Defense Primer: Active Duty Enlisted Recruiting

Congressional Role

The Constitution provides Congress with broad powers over the Armed Forces, including the power "To raise and support Armies" and "To provide and maintain a Navy." In the exercise of this authority, Congress has historically shown great interest in military recruiting, which is critical to maintaining a fully manned and capable military workforce. Congress exercises a powerful influence on recruiting through its establishment of personnel end-strength levels for the Active Components and Reserve Components. Higher end-strengths generally require a greater number of new recruits, higher rates of retention among current servicemembers, or some combination of the two. Through its oversight powers, Congress monitors the performance of the executive branch in managing the size and quality of the military workforce.

Congress influences the achievement of recruiting goals by the services in a number of ways:

- authorizing military compensation packages that are competitive with civilian employers (e.g., basic pay, recruiting bonuses, educational and health care benefits);
- establishing criteria that affect eligibility for enlistment such as age, cognitive, behavioral, and citizenship standards; and
- funding recruiting programs that provide for dedicated recruiters, market research, advertising, and military entrance processing stations.

The policy levers most commonly used to manage recruiting include varying the number of recruiters, funding for advertising, and funding for enlistment incentives. When recruiting shortfalls occur, or are anticipated, Congress may elect to apply additional resources to these mechanisms. Likewise, when recruiting is expected to be strong, Congress may elect to shift resources away from these areas.

Recruiting

Without a robust ability to bring new personnel into the military, the Services would lack sufficient manpower to carry out mission essential tasks in the near term. Moreover, without stable recruiting levels they would lack a sufficient pool of entry-level personnel to develop into the mid-level and upper-level leaders of the future. To maintain a healthy military force structure, each Service sets goals for new personnel *accessions* each fiscal year for both its Active and Reserve Components. Officer and enlisted goals are set separately. For enlisted personnel, there are both *quantity* and *quality* goals.

Quantity Goals

Quantity goals are based on each Service's projected need for new personnel over the course of the year to meet its congressionally authorized end-strength. This quantity goal is normally based primarily on the difference between the congressionally authorized end-strength of a specific Service and Component for a given fiscal year and the projected number of currently serving personnel it will retain through the end of the year. For example, if a given Service has an authorized Active Component end-strength of 200,000 enlisted personnel, and it projects that it will retain 175,000 of its current enlisted members through the year, it will set a goal of enlisting 25,000 new individuals for that year. The goal will also include a certain number more to account for those new enlistees who do not complete their first year of service. The actual number of new enlistees needed may also change during the year as new projections are made about the retention of currently serving enlisted personnel, or if the Service must increase or decrease the total size of its force (for example, if a Service Secretary were to exercise the authority of 10 U.S.C. 115(g)(1)(A) to increase congressionally authorized active duty end-strength for that Service by up to 2%).

Table 1 lists recruit quantity goals and results for FY2016-FY2018.

Quality Goals

Quality goals are only for new enlistees without any previous military service, also known as *non-prior service* (NPS) recruits.

Two principal Department of Defense (DOD) quality benchmarks apply to NPS recruits. The first quality benchmark is the percentage of NPS enlistees who are high school diploma graduates (HSDG). The second quality benchmark is the percentage of scores above average on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT Categories I-IIIA). Since FY1993, the DOD's quality benchmarks for recruit quality have stipulated that at least 90% of NPS enlistees must be high school diploma graduates, and at least 60% must score above average on the AFQT. Supplementary ways to assess the quality of enlistment cohorts include the percentage of NPS enlistees who score well-below average on the AFQT (Category IV) and the number and types of enlistment waivers granted to enlistees for medical reasons, misconduct, or drug use. DOD regulations require that no more than 4% of an annual enlistment cohort may be Category IV (10th-30th percentile on the AFQT). In addition, no one in Category V (1st-9th percentile on the AFQT) may be admitted into the U.S. armed forces. In the case of waivers, there is no official benchmark.

Table 2 and **Table 3** list recruit quality benchmarks and results for FY2016-FY2018.

Table 1. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quantity)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2016-FY2018

Service	FY2016			FY2017			FY2018		
	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal
Army	62,500	62,682	100.3%	68,500	68,862	100.5%	76,500	69,972	91.47%
Navy	30,606	30,606	100.0%	35,200	35,225	100.1%	39,000	39,018	100.05%
Marine Corps	30,500	30,508	100.0%	31,994	32,059	100.2%	31,556	31,566	100.00%
Air Force	31,461	31,757	100.9%	31,250	31,296	100.1%	29,450	30,343	103.03%

Source: Department of Defense.

Table 2. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quality – High School Diploma Graduates)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2016-FY2018

Service	DOD Benchmark	Achieved FY2016	Achieved FY2017	Achieved FY2018
Army	90%	96.1%	95.8%	95.0%
Navy	90%	99.2%	98.7%	97.8%
Marine Corps	90%	99.9%	99.8%	99.8%
Air Force	90%	99.7%	99.6%	98.6%

Source: Department of Defense.

Table 3. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quality – Above Average AFQT Score)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2016-FY2018

Service	DOD Benchmark	Achieved FY2016	Achieved FY2017	Achieved FY2018
Army	60%	60.3%	60.5%	63.9%
Navy	60%	85.5%	83.4%	75.3%
Marine Corps	60%	71.3%	71.6%	69.9%
Air Force	60%	84.9%	82.1%	82.8%

Source: Department of Defense.

Relevant Statutes	Other Resources
Title 10 U.S. Code, Chapter 31 10 U.S.C. §115	DOD Instruction 1304.26, Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction DOD Instruction 6130.03, Medical Standards for Appointment, Enlistment or Induction in the Military Services Defense Manpower Data Center, DOD Personnel, Workforce Reports, and Publications.

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