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Integrating Recruiting and Marketing for the Total Air Force

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About This Report

The U.S. Air Force is a large, multifaceted, and geographically dispersed organization with almost 320,000 active duty and 300,000 national guard and reserve military personnel serving in more than 250 career fields. Additionally, the Air Force employs more than 165,000 civilians in approximately 600 occupations. Every officer, enlisted airman, and civilian in or employed by the Air Force was the result of a successful recruiting effort. Instead of having one recruiting organization to meet these needs, the Air Force has several. These include the Air Force Recruiting Service, U.S. Air Force Academy, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, and Air Force Personnel Center. In the current competitive recruiting environment, the Air Force's goal is to provide every opportunity for an individual who wishes to serve to find a place with the Air Force. Without close cooperation among the Air Force recruiting organizations, an individual might not become familiar with all options open to him or her to serve.

This report stems from a multiyear project to assist the Air Force with its effort to achieve a modern, comprehensive, and integrated recruiting system. Elements of the effort during the first year (fiscal year [FY] 2017) included developing and evaluating the first phase of a recruiting pilot test in the New England region, identifying differences and similarities in how the multiple Air Force recruiting organizations conduct their recruiting operations, and identifying current recruiting practices in the private sector that could provide lessons for Air Force recruiting. Near the end of the first year, the recruiting organizations began to realize that the lack of modern, mobile, integrated technology would hamper their efforts at integration. Thus, during the second year (FY 2018), the focus of the recruiting organizations and of this study turned toward the barriers to integration and how those barriers could be overcome. We delved more deeply into private sector recruiting practices and added a focus on the marketing activities of the separate recruiting organizations and how progress toward integration would be affected by the existence and activities of the three major marketing contracts serving active duty, Guard, and Reserve recruiting.

The research described in this report was commissioned by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Force Management Integration and conducted within the Workforce, Development, and Health Program of RAND Project AIR FORCE as part of FY 2017 and FY 2018 projects, "Developing a Comprehensive Air Force Recruiting Strategy."

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Summary

Issue

The Air Force faces challenges with recruiting. Externally, the number of individuals who are both interested in and eligible for military service is declining. Internally, those who conduct Air Force recruiting activities have for decades been stovepiped by organizational lines, separate recruiting and marketing activities, and incompatible information systems, as shown in Figure S.1. The result has been a collection of separate Air Force recruiting entities that are not well positioned to collaborate to meet the Air Force's human capital objectives.[1]

Figure S.1. Organization of Air Force Recruiting and Supporting Data Systems
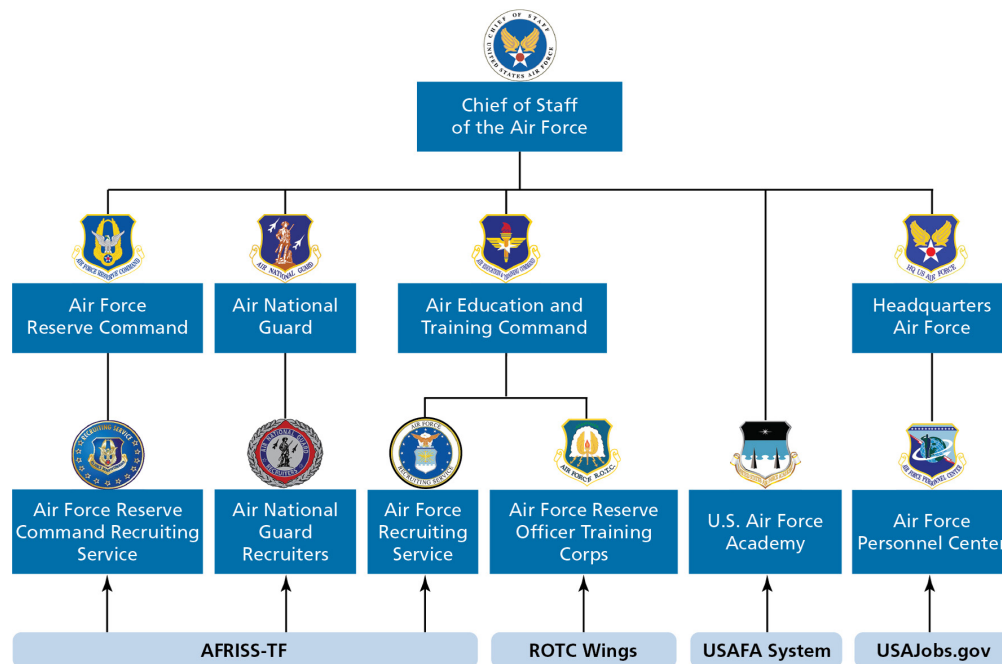
NOTE: AFRISS-TF = Air Force Recruiting Information Support System – Total Force; ROTC = Reserve Officer Training Corps; USAFA = U.S. Air Force Academy. With no single authority overseeing all of recruiting for the Total Force and no integrated data system, the activities of the six recruiting entities have been stovepiped and uncoordinated. Other than the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, there is no single point of authority over the entire collection of Air Force recruiting entities to provide leadership or require accountability.

