tools in the licensing process but need further refinement to maximize useability. Project management also remains an area in need of further improvement. NIA is pleased with the current progress and looks forward to an even smoother licensing process once these recommendations are implemented.

NIA and interviewees shared concerns about the level of staffing at the NRC and how it will contribute to licensing. The surge of applications in combination with the staff exodus over the past year are areas to watch. NRC is working on improving its staff retention and recruitment as recommended in NIA's [*Improving NRC Organizational Culture*](#). NIA will continue to monitor the NRC staffing situation and provide constructive input.