



Security, Health, Infrastructure, Energy, and Land Defense (SHIELD)

A Nebraska-Anchored Economic Development and National Security Business Plan

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About This Document

This framework outlines how existing Federal authorities, state coordination, and private-sector participation could be aligned to strengthen economic growth and national resilience. It is presented as a candidate policy framework and reflects how Kishla Askins would approach legislative priorities if elected.

Disclaimer

This document reflects the policy framework and planning approach of Kishla Askins as a candidate for the United States Congress. It is provided for public discussion and does not constitute an official government plan, funding commitment, or contractual offer. Any future legislative or executive actions would be subject to applicable law, congressional process, and oversight.



1. Executive Summary

SHIELD is a Nebraska-anchored economic development and national security platform designed to reverse talent loss, create durable high-skill jobs, and strengthen long-term U.S. resilience by aligning assets that already exist. Rather than relying on one-off incentives, fragmented projects, or new bureaucratic structures, SHIELD operates as a disciplined coordination framework that integrates security, health, infrastructure, energy, and land defense into a single economic system.

Nebraska is uniquely positioned to serve as the anchor for this platform. The state combines globally consequential national security missions, applied defense research, advanced health security infrastructure, a nationally critical agricultural economy, and central logistics capacity. SHIELD leverages this convergence through a statewide pilot with clear performance benchmarks, shared public-private risk, and a defined pathway to limited regional scale once results are demonstrated.

Economically, SHIELD builds on an estimated \$8–10 billion in existing annual economic activity already occurring in Nebraska across health security, national security, agriculture, and logistics. The framework is designed to expand that activity by billions of dollars over time while retaining and attracting high-skill talent and strengthening national resilience.

SHIELD is an execution platform grounded in existing authority, existing assets, and measurable outcomes. Successful execution of a platform of this scale requires disciplined leadership with experience integrating complex Federal missions, managing cross-sector stakeholders, and operating within statutory and budgetary constraints. SHIELD is best led by individuals with demonstrated national-level execution experience rather than political or symbolic authority.

2. Problem Statement

Nebraska's economic challenge is often described as "brain drain," but that framing obscures the underlying issue. Talent does not leave because people do not want to stay in Nebraska. Talented people leave largely because economic and career growth does not seem attainable. When high-skill jobs fail to cluster at sufficient scale, and career pathways remain fragmented across sectors and institutions people move.

Research investments, workforce training programs, infrastructure spending, and private capital are frequently deployed independently. Without alignment, these investments do not create the density of opportunity required to retain graduates, attract experienced professionals, or sustain wage growth. As a result, Nebraska loses talent to regions where systems are better integrated and opportunity builds on itself.



This structural fragmentation has measurable consequences. Analyses associated with the Greater Omaha Chamber estimate that Nebraska is short approximately 68,000 jobs, representing roughly \$11 billion in foregone wages compared with peer metropolitan regions. Brain drain is not the root problem. It is the outcome of a system that does not reinforce itself.

3. Market Opportunity

SHIELD targets sectors defined by sustained national demand rather than cyclical market trends. These sectors are mission-critical, capital-intensive, and increasingly dependent on regional clustering, secure supply chains, and specialized workforces.

Primary markets include defense and national security innovation; health security and bio-preparedness; agricultural and food system security; infrastructure and logistics; and energy reliability and resilience. Each domain receives consistent Federal investment, attracts private-sector participation, and supports long-term, high-wage employment.

As global risk increases across supply chains, health systems, energy grids, and food production, regions capable of integrating these domains gain a durable competitive advantage. SHIELD positions Nebraska within these growth markets by aligning existing participation into a coherent operating platform.

4. Competitive Advantage: Nebraska

Nebraska's advantage lies in the convergence of strategic assets within one geography. Few regions combine major national security missions, applied defense research, advanced health security capacity, globally significant agriculture, and central logistics infrastructure.