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[1] The Air Force has made substantial progress in achieving integrated total force recruiting since the research reflected in this report was completed in 2020. For example, all three components (active, guard, and reserve), along with the Space Force, now share one national marketing contract, and a pilot test of a unified system of recruiting software is also underway.

Approach

Across fiscal year (FY) 2017 and FY 2018, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Force Management Integration (SAF/MRM) asked RAND researchers to assist with its efforts to integrate the recruiting function across the Total Force. SAF/MRM asked RAND researchers to identify possible areas of synergy and integration across the recruiting entities, assist with the evaluation of the New England Recruiting Test, and examine practices in the private sector to identify avenues for improvement in Air Force recruiting. To accomplish these objectives, we conducted extensive document and literature reviews and interviews and meetings with recruiting stakeholders across the Air Force.

Conclusions

From this work, we drew the following conclusions:

- The current organizational structure, which provides no shared leadership for recruiting other than the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, is ill-suited to integration.
- There are some similarities among the stovepiped recruiting entities that recruit uniformed personnel, suggesting opportunities for integration.
- The marketing activities for recruiting are mostly separate, with separate marketing vendors and very limited sharing or coordination.
- The marketing outreach through Air Force websites reflects the separation and lack of coordination among the various Air Force recruiting entities.
- The New England Recruiting Test provided important experiences and insights related to collaboration and information-sharing to inform the move toward Total Force recruiting.
- Case studies of five private sector companies demonstrate that integrating and streamlining recruiting across a large organization requires investments in technology and deliberate organizational change and attention to the people who will use the technology.

Recommendations

Building on these conclusions, we offer the following recommendations, beginning first with broad, organizational issues and following with steps related to the implementation of subsequent changes:

- Establish an organizational structure with a single point of authority that is responsible for all recruiting across the Total Force and that operates between the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the recruiting sources.
- Move forward with integration of selected marketing activities, such as establishing a unified call center (for which recruiting stakeholders across recruiting entities expressed support).
- Reduce the sense of competition among the Air Force recruiting entities by developing recommended practices for channeling leads and reexamining the incentive structure to best serve the needs of the Total Force.

- Without requiring a separate marketing contract (which we do not recommend), establish a more-unified web presence for Air Force recruiting.
- Continue to pilot processes that integrate recruiting across the Total Force and foster collaboration among the recruiting sources, applying lessons from prior phases of the New England Recruiting Test to improve the outcomes of the pilot testing each time.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

AFCS	Air Force Civilian Service
AFI	Air Force Instruction
AFPC	Air Force Personnel Center
AFR	Air Force Reserve
AFRISS-TF	Air Force Recruiting Information Support System – Total Force
AFROTC	Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps
AFRS	Air Force Recruiting Service
AI	artificial intelligence
ANG	Air National Guard
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
ATS	applicant tracking system
CRM	customer relationship management
DEP	Delayed Entry Program
FY	fiscal year
HCA	Human Capital Annex
IT	information technology
MEPS	Military Entrance Processing Station
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
PWS	performance work statement
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
SAF/MR	Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs
SAF/MRM	Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Force Management Integration
TFRC	Total Force Recruiting Council
USAFA	U.S. Air Force Academy

