



What We Did

MITRE convened senior Department of War (DOW) leaders, operators, industry executives, congressional representatives, and the FFRDC community at MITRE's McLean, Va., campus at the end of April to address a central challenge: Implementing the strategic direction and new authorities provided by the Administration's recent executive orders, policy memos, and the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act. In other words, how do we move the acquisition system from a peacetime orientation to a wartime posture capable of delivering combat capability at speed and scale?

Beyond Barriers underscored the urgent acquisition transformation necessary to accelerate capability delivery to the warfighter. The summit demonstrated how industrial base partners, in alignment with DOW, can drive faster capability delivery, foster smarter risk-taking, and increase supply chain resilience to outpace adversary threats.

Throughout the summit, leaders stressed the importance of translating strategic direction into measurable implementation. Discussions focused on practical, forward-looking execution – operationalizing the guidance and warfighting acquisition authorities granted in recent EAs and the NDAA.

The 2026 State of Warfighting Acquisition Survey reinforced the optimism. Warfighting acquisition practitioners expressed growing confidence in the speed and delivery of capability. Nearly 79 percent of respondents rated DOW’s ability to rapidly field capabilities as moderately or extremely effective. Yet persistent barriers remain: Respondents cited inflexibility and complexity as the primary challenges facing contractors, and achieving lasting warfighting acquisition improvement will require disciplined and consistent reform implementation.

Over the past year, the Administration has moved to accelerate the warfighting acquisition process, which the nation can no longer afford to have operate at a peacetime pace. At Beyond Barriers, a central theme quickly emerged: Practitioners throughout the warfighting acquisition system must prioritize outcomes over process, deliver integrated capabilities faster, and align authority with accountability. Multiple speakers argued that the current acquisition culture still rewards risk avoidance and procedural compliance at the expense of operational effectiveness. Participants indicated they are already seeing progress toward these goals, but execution—not additional policy development—will ultimately determine success.

[See the full list of speakers and view the recorded sessions here](#)

Beyond Barriers Day 1 framed the urgency through senior leader remarks and panels. The nation cannot afford acquisition timelines that lag adversary capability development, and participants agreed that the acquisition reform conversation has shifted from identifying barriers to executing change. Beyond Barriers focused on practical actions to accelerate capability delivery, rebuild industrial capacity, strengthen sustainment and supply chains, empower the acquisition workforce, enhance our ally/partner warfighting industrial base, and increase smart risk-taking across the acquisition enterprise.

The summit aligned directly with DOW’s November 2025 Acquisition Transformation Strategy, which focuses on five priority pillars:

1. Rebuilding the defense industrial base
2. Empowering the acquisition workforce
3. Reducing process barriers
4. Strengthening technical execution, and
5. Improving lifecycle risk management
6. Build our ally/partner defense industrial capacity

Acquisition speed is a strategic imperative and the nation can no longer spend decades developing bespoke, exquisite weapons systems while our adversaries quickly develop and field new capabilities. The acquisition community needs a culture change: an “80 percent solution” put in the hands of warfighting forces quickly has much greater value than a perfect solution that arrives too late to influence combat outcomes.

What We Learned

Several speakers warned that avoiding risk in acquisition programs perversely creates greater operational risk because adversaries continue fielding capability faster and in larger quantities.

Industry leaders and acquisition officials also emphasized the need for stronger, more consistent demand signals from government. Private-sector companies can better meet the Department's needs when DOW offers predictable procurement pathways, commercial-first contracting approaches, stable production expectations, and access to long-term investment capital before contractors expand manufacturing capacity. Congress can support these efforts by approving multi-year procurements, budget flexibility, and portfolio prioritization authorities that allow DOW to retire lower-priority programs and focus resources on operationally relevant capabilities.

The preferred operating model is integration over independence

The summit reinforced the evolving role of MITRE and the broader FFRDC community. Government leaders emphasized the need for technical partners who remain objective while operating close enough to the mission to understand operational tradeoffs, acquisition constraints, industrial realities, and the consequences of delay. Leaders emphasized mission-focused analysis that offers integration and objectivity, and combines knowledge derived from operator needs, acquisition authorities, systems engineering, commercial technology, industrial capacity, and sustainment realities into a unified picture to inform and preserve decision space for senior decision makers.