National security missions anchored at U.S. Strategic Command create stable, long-term demand for high-skill labor. Applied research through the National Strategic Research Institute connects academic expertise directly to mission needs. Health security infrastructure, including Nebraska Medicine and the Global Center for Health Security, supports Federal preparedness requirements and workforce pipelines.

Nebraska's agricultural economy produces core elements of the nation's food supply, supported by critical land and water systems that are increasingly central to national resilience. Logistics assets connect these sectors efficiently to national and global markets. When aligned, these assets form a reinforcing system capable of sustaining high-skill job clusters, attracting private capital, and supporting long-term wage growth.



5. The SHIELD Framework

SHIELD is an operating framework, not a standalone entity. It integrates five interdependent domains into a single economic system:

- **Security** anchors sustained demand for cybersecurity, defense support, and secure supply chains.
- **Health** drives biosecurity, preparedness, medical research, and workforce readiness.
- **Infrastructure** enables industrial clustering, logistics efficiency, and scale.
- **Energy** ensures reliability and resilience across all sectors.
- **Land Defense** treats agriculture, food systems, water, soil, and biosecurity as explicit national security assets rather than secondary industries.

Together, these domains ensure investments reinforce one another rather than compete for attention or resources.

6. Operating Model

SHIELD operates through a phased, execution-driven operating model designed to reduce risk, enforce accountability, and demonstrate results before expansion.

Phase One: Nebraska Statewide Pilot

Phase One is a statewide Nebraska pilot designed to test SHIELD across urban, rural, and regional contexts simultaneously. Nebraska serves as the proving ground for aligning Federal mission demand, workforce pipelines, infrastructure readiness, and private-sector participation at scale.

Core activities include project selection tied to sustained demand; statewide workforce alignment linking education and employers; infrastructure and site readiness across the state; and disciplined capital sequencing that anchors demand with public investment and validates viability with private capital.

Inclusion is treated as an economic requirement. Rural communities and historically underinvested areas, including North Omaha, are included from inception to expand the labor pool and strengthen statewide resilience.

Phase Two: Limited Regional Expansion

Only after Phase One benchmarks are met does SHIELD expand regionally. Expansion is limited, mission-driven, and earned through results.



Example: a Midwest Agricultural Biosecurity Center anchored in Nebraska with coordination through Kansas's National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility. This example is illustrative, not prescriptive, and demonstrates how SHIELD scales only where risks and supply chains are inherently multi-state.

7. Business Methodology

SHIELD applies a systems-based business methodology designed to convert existing assets into sustained economic and national security outcomes. The methodology emphasizes alignment over expansion, demand over incentives, and measurable performance over activity.

Demand-driven alignment

SHIELD begins with validated Federal or national demand rather than speculative development. Demand signals from defense, health security, infrastructure protection, food systems, and energy resilience guide project selection and sequencing. Workforce development, site readiness, and capital deployment follow demand, not the reverse.

Portfolio-based management

Projects are managed as a portfolio, not as standalone initiatives. This approach allows SHIELD to balance risk across sectors and geographies, reallocate resources based on performance, and terminate or recalibrate underperforming efforts early. No single project is treated as indispensable.

Workforce-integrated execution

Workforce development is embedded at project inception. Each initiative includes defined workforce inputs and outputs, including required skills, credential pathways, placement targets, and wage benchmarks. This integration ensures that training investments translate directly into employment and career progression, strengthening talent retention statewide.

Shared-risk capital structure

SHIELD uses a shared-risk capital approach. Federal funding anchors demand, state and local investment demonstrate readiness, and private capital validates market viability. Continued participation is contingent on performance, preserving market discipline and limiting public exposure.



Phased scaling and replication

Scaling occurs only after performance benchmarks are met. Expansion prioritizes replication of proven operating models rather than rapid growth. This disciplined approach ensures economic gains compound and governance and coordination mechanisms remain effective.