Chapter 1. Introduction

As noted in *America's Air Force: A Call to the Future*,

> our ability to recruit and retain exceptional Airmen is the cornerstone of our business. Historically, we have enjoyed great success in recruiting high quality people into our force, but we can ill afford to assume that the methods of the past will be sufficient in the future.[2]

In fact, the Air Force is facing a recruiting challenge. First, the Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS) has noted that it is taking longer each month to meet monthly recruiting goals and, as of this writing, is facing the prospect of missing its goal for fiscal year (FY) 2018. Second, a slow drop in recruiting outcomes manifests itself in the declining number of individuals in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) waiting to enter basic training. Finally, steady increases in the active duty enlisted accession mission, from 23,994 in FY 2015 to 30,900 in FY 2019, that have occurred without similar increases in resources has sent further shocks to the system.

The *Human Capital Annex Flight Plan: Attracting and Recruiting* (hereafter referred to as the Flight Plan) spells out a "comprehensive recruiting strategy" designed to address the challenges stated above.[3] The Human Capital Annex (HCA) reflects the outcome of a diverse Air Force working group that met to create a strategy and roadmap for achieving a Total Force recruiting enterprise. The goal of this strategy is to "synthesize the efforts of the Total Force to attract the next generation of agile Airmen by integrating efforts, optimizing systems and standardizing processes." The HCA includes three major objectives:

- **Objective AR 1**. Synchronize recruiting efforts across the Total Force to ensure the optimal mix of talent, diversity, and agility in the officer, enlisted, and civilian forces.
- **Objective AR 2.** Develop methods, strategies, and tactics to recruit agile and inclusive Total Force airmen for today and tomorrow's missions.
- **Objective AR 3.** Ensure the Air Force's human capital management programs are based on and integrated to address strategic capability gaps in two primary areas: emerging missions and transitioning to a more agile workforce.[4]

These objectives call for Air Force recruiting to become more integrated, with the purpose of attracting and recruiting individuals who will make the force more agile and more inclusive. Several objectives and subobjectives are especially relevant. For example, at a strategic level, subobjective AR 1.2 focuses on developing Total Force recruiting policies and guidance. More

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[2] U.S. Air Force, *America's Air Force: A Call to the Future*, Washington, D.C., July 2014, p. 9.

[3] U.S. Air Force, *Human Capital Annex Flight Plan: Attracting and Recruiting, a Comprehensive Recruiting Strategy*, Washington, D.C., January 4, 2017, p. 3.

[4] U.S. Air Force, 2017, p. 2.

tactically, subobjective AR 1.3 incorporates several tasks to "Develop Enabling Systems that Promote Synergy and Take Advantage of Big Data and Micro-Targeting."[5] Further, AR 1 and AR 2 mention diversity and inclusion as part of the HCA's objectives.

A Competitive Recruiting Environment and Organizational Inefficiencies

There are several reasons for the increasing difficulties in recruiting. One such reason is that the propensity of youth to enlist has been declining. In 2014 testimony before the House Armed Services military personnel subcommittee, Vee Penrod, who was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, stated, "Since 2004, the percent of youths who associate military service with an attractive lifestyle is down approximately 20 percent."[6] In addition to lower interest in military service, the continuing strength of the economy has increased the competition for qualified youth among the military services and with private employers. The civilian unemployment rate dropped from 9.6 percent in August 2016 to 4.4 percent in August 2017.[7] The services compete for the same pool of qualified applicants, and the Army began offering enlistment incentives up to $40,000 for the same highly qualified recruits sought by the Air Force.