Acquisition is a Warfighting Function

Acquisition and operations are no longer separate domains, as acquirers and operators now collaborate more closely than ever. Rapid delivery of effective capabilities is central to the nation's deterrence, readiness, and success in strategic competition with adversaries. Operators, acquirers, industry, logisticians, and FFRDCs must work as integrated team that make faster decisions and rapidly transition capability into operational use. The transformational PAE construct focuses on empowered self-contained teams of experts to accelerate decision making and reduce layers of bureaucracy that currently delay acquisition programs trying to deliver capability at the speed needed by the operational community.

Sustainment, Logistics, and Industrial Resiliency Are Foundational Warfighting Requirements

Organizations can no longer view logistics as a downstream support activity. Future conflicts, particularly any potential contingency with China, will stress the nation's logistics networks, replenishment capacity, repair infrastructure, and production endurance. Contested logistics environments require stronger lifecycle risk management, resilient supply chains, improved repair concepts, allied industrial integration, and greater interoperability across systems and partners.

Sustainment and supply chain management now sit at the center of acquisition strategy. Leaders called for a shift away from risk-averse acquisition toward proactive lifecycle management that anticipates operational stress before conflict occurs. Industrial depth, supply chain visibility, and allied production capacity will determine how effectively the nation sustains combat operations during prolonged crises.

Workforce Culture and Culture Shifts Are Decisive Factors

Acquisition reform will not succeed unless the culture supports it. Warfighter acquisition transformation requires leaders to empower program managers and portfolio leaders to make faster decisions with clear accountability and authority. Several speakers noted that policy reform alone will not deliver results unless leaders also change incentives, decision timelines, and organizational behaviors. The warfighter is the customer.

Participants identified clear progress through DOW Acquisition Transformation Strategy initiatives, production expansion efforts, workforce empowerment programs, and supply chain investments. However, leaders warned that the department must maintain urgency and resist reverting to slower, compliance-focused processes as reforms mature. Throughout the summit, leaders stressed the importance of translating strategic direction into measurable implementation. Discussions consistently focused on practical execution rather than theoretical reform concepts.

What Comes Next

Beyond Barriers concluded with broad agreement that government, industry, Congress, and the FFRDC community increasingly align around the need for speed, scale, and smarter risk-taking. The acquisition ecosystem is making meaningful progress, but future success will depend on sustaining today's momentum and delivering measurable operational outcomes.

The nation faces a strategic requirement to accelerate acquisition reform, rebuild industrial capacity, strengthen sustainment and logistics resilience, and empower leaders to prioritize operational outcomes over procedural compliance. Beyond Barriers demonstrated that government, industry, Congress, and the FFRDC community increasingly align around the need for greater speed, scale, and smarter risk management.

For example, the Navy was able to return F/A-18 fighters to service from corrosion repairs four months faster by accepting a small amount of risk – a tradeoff that yielded greater operational capability, sooner. The next measure of success will be how effectively the speed-scale-risk alignment translates into broadly fielded combat capability at scale, and ahead of adversaries.

Beyond Barriers Day 2 transitioned into workshops aligned to the Department's strategy and shifted toward developing solutions. Six workshops, all aligned to the Acquisition Transformation Strategy and designed to produce tangible outcomes, focused on:

1. Integrating mission engineering and acquisition
2. Enabling portfolio-level decision-making
3. Accelerating private capital investment
4. Connecting capabilities to kill chains with a modular open systems approach (MOSA) and interoperability
5. Fixing supply chain weaknesses, and
6. Linking global supply chains with allies and partners

The workshops included participation from government, industry, FFRDCs/academia as well as Congressional staff representation and identified near-term, actionable steps to move from authorities to implementation. Across the tracks, a common pattern emerged: reform succeeds when leaders treat portfolio choices, mission engineering, technical standards, supply-chain visibility, and private-capital incentives as one operational problem.