Continuous performance management

SHIELD incorporates continuous evaluation rather than episodic review. Performance data informs capital allocation, workforce adjustments, infrastructure sequencing, and decisions to expand, pause, or terminate initiatives. Independent audits and annual evaluations serve as active management tools, not compliance exercises.

Technology Enablement

Technology functions as an execution enabler across SHIELD, reducing coordination friction, improving performance management, and strengthening resilience.

Key elements include:

- **Portfolio and KPI dashboard:** a shared performance system tracking milestones, spend, workforce outcomes, and KPIs to enable quarterly continue, accelerate, pause, or stop decisions
- **Workforce skills and placement platform:** a common skills taxonomy linking training providers to employers, improving matching, reducing time-to-placement, and enabling retention tracking
- **Secure data and cyber standards:** baseline requirements for participating partners and vendors, including zero-trust principles, vendor security clauses, and incident response expectations
- **Infrastructure and supply-chain visibility:** integrated data for logistics planning and supply-chain risk monitoring of critical inputs, with scenario planning to improve continuity
- **Digital modeling and scenario planning:** where appropriate, modeling tools to stress-test infrastructure loads, surge scenarios, and supply-chain disruptions before committing capital

Technology adoption is phased. Phase One deploys practical dashboards and workforce matching. Advanced capabilities are added as governance and data standards mature.

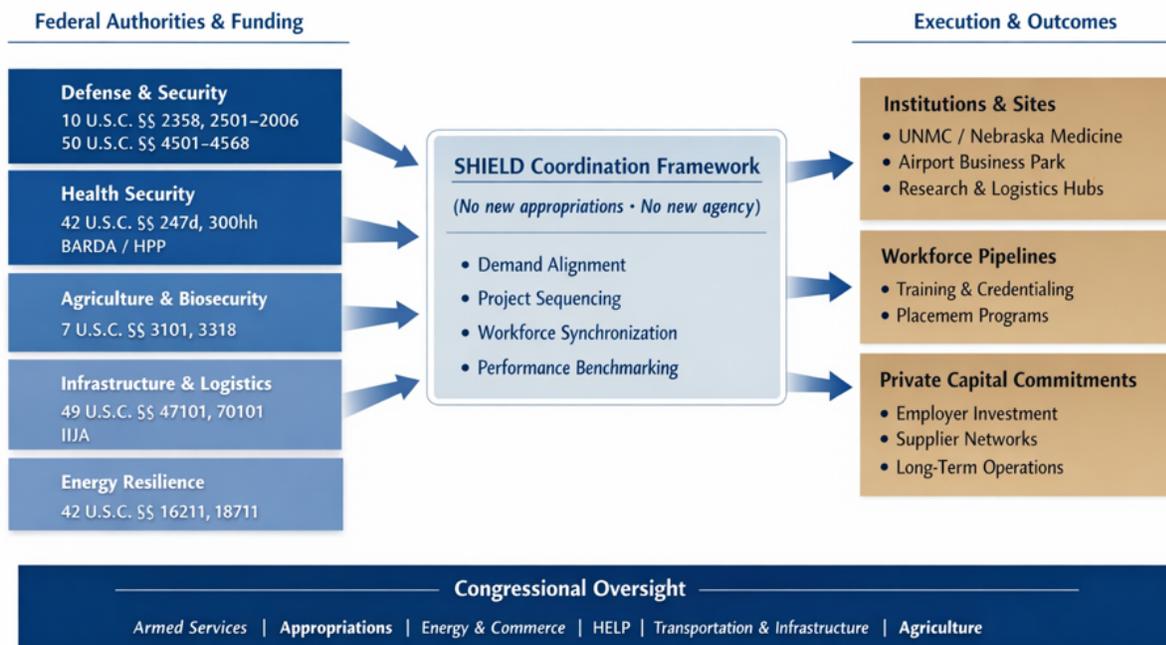
8. Proof of Concept

SHIELD formalizes patterns already demonstrated in Nebraska. Project NExT, led by UNMC and Nebraska Medicine, is a nearly \$3.1 billion public-private partnership involving DoD, HHS, VA, DHS, and the State. UNMC and Nebraska Medicine currently generate \$7.1 billion in statewide economic activity and support more than 96,000 jobs.