The Air Force recruits against a backdrop of multiple disconnected and, in some cases, competing recruiting sources,[8] each relying on legacy contact management and recordkeeping systems that were not designed to easily share data across systems. Beyond recruiting for active-duty and reserve component military service members, the Air Force also employs more than 160,000 civilians, recruiting and hiring approximately 8,000 civilian employees every year. In addition, multiple marketing agencies are engaged in supporting these recruiting sources. Figure 1.1 displays the current organization of Air Force recruiting and the supporting data systems. In sum, Air Force recruiting faces a modernization challenge that is both strategic and tactical.[9]

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[5] U.S. Air Force, 2017, p. 9.

[6] Jim Garamone, "Recruiting on Track, but Officials Worry About Future," U.S. Air Force, January 16, 2014.

[7] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," online database, undated.

[8] We use the term *recruiting sources* to refer to the Air Force entities that conduct recruiting for any type of Air Force personnel, whether military or civilian, following the usage by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Force Management Integration (SAF/MRM) at the time of this study. The recruiting sources include AFRS, which recruits for active duty, Air Force Reserve (AFR), Air National Guard (ANG), Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC), U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA), and the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC), which recruits for the Air Force Civilian Service (AFCS).

[9] The Air Force has made substantial progress in achieving integrated total force recruiting since the research reflected in this report was completed in 2020. For example, all three components (active, guard, and reserve), along with the Space Force, now share one national marketing contract, and a pilot test of a unified system of recruiting software is also underway.

Figure 1.1. Organization of Air Force Recruiting and Supporting Data Systems
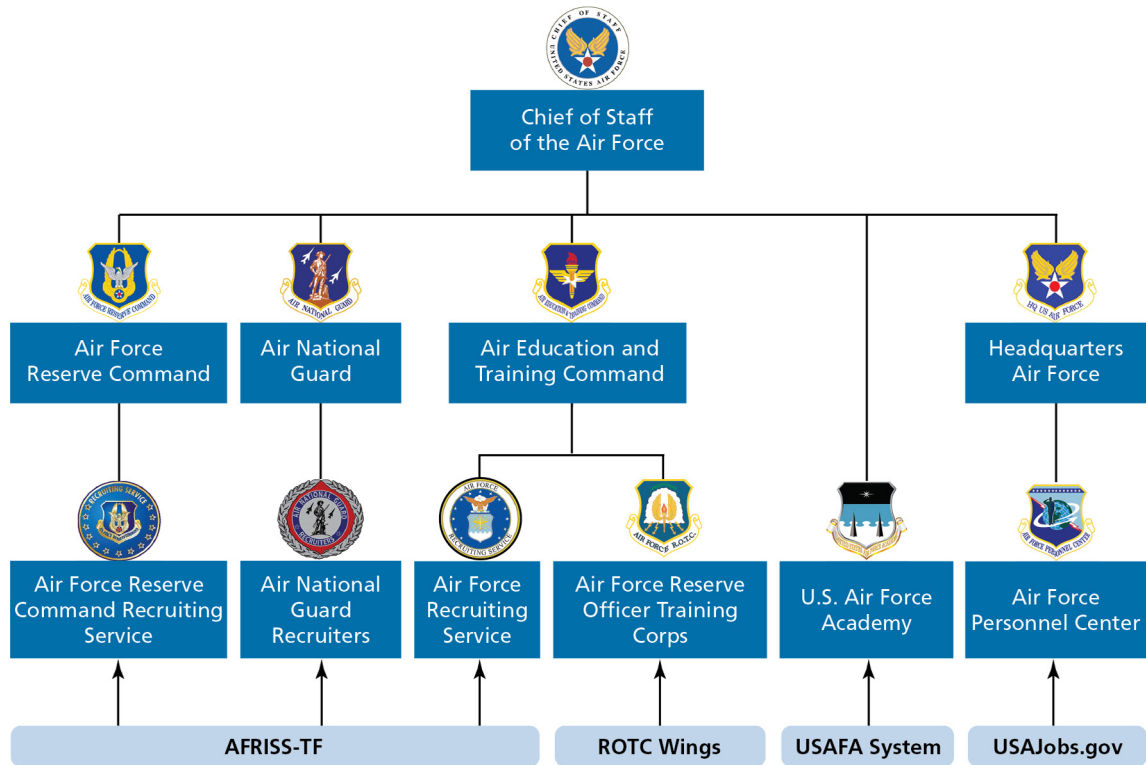
NOTE: AFRISS-TF = Air Force Recruiting Information Support System – Total Force; ROTC = Reserve Officer Training Corps.

