Minute to Pen it

FROM COMPLEX REQUIREMENTS TO CLEAR SOLUTIONS



SHIP REPAIR INSIGHTS

NOVEMBER 2026: WEEK 2

NAVY SHIP REPAIR INNOVATION

EDITORIAL EDITION

NAVSEA
Navy Improvement Suggestion Form:

Make a Suggestion

This week's Ship Repair Insights takes a slightly different approach. While our articles typically focus on factual information, industry developments, and analysis of issues affecting the ship repair community, this edition offers something more personal: an editorial perspective shaped by decades of firsthand experience within the naval ship repair industry.

Our intent is not simply to identify problems or suggest that our perspective is the only one worth considering. Rather, we hope to encourage meaningful discussion about the challenges facing our industry, the opportunities for improvement, and the important role every participant—from the largest shipyards to the smallest subcontractors—can play in strengthening our Navy's maintenance and repair capabilities.

WHAT DOES NAVSEA CONSIDER INNOVATION

While I strongly encourage members of the shipbuilding and ship repair community to submit recommendations through NAVSEA's Navy Improvement Suggestion Portal, our recent experience raises an important question: What exactly does NAVSEA consider innovation?

Minute to Pen It (MtPi) recently submitted recommendations addressing concerns discussed in our October Week 5 and November Week 1 editions of Ship Repair Insights. Based on our industry experience, these recommendations focused on improving existing processes, strengthening technical accountability, and reducing inefficiencies affecting maintenance schedules, costs, and work execution.

We appreciated receiving prompt responses. However, the replies included the following statement:

"While your recommendation holds merit, it is outside the scope of this initiative."

This is a professional and courteous response that acknowledges the value of our recommendations while excluding them from consideration. We recognize that every initiative must have defined objectives and reasonable boundaries. However, if those boundaries are not clearly communicated, how can industry participants determine which recommendations qualify?

NAVSEA encourages recommendations involving new methods, improved processes, and emerging technologies. Yet the distinction between technological innovation and practical process improvement does not appear clearly defined. Does innovation require new equipment, advanced technology, or engineering solutions? Or should it also include eliminating inefficient administrative processes, improving technical documentation, reducing unnecessary procedural requirements, and streamlining review and approval practices?

Some of the most meaningful improvements in ship repair may have little to do with new technology. Reducing repetitive review cycles, improving Work Item clarity, standardizing technical requirements, and accelerating technical issue resolution could deliver measurable improvements in cost, schedule, and first-time quality without significant capital investment.

Consider the resources consumed when contractors repeatedly revise technical documentation because requirements are unclear or subject to differing interpretations. Likewise, unresolved technical questions and unnecessary approval delays can directly affect maintenance schedules and costs. Addressing these longstanding challenges may not require revolutionary technology, but the benefits could be substantial. Innovation should not be measured solely by how new or technologically advanced a solution may be, but by the measurable improvements it delivers.

If NAVSEA's objectives include reducing costs, shortening maintenance schedules, improving workforce efficiency, and strengthening fleet readiness, recommendations addressing existing policies, procedures, and administrative practices should have a clearly identified pathway for consideration. This raises another important question: If a recommendation is acknowledged as having merit but falls outside the initiative's scope, what happens next?

Is it forwarded to the appropriate organization, redirected to another submission process, or simply set aside? A recommendation does not lose its potential value because it was submitted through a process not designed to evaluate it. Without clearly defined submission criteria and an alternative pathway for worthwhile recommendations, valuable ideas from those who perform, plan, estimate, supervise, and manage ship repair work may never receive meaningful consideration.

This is particularly important for smaller contractors and subcontractors, who routinely experience the consequences of inefficient processes, unclear requirements, and delayed technical decisions but may have limited opportunities to influence change. Their firsthand experience should be recognized as a valuable resource. To be clear, our concern is not that NAVSEA declined to consider our specific recommendations under this initiative. We appreciate the timely responses and acknowledgment of their merit. Rather, we question whether the initiative's scope is sufficiently defined and whether recommendations falling outside those boundaries have another meaningful avenue for evaluation.

Additional guidance identifying qualifying recommendations and alternative submission channels would help ensure valuable industry ideas reach the appropriate decision-makers. Encouraging industry participation is an important first step. Ensuring worthwhile recommendations receive meaningful consideration is what gives that participation lasting value. Improving how we perform the work can be just as valuable as developing entirely new ways to perform it. Both deserve consideration if our objective is to build, deliver, maintain, and repair our Navy's ships and submarines more efficiently and effectively.

After all, the purpose of innovation should not simply be to introduce something new.

It should be to make something better.

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