Infrastructure-driven development near Eppley Airfield provides a second proof point, including the \$89.2 million North Omaha Airport Business Park, \$35 million Levi Carter Park Community Center, and Eppley Airfield’s \$950 million modernization. Together, these investments align logistics, workforce access, and supply-chain resilience.

9. Funding and Revenue Model

How SHIELD Aligns Existing Federal Authorities and Appropriations



SHIELD does not establish new entitlements, standing appropriations, or permanent funding mechanisms. It aligns existing Federal funding streams already authorized in U.S. Code, coordinating eligibility, sequencing, and execution across agencies and programs.



Key statutory authorities supporting SHIELD-aligned funding include:

- **10 U.S.C. § 2358** and **10 U.S.C. §§ 2501–2506** for defense research and industrial base resilience
- **50 U.S.C. §§ 4501–4568** for supply-chain security and industrial base expansion under the Defense Production Act
- **42 U.S.C. § 247d**, **42 U.S.C. §§ 300hh–300hh-34**, and **42 U.S.C. § 247d-3a** for health security and preparedness
- **7 U.S.C. § 3101**, **7 U.S.C. § 3318**, and **7 U.S.C. §§ 6921–6925** for agricultural research and biosecurity
- **49 U.S.C. § 47101 et seq.**, **49 U.S.C. § 70101 et seq.**, and **49 U.S.C. § 5301 et seq.** and multi-year IJA programs for infrastructure and logistics
- **42 U.S.C. § 16211** and **42 U.S.C. §§ 18711–18725** for energy resilience

State and local participation is required. Private capital participation validates market viability. SHIELD does not pool, redirect, or reprogram funds and remains subject to existing congressional appropriations and oversight.

10. Governance and Legal Authority

SHIELD operates entirely within existing statutory authority and is designed to coordinate execution across agencies and sectors without creating a new Federal entity, regulatory body, or permanent bureaucracy. Governance is lean, time-limited, and built around measurable performance.

Legal foundation

SHIELD activities are aligned to authorities that already exist in U.S. Code, including:

Defense innovation and industrial base

- **10 U.S.C. § 2358** (DoD research and development projects)
- **10 U.S.C. §§ 2501–2506** (national technology and industrial base, industrial base policy and assessments)
- **50 U.S.C. §§ 4501–4568** (Defense Production Act, including industrial base expansion and supply chain resilience)

Health security and preparedness

- **42 U.S.C. § 247d** (public health emergency authorities)
- **42 U.S.C. §§ 300hh–300hh-34** (Hospital Preparedness Program framework)
- **42 U.S.C. § 247d-3a** (BARDA authorities)



- **38 U.S.C. § 8111** (VA emergency preparedness and response)

Agriculture and biosecurity

- **7 U.S.C. § 3101** (agricultural research, extension, education)
- **7 U.S.C. § 3318** and **7 U.S.C. §§ 6921–6925** (USDA research and biosecurity innovation mission)

Infrastructure and logistics

- **49 U.S.C. § 47101 et seq.** (airport improvement)
- **49 U.S.C. § 70101 et seq.** (aviation security)
- **49 U.S.C. § 5301 et seq.** (public transportation and workforce access)
- Multi-year infrastructure programs authorized through IIJA and related appropriations

Energy resilience

- **42 U.S.C. § 16211** and **42 U.S.C. §§ 18711–18725** (grid reliability, energy security, energy research)

These citations support a central SHIELD claim: coordination and execution can be improved using existing legal and funding authorities.