The stovepiping of Air Force recruiting sources and systems has created multiple problems. First, inefficiencies result from efforts to coordinate across the multiple recruiting sources. For example, in meetings conducted during this study, representatives from USAFA informally estimated that their institution receives ten times the number of applicants it enrolls every year. Many of these applicants who do not enroll at USAFA could be prospects for AFROTC recruiting, but disconnected applicant tracking systems and the overlapping nature of the timing requirements of applications to USAFA and public and private colleges and universities create an almost insurmountable obstacle for these two recruiting sources to efficiently share this applicant pool.

Second, stovepiping also creates redundancies. At least three different applicant tracking systems are currently in use, one each for USAFA, AFROTC, and AFRS (the majority of the focus for AFRS is on active-duty enlisted recruiting). One result is that many of the same individuals might be found within each of these three tracking systems and might be in the process of being contacted by three different recruiters, who are each unaware of the others' activities.

Third, AFRS, ANG, and AFR each have their own contracts with different marketing agencies. As a result, the Air Force does not appear as one Total Force but rather as multiple

distinct and competing Air Forces. As we describe in Chapter 4, the disconnected and outward-looking faces of the Air Force are evident in their online presences. In addition, having multiple and uncoordinated web-based marketing and recruiting activities drives up the cost to all. For example, if the AFRS contractor buys search terms from Google so that the AirForce.com website is at or near the top of the list when an individual searches for "Air Force," and the AFR contractor buys the same search term, the cost of these search terms is driven up for both because of search-term pricing in a competitive marketplace.

How Can the Air Force Better Integrate Recruiting?

Across FY 2017 and FY 2018, SAF/MRM asked RAND to assist on three fronts: (1) to identify possible areas of synergy and integration across the recruiting sources, (2) to assist with the development and ongoing evaluation of the New England Recruiting Test,[10] and (3) to examine recruiting practices in other public and private sector organizations that offer ideas for changes in Air Force recruiting.[11]

Key Questions

To assist SAF/MRM with these priorities, we focused our efforts on the following questions:

1. What is the current state of recruiting processes in each of the recruiting sources?
2. What lessons emerged from the New England Recruiting Test?
3. What promising recruiting practices are being used in selected private sector organizations?
4. According to these findings, what steps should the Air Force pursue to make its recruiting efforts more comprehensive and integrated across the Total Force?

Approach and Data Sources

To address those questions, we drew on several methods and sources. To answer the first and second questions, we consulted Air Force documents, such as the Air Force Strategic Master Plan, the Human Capital Annex, the Flight Plan, and the New England Recruiting Test Plan, the guiding document for the New England Recruiting Test.[12] Further, we conducted a search for relevant official Air Force Instructions (AFIs) that detailed recruiting procedures. We conducted meetings and interviews with stakeholders, including representatives from the Assistant

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[10] The New England Recruiting Test was an effort started in FY 2017 to test new approaches to lead identification along with lead-sharing among recruiting sources across the Total Force. It was located in New England because that region has historically yielded fewer recruits than other regions, and it was thought that the tested changes might be beneficial.

[11] U.S. Air Force, 2017.

[12] U.S. Air Force, *USAF Strategic Master Plan*, Washington, D.C., May 2015b; U.S. Air Force, *Human Capital Annex to the USAF Strategic Master Plan*, Washington, D.C., May 2015a; U.S. Air Force, 2017.

Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (SAF/MR), AFRS, AFROTC, AFPC,[13] ANG, AFR, and USAFA. We also reviewed their recruiting websites. Further, we attended planning and lessons-learned meetings that included representatives from all of those recruiting sources as they moved toward greater integration of their recruiting efforts.

