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 requirements; 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 typically based on each Service's projected need for new personnel (both officer and enlisted) over the course of the year to meet its congressionally authorized end-strength. Enlisted quantity goals are based on the proportion of congressionally authorized end-strength that a specific Service and Component allocates to its enlisted force, less the projected number of currently serving enlisted personnel it expects to retain through the end of the year. As a hypothetical example, assume a Service has an authorized Active Component end-strength of 200,000 total personnel, comprised of 30,000 officers and 170,000 enlisted personnel. If it projects that it will retain 140,000 of its current enlisted personnel through the end of the fiscal year, it might set a goal of enlisting 30,000 new individuals for that year plus a certain number more to account for those new enlistees who are separated before the end of the year (for example, for medical disability). 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 FY2018-FY2020.

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 FY2018-FY2020.

Table 1. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quantity)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2018-FY2020

Service	FY2018			FY2019			FY2020		
	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal	Goal	Achieved	Percent of Goal
Army	76,500	69,972	91.5%	68,000	68,185	100.3%	61,200	61,249	100%
Navy	39,000	39,018	100.0%	39,000	39,027	100.1%	39,600	39,678	100%
Marine Corps	31,556	31,566	100.0%	31,767	31,777	100.0%	28,028	28,048	100%
Air Force	29,450	30,343	103.0%	32,300	32,421	100.4%	26,373	26,373	100%

Source: Department of Defense.

Table 2. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quality – High School Diploma Graduates)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2018-FY2020

Service	DOD Benchmark	Achieved FY2018	Achieved FY2019	Achieved FY2020
Army	90%	95.0%	93.7%	95.8%
Navy	90%	97.8%	97.7%	97.4%
Marine Corps	90%	99.8%	99.5%	99.5%
Air Force	90%	98.6%	98.5%	98.5%

Source: Department of Defense.

Table 3. Non-Prior Service Accessions Data (Quality – Above Average AFQT Score)
Active Component Enlisted Personnel, FY2018-FY2020

Service	DOD Benchmark	Achieved FY2018	Achieved FY2019	Achieved FY2020
Army	60%	63.9%	60.6%	62.9%
Navy	60%	75.3%	71.6%	70.2%
Marine Corps	60%	69.9%	69.4%	69.5%
Air Force	60%	82.8%	81.8%	82.2%

Source: Department of Defense.

Relevant Statutes

Title 10 U.S. Code, Chapter 31

10 U.S.C. §115

Other Resources

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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