The mission-engineering and program executive officer-to-program acquisition executive (PEO-to-PAE) discussions focused on giving leaders the data and authority to make tradeoffs across portfolios, not just within individual programs.

The private-capital, MOSA/interoperability, supply-chain, and allied/global supply-chain workshops demonstrated that industry integration depends on demand signals, modular architectures, and a clearer path from innovative supply to operational use.

The workshops identified many specific areas for action and we prepared detailed reports, many of which were shared directly with government partners.

MITRE's Beyond Barriers team continues working with its partners in government, industry, academia, and other FFRDCs to refine the workshop findings and craft actionable plans to institutionalize the needed changes. A brief summary of several action areas follows.

Stay tuned for further updates on this important effort, and we look forward to seeing you again at Beyond Barriers in 2027!

	Workshop	Needs and Actions
1.	Integrating Mission Engineering and Acquisition	• Simplify Mission Engineering (ME) outputs to improve usability across the acquisition workforce. • Establish an industry feedback mechanism to support integrated Mission Engineering and acquisition activities. • Normalize and structure ME data to support Capability Trade Council discussions and inform requirements decisions.
2.	From PEO to PAE	• Establish a governance and decision framework that links MEIA-identified mission gaps to acquisition decisions. • Develop an execution framework that converts approved portfolio decisions, pilot efforts, and integration opportunities into coordinated acquisition actions. • Implement targeted PPBE flexibilities to support timely portfolio decisions.
3.	Accelerating Private Capital	• Develop a “Private Capital 101” playbook to help DOW personnel understand how private capital can accelerate capability delivery. • Create a standardized demand signal template that translates DOW requirements into concise, investor-ready briefs. • Develop structured success measures including dollars invested, capability tags, and quantified warfighter impact.
4.	Connecting Capabilities to Programs	• Establish cross-domain interoperability labs, data repositories, and module libraries accessible to solution providers. • Expand use of digital twins as flexible specifications to accelerate system integration and testing. • Develop a common DOW marketplace that allows solutions to connect with operational problems and acquisition programs.
5.	Fixing the Broken Supply Chain	• Map critical DOW supply chains to identify operational vulnerabilities and dependencies. • Establish transparent supplier health metrics that support enterprise-wide visibility and decision-making. • Shift from reactive sustainment to proactive resilience through predictive early warning capabilities and AI-enabled digital twin technologies.
6.	Aggregating Demand and Linking Global Supply Chains	• Align international demand planning efforts by harmonizing IAMD and Counter-UAS projections and establishing Modular Open Systems Approach standards. • Reduce single-source supplier risk by qualifying additional vendors and incentivizing second-source arrangements within prime contracts. • Modernize the Foreign Military Sales IT enterprise with a big-data architecture aggregating international demand signals.

MITRE's State of Warfighting Acquisition Survey

The 2026 State of Warfighting Acquisition Survey, released shortly after the summit, reinforced the optimism seen during Beyond Barriers. More than 1,200 professionals across government, industry, and academia shared their perspectives on the state of warfighting acquisition.

They expressed growing confidence in the speed and delivery of capability: Nearly 79 percent of respondents rated DOW's ability to rapidly field capabilities as moderately or extremely effective. Some 48 percent identified faster acquisition processes as the most significant positive impact of the Department's recent reforms.

At the same time, persistent barriers remain. Respondents identified inflexibility and complexity as the primary challenges facing contractors, and achieving lasting results will require disciplined and consistent implementation across the acquisition enterprise. Weapons and capability suppliers still face overly complex contracting processes, continued reliance on cost-type contracts, and supply chain reliability concerns. Still, respondents felt continued reform efforts will address these issues.

This annual survey, along with the year-over-year insights it provides, gives DOW leaders clarity to empower the warfighting acquisition workforce, effectively allocate resources, and strengthen accountability and transparency to deliver warfighter capability faster and more effectively.

The survey was conducted by Atomik Research on behalf of MITRE and captures insights from 1,235 stakeholders across the U.S. industrial base, including government, private sector, and academic participants. Conducted from March 13 to March 31, the survey reflects a broad cross section of perspectives, with a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Read more about the State of Warfighting Acquisition Survey and the full results [here](#).