To answer the third question, we examined both academic literature and industry publications, as follows:

- academic literature from 2014 to 2017 that discusses corporate recruitment trends; rapid evolution in recruitment software and applications quickly makes older literature obsolete
- alternative nonacademic sources

    – business and mainstream news
    – media publications
    – corporate releases
    – corporate consulting reports (e.g., McKinsey)
    – selected blogs and social media postings (e.g., LinkedIn).

For this investigation, we used two types of search. First, we searched the academic literature using traditional methods. Second, we conducted a corresponding complementary internet search. The internet search used a set of keywords that was consistent with the academic literature search.

Overview of the Report

The following chapters share the findings and recommendations resulting from these efforts. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, we address the first key question, regarding the current state of recruiting processes. In Chapter 2, we describe the current recruiting system, including the organizational structure at the time of this study and the processes in use among the various recruiting sources. In Chapter 3, we report on how the respective recruiting sources contract for marketing services. In Chapter 4, we examine the external messaging that results from the marketing services. In Chapter 5, we address the second key question by summarizing the purpose of the New England Recruiting Test—which was an effort to explore approaches to recruiting integration—and the lessons from it. In Chapter 6, we address the third key question and describe some of the recruiting practices of other public and private sector organizations. Finally, we provide our conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 7.

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[13] AFPC is the recruiting source for AFCS.

Chapter 2. Air Force Recruiting System

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Total Force recruits through multiple disconnected and, in some cases, competing recruiting sources, each relying on legacy contact management and recordkeeping systems that were not designed to easily share data across systems. In this chapter, we examine the current organizational structure for Air Force recruiting and the processes and systems used.

Organizational Structure for Air Force Recruiting

Air Force recruiting faces a modernization challenge that is strategic, tactical, organizational, and technical. Figure 2.1 depicts these challenges from top to bottom.

First, there is essentially no shared authority for all of Air Force recruiting below the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. In other words, the lowest organizational level with a decisionmaker common to all of Air Force recruiting is also the highest-ranking member of the Air Force. As a result, coordinating the recruiting and hiring enterprise among the Air Force recruiting sources is overly burdensome and inefficient. Adding to the inefficiency is the fact that the various recruiting entities use different data systems that do not communicate with one another. As Figure 2.1 also shows, there are four distinct data systems in use.

Second, the Air Force has created a Total Force Recruiting Council (TFRC) that

> serves as the primary body to provide direction for each Air Component Recruiting Service or equivalent, given equal representation and authority, with intent to enhance communication, create synergy, efficiency and continuity of operations to foster successful collaboration.[14]

Figure 2.2 depicts the organizational structure of this council and shows the organizational hurdles that must be overcome for coordinated efforts to occur in the realm of Air Force recruiting. To initiate coordinated actions, the TFRC relies on achieving consensus among six working group members of the council, followed by the approval of each working group member's higher decisionmaking authority. Note that relatively near-term goals for achieving integrated recruiting will incorporate USAFA, AFROTC, and AFPC, which will add additional working group members and higher headquarters to the decisionmaking mix.

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[14] AFI 36-1901, *Recruiting Programs*, Washington, D.C.: Secretary of the Air Force, June 20, 2017, p. 5.