Governance structure

Federal anchor

A designated Federal anchor entity provides convening, compliance assurance, and reporting coordination. The anchor does not create new grant authority and does not reprogram funds. Its role is to align timing, eligibility, and execution across existing programs and participating agencies. At the Federal level, sustained success depends on leadership capable of bridging authorizing, appropriations, and oversight functions while maintaining trust across defense, health, infrastructure, and agricultural stakeholders. This role requires operational fluency across Federal agencies, familiarity with interagency execution, and the ability to translate mission requirements into durable economic outcomes.

State coordination

Nebraska designates a statewide SHIELD coordinating entity responsible for:

- Pipeline alignment across universities, community colleges, workforce boards, and employers
- Site readiness and infrastructure sequencing with state and local partners



- Inclusion execution across rural communities and historically underinvested areas
- KPI reporting, audit support, and preparation for performance reviews

Execution councils

To avoid one-size governance, SHIELD uses three execution councils aligned to SHIELD domains. Each council is operational, time-bounded, and performance-driven.

- Security and industrial resilience council
- Health security and workforce council
- Land defense, infrastructure, and energy resilience council

Each council maintains a prioritized pipeline of projects, tracks delivery milestones, and escalates blockers for resolution.

Advisory council

A non-statutory advisory council includes industry, labor, academia, and community stakeholders. Its function is transparency, alignment, and implementation feedback. It holds no funding or regulatory authority.

Decision rights and operating cadence

- **Project gates** use standardized criteria and readiness thresholds for inclusion in the portfolio
- **Quarterly performance reviews** drive portfolio decisions to continue, accelerate, pause, or stop initiatives
- **Annual evaluation** determines whether Phase Two expansion is warranted based on KPI attainment and fiscal discipline

Guardrails and accountability

- Time-limited pilot authorization and explicit scope
- Annual independent audit, financial and performance
- Audit issue closure targets tied to governance KPIs
- Sunset provisions unless benchmarks are met
- Authority to terminate or scale back underperforming initiatives

Congressional oversight

All aligned funding remains under existing congressional appropriations, authorization, and oversight channels, including Armed Services and Appropriations, Energy and Commerce and HELP, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Agriculture.



11. Economic Impact

SHIELD's economic impact is projected across three time horizons that reflect the natural progression of job creation, capital deployment, and multiplier effects associated with large, mission-anchored public-private initiatives. Estimates are intentionally conservative and grounded in observed outcomes from comparable defense, health security, logistics, and advanced manufacturing investments.

Nebraska Statewide Pilot (Years 1–3)

During the initial pilot period, economic activity is driven by early project activation, workforce onboarding, supplier engagement, and initial operating capacity coming online across the state. Impacts reflect limited geographic scope, phased project start-ups, and conservative assumptions about private-sector response.

Estimated impact:

- 2,000–4,000 direct jobs
- 3,600–9,200 total jobs supported
- \$1.2–\$2.5 billion in cumulative economic activity

This phase establishes the baseline economic footprint from which subsequent growth compounds.

Nebraska Scale (Years 4–7)

As SHIELD-aligned activities mature statewide, economic impacts expand through firm growth, supplier clustering, workforce retention, and wage progression. Capital investments transition from initial deployment to operational expansion, and multiplier effects increase as spending circulates more fully through the state economy.

Estimated impact:

- 6,000–10,000 direct jobs statewide
- 12,000–20,000 total jobs supported
- \$4–\$7 billion in cumulative economic activity

This period captures the point at which SHIELD contributes materially to statewide employment levels, wage growth, and sustained economic output.

Projected Regional Scale (Years 7–10)



Projected regional economic impact reflects replication of proven SHIELD-aligned activity across select multi-state domains where coordination is operationally required. Estimates assume disciplined scope, application of established standards, and continued Nebraska leadership roles rather than broad geographic expansion.

Estimated impact:

- 20,000–40,000 direct jobs regionally
- 40,000–75,000 total jobs supported
- \$15–\$30 billion in cumulative regional economic impact

These projections are contingent on demonstrated performance, partner readiness, and sustained demand.

