The Defense Department has released its data strategy, which aims to make data a critical strategic asset across the military to achieve improved operational capabilities.

The strategy applies across the entire department, aiming to make it “a data-centric organization that uses data at speed and scale for operational advantage and increased efficiency,” according to the document’s vision statement.
DOD aims to achieve this vision with eight guiding principles, which push the military to:

- Leverage data as a strategy asset;
- Collectively create stewardship of data by clearly defining roles and responsibilities;
- Ethically apply data, applying the DOD AI Ethics Principles released in February;
- Enable data collection, especially through automated means;
- Form enterprise-wide data access and availability;
- Maintain data intended for training AI;
- Ensure that data is “fit for purpose” — that it is readily discoverable and understood within the context of its intended use; and
- Design data governance and compliance to match DOD policies.

Military data leadership emphasized the role of ensuring visible, interoperable and coordinated efforts in building up the proper IT architecture, standards and workforce that DOD needs to achieve these goals. By making data easily accessible, understandable, trustworthy, linked and secure, the chief data officers of the department aim to highlight that data isn’t an IT asset, but rather a central and critical role for military engagements.

“A core tenet of the DOD Data Strategy is the understanding that data is not an IT asset, but an essential and integral part of the mission itself,” the strategy said. “Data is ubiquitous. DOD weapons platforms, connected devices, sensors, training facilities, test ranges and business systems generate enormous volumes of data of which all retain and share their data for broader use. It is critical that data be of high quality, accurate, complete, timely, protected and trustworthy.”

To coordinate these efforts, DOD Chief Data Officer David Spirk will establish a DOD Data Council, which will include leadership representation from DOD’s various agencies, combatant commands and field activities. This council will aim to execute on the goals of the data strategy, while also working with the user community to continuously share best practices, develop solutions and troubleshoot challenges.
The Defense Data Strategy aligns closely with principles from the Defense Digital Modernization Strategy and Federal Data Strategy, which both underscore the need to tie IT assets and data as core tools to achieving agency goals. For DOD CIO Dana Deasy, the data strategy means making data another piece of ammunition for the military.

“Data is the ammunition in the Digital Modernization Strategy and is increasingly central to warfighter advantage on and off the battlefield.” Deasy said. “The National Defense Strategy directed us to be more lethal, efficient and interoperable with partners. This strategy is our first step to making that ammo persistently available to the men and women of the DOD regardless of echelon or geographic location.”

The DOD CIO's office will help oversee the data strategy's execution alongside the DOD Data Council. Efforts in this area will include the continued decommissioning and replacement of legacy IT systems that have impeded DOD’s ability to establish an enterprise data management system. Defense IT leadership will also look to coordinate the data strategy's execution alongside other modernization efforts, like artificial intelligence and 5G communications.