Figure 2.1. Organization of Air Force Recruiting
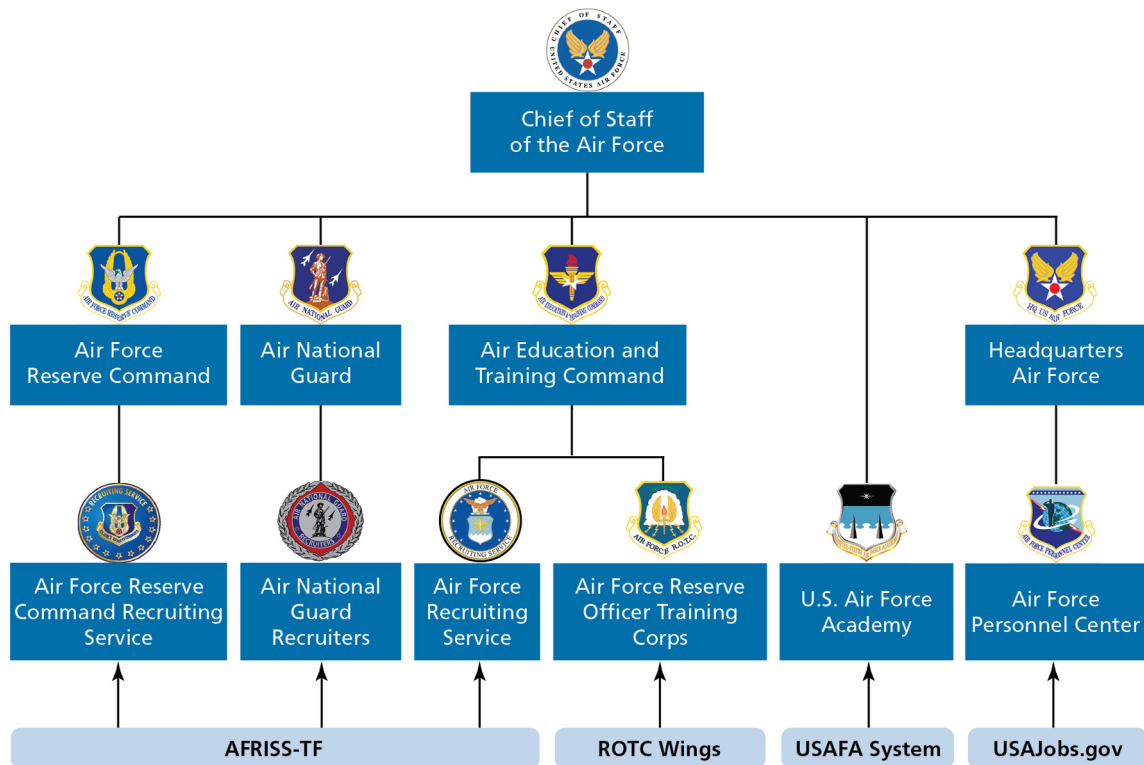
Third, a tactical and technical challenge faced by the Air Force is that the recruiting sources use four different stovepiped data systems for tracking leads and accessioning or hiring applicants (shown in Figure 2.1). In addition, each of these legacy systems lags behind what private sector competitors use to track and hire applicants, in terms of the hardware and software and in the application of leading-edge data analytics. For example, the legacy systems are Common Access Card–enabled, which means that recruiters must return to their offices to use the systems and cannot access or enter data while in the field. Further, the systems still require parts of the process to be conducted using pen and paper, and some forms must be completed by the recruiter together with the potential recruit.

Finally, the pool of qualified and propensed individuals has been shrinking as a result of decreased unemployment and a lessening connection between the population at large and military service.[15] If the Air Force previously had a recruiting advantage over the sister services because of its reputation for being technologically advanced, that edge has been shrinking as the other services also advance technologically.

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[15] U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies Office of People Analytics, *Spring 2017 Propensity Update*, January 2018.

