

# PLOUGHSHARES FUND

June 2022

## Evolving the Field Potential Directions for the Nuclear Policy Community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Overview

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In December 2021, Ploughshares Fund conducted a survey of the international nuclear policy community to draw a portrait of the sector and determine areas of opportunity and excitement over the next several years. The survey was distributed widely in the community, with 158 responses received. The survey findings paint a picture of a global community of activists, academics, advocates, philanthropists, researchers, journalists, and others trying to make sense of where change is possible and how to adapt the nuclear field in light of the world's continual tumult (case in point, the survey was conducted prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and thus does not include reflections on that ongoing crisis). The survey paints a complex picture of hope, frustration, and a desire for a field to adapt, if not to radically reinvent itself.<sup>1</sup>

## Demographics of Survey Respondents

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This survey is not a representative sample of the full nuclear policy community. That said, the survey respondent group does showcase some demographic insights that parallel previous studies of the field and may offer some indications of evolving field contours. Highlights include:

- **AGE:** Millennials account for nearly half of respondents.
- **GENDER:** The majority of respondents identify as women (62%), with 35% identifying as men and 1% identifying as genderqueer/non-binary. No respondent identifies as transgender.
- **RACE/ETHNICITY:** Respondents predominantly identify as White/Caucasian (76%), with 11% identifying as Asian and smaller proportions (under 6% each) identifying as members of other races/ethnicities. No informants identify as Indigenous or Aboriginal.<sup>2</sup>
- **GEOGRAPHY:** 12% percent of respondents are based in Europe and 2% in Asia. The remaining 86% are based in the United States.
- **INDUSTRY:** One-third of respondents work for grassroots or advocacy organizations, one-third at think tanks, and approximately one-eighth in academia and philanthropy respectively.
- **WORKPLACE ROLES:** Nearly 50% of respondents identify as executive or senior leadership and about a third of respondents are in mid-level or project management roles. Though they represent only 22% of respondents to the survey, 42% of respondents ages 57 and older are in executive or senior leadership positions. Respondents from US-based organizations who identify as Asian; Black, Caribbean, or African origin; Hispanic, LatinX or Spanish origin; Middle Eastern or North African have significantly lower proportional representation (31%) in executive

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<sup>1</sup> This document builds on a variety of influential reports that documented segments of the nuclear community, including [Greater Than: Nuclear Threat Professionals Reimagine Their Field](#) and [Gender Champions in Nuclear Policy: Gendered Impacts of Covid-19](#).

<sup>2</sup> Included in the survey as: Native American, Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, Aboriginal Australian, or Native Hawaiian.

or senior leadership positions and higher proportional representation in mid- and support-level positions.

## Critical Challenges Facing the Field

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Two-thirds of respondents assert that the most critical field challenge is dwindling funding, with the secondary challenges (noted by 35-40% of respondents) being: (1) fragmentation and competition: organizations competing and operating in their own silos; (2) lack of a mass constituency for nuclear arms control and disarmament; and (3) stasis and risk aversion: the field is stuck in old ideas and stale strategies.

The data from specific demographic groups diverge from some of these findings. In particular:

- *Funding*: respondents from Europe- and Asia-based organizations rank declining funding lower at 57% (compared with 71% of respondents from US-based organizations).
- *Fragmentation*: only 14% of respondents from Asia and Europe identify fragmentation as a challenge (compared with 37% of respondents from US-based organizations).
- *Stasis and risk aversion*: 46% of respondents who identify as women see stasis as a primary challenge, with 100% of genderqueer/nonbinary respondents elevating it as a challenge (compared with 21% of respondents who identify as men).

## Appetite for Change

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This survey sought to identify where there is energy and groundswell for making change. When asked to consider the next five years, respondents note they are most excited by the following areas: challenging the status quo with longer-term, more systemic thinking (71%), tying nuclear disarmament to other social issues (46%), and building and sustaining diversity in the field (44%).

Specific demographic groups see these areas somewhat differently. In particular:

- *Challenging the status quo with longer-term, more systemic thinking*. There is more excitement for this topic (78%) from respondents from US-based organizations who identify as Asian; Black, Caribbean, or African origin; Hispanic, LatinX or Spanish origin; Middle Eastern or North African.
- *Building and sustaining diversity*. Respondents from organizations in Asia and Europe rank this issue higher (57%), whereas those respondents born before 1965 rank it lower (23%).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion emerge as a dominant theme throughout this survey, with 86% stating that recent DEI efforts have improved their organizations' practices. Indeed, 80% of respondents see DEI as the area with the most potential for change over the next 3-5 years. A greater percentage of respondents from Europe- and Asia-based organizations view DEI as having 'enormous' potential to make change (54% compared with 26% of the total respondent group), as do respondents born after

1981 (32%) and respondents identifying as women (36%). Respondents in US-based organizations who identify as Asian; Black, Caribbean, or African origin; Hispanic, LatinX or Spanish origin; Middle Eastern or North African see less potential around DEI (only 11% see ‘enormous’ potential for making change).

## Energy for Collaboration

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There are many exemplary collaborations currently taking place in the field. The following are the top five areas where survey respondents perceive energy to build new collaborations.

- *Intersectional collaborations.* With a disproportionate focus on the climate/nuclear nexus.
- *Build a grassroots people’s movement.* Broaden the popular base for nuclear disarmament.
- *Field-wide communication initiative.* A shared communications plan to change the public narrative.
- *Support young, emerging leaders.* Training, support, rotational fellowships.
- *Reconceptualize the policy community’s organizing and advocacy frameworks and tactics.* Including developing an advocacy strategy based on longer-term goals that will increase collaboration and expand the public and policymaker constituencies for nuclear arms control and disarmament.

## Funders and Collaboration

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Respondents offer a range of ideas for how funders could better support the field and incentivize collaboration. Besides simply sourcing more funding for the field and identifying other philanthropic institutions that fund areas tangential to the nuclear issue (e.g., climate, social justice, economics, public health, etc.), the most significant recommendation by far is for funders to fund and incentivize – rather than penalize – collaborations.

## Conclusion

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While this survey does not represent the viewpoints of the comprehensive nuclear community, it does paint a more extensive picture than has been captured in recent history. As respondents note, there are already major changes underway in the field – with many galvanizing the energy and enthusiasm of community members. The hope is that the survey will surface these points of promise, so that both the NGO and funder communities can help foster them into fruition. The work called for from this survey cannot and should not be the purview of any one organization. Each player will need to determine where they have the greatest potential for impact, if and how collaboration can amplify that impact, and how to create an operating culture in which all in the community have the opportunity to offer their skills towards shaping a safer world.