Across all time horizons, projected economic impact reflects compounding effects from workforce participation, supplier networks, infrastructure utilization, and private-sector investment rather than one-time construction activity or incentive-driven growth. SHIELD’s economic contribution increases as systems mature, and scale based on performance.

12. Risk Analysis and Mitigation

Risk	How it shows up	Impact	Mitigation built into SHIELD	Owner
Fragmentation and duplication	Competing initiatives, conflicting priorities	Lost ROI, delays	Portfolio governance, single intake pipeline, quarterly reviews	State coordination entity
Demand risk	Projects lack sustained demand	Stranded assets	Demand-first selection, private validation, mission alignment	Federal anchor + councils
Workforce mismatch	Training not matched to jobs	Low placement, churn	Skills mapping, employer-backed curricula, placement KPIs	Workforce council
Site readiness delays	Permitting, utilities, zoning delays	Schedule slip	Readiness gates, pre-certified sites, sequencing plan	Infrastructure lead



Risk	How it shows up	Impact	Mitigation built into SHIELD	Owner
Cost inflation and overruns	Construction/procurement variance	Budget blowback	Stage-gated funding, independent cost review	Project sponsor
Political turnover	Priorities change	Program stall	Statutory grounding, time-limited pilot, clear KPIs	Federal anchor
Private participation weak	Firms hesitate to invest	Lower jobs/ROI	Co-investment requirements, pipeline transparency	Industry council
Compliance constraints	Contracting and rules friction	Delays, audit exposure	Compliance checks at gates, standardized pathways	Legal and compliance
Cyber/data exposure	Shared systems create risk	Mission risk	Baseline cyber standards, vendor requirements	Security council
Inclusion failure	Benefits concentrate	Talent/political risk	Inclusion gates, access measures, participation tracking	State coordination entity
Overexpansion	Scale exceeds capacity	Credibility loss	Expansion only after KPI thresholds, replication model	Governance body

Risk is further mitigated by leadership with institutional knowledge of Federal budget cycles, statutory authorities, and interagency coordination, reducing disruption during political transitions.

13. Performance Metrics (KPIs)

- **Economic:** direct jobs created; median wage; private capital leverage
- **Workforce:** placement rate; retention; wage progression
- **Infrastructure:** site readiness; delivery on time and on budget
- **Resilience:** surge capacity; supply-chain recovery time



- **Governance:** audit closure rate; portfolio performance

KPIs are tracked quarterly and tied to continuation decisions.

14. Conclusion

SHIELD is a feasible, execution-ready framework designed to align existing assets, authorities, and investment streams into a coordinated economic and national security platform. It does not rely on speculative growth, new bureaucratic structures, or untested funding mechanisms. Instead, it builds on demonstrated demand, established institutions, and statutory authority already in place.

Nebraska's competitive advantage lies in the convergence of national security missions, health security infrastructure, agricultural production, logistics capacity, and workforce assets. SHIELD converts this convergence into a disciplined operating system that produces durable job creation, strengthens resilience, and retains high-skill talent. The statewide pilot structure ensures results are demonstrated across diverse geographies before any regional expansion is considered.

The operating model, governance structure, funding approach, and performance metrics outlined in this plan are designed to manage risk, enforce accountability, and enable continuous performance management. Clear decision gates, shared-risk capital structures, and defined KPIs ensure that resources are allocated based on outcomes rather than assumptions.

With existing proof points already underway in Nebraska, SHIELD is positioned to move from coordination to execution. Upon approval, the immediate next steps include finalizing the statewide project portfolio, establishing governance and reporting cadence, and initiating Phase One performance tracking. Regional expansion, if pursued, will be limited, earned, and grounded in demonstrated results.

In sum, SHIELD presents a disciplined, scalable approach to economic development and national resilience that aligns public purpose with private execution. It is ready for implementation.