Figure 2.2. Total Force Recruiting Council Structure Diagram
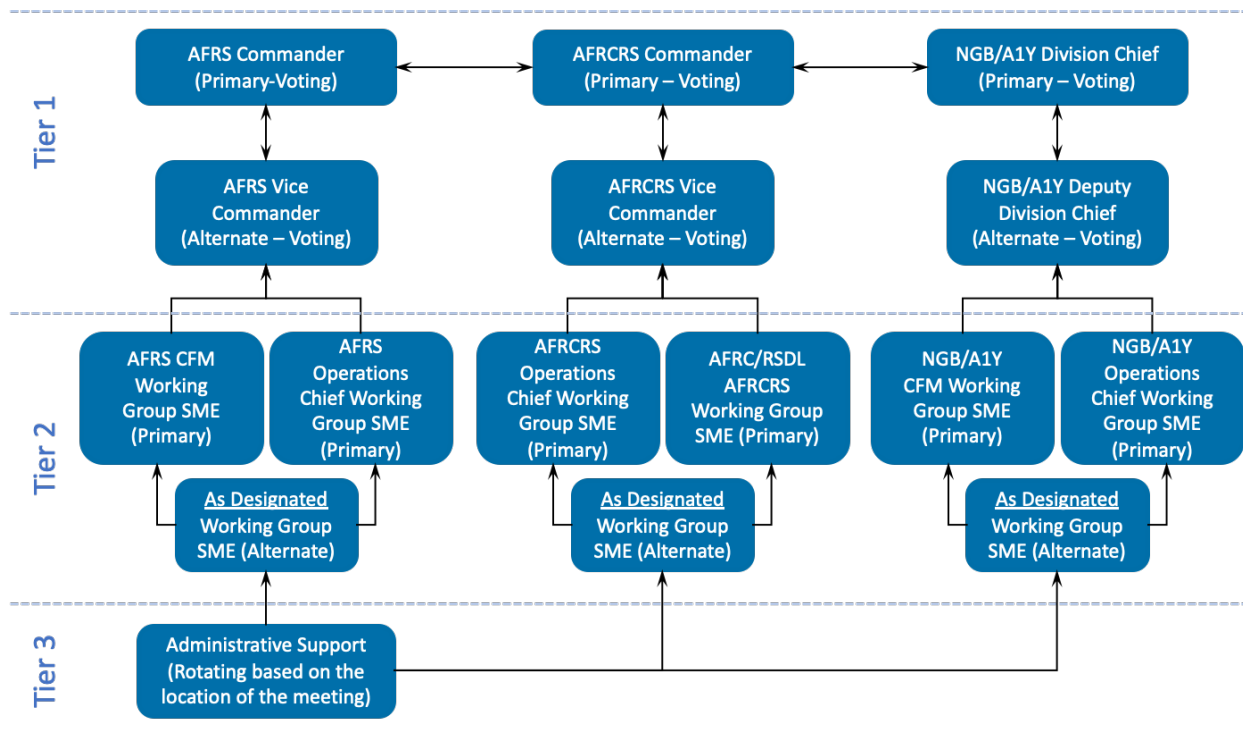
SOURCE: AFI 36-1901, 2017, Figure 1.1.
NOTE: AFRCRS = Air Force Reserve Command Recruiting Service; CFM = career field manager; NGB/A1Y = Air National Guard Recruiting and Retention Division; SME = subject-matter expert.

Recruiting Processes Are Similar but Are in Stovepiped Entities

To provide a common language with which to understand and describe the recruiting processes of the different accession sources, we divide a recruit's journey into the following phases:

- **Phase 0.** Air Force has no specific information on the person.
- **Phase 1.** Air Force has contact information on the person.
- **Phase 2.** Person has expressed interest for more information.
- **Phase 3.** Person has started application.
- **Phase 4.** Person has sworn in.

Different Names Used by Different Recruiting Sources

We label our phases with numbers in an effort to avoid confusion with terminology. In our interviews with recruiters from the various Air Force recruiting sources, we learned that some of the same words are used to mean different things by different recruiting sources.

For example, AFRS, AFR, and ANG are consistent in using the term *prospect* to refer to a person for whom contact information is known to the Air Force or its marketing partner (which

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would correspond to our Phase 1). They use the term *lead* to indicate someone who has expressed some interest in the Air Force (which is our Phase 2). The ANG further makes distinctions as to whether the prospects or leads come from marketing efforts or from sales efforts (meaning recruiters). Meanwhile, no distinction is made regarding how far along the application process (Phase 3) a person is; all would be considered leads.

In contrast, AFROTC refers to people who have received a presentation or visit from the Air Force as being *outreached*. This would correspond to our Phase 0. A *contact* is someone who requests information about AFROTC. This would correspond to our Phase 2, but AFROTC has additional terms for other people in Phase 2, depending on their level of qualification. A *prospect* is a person who expresses more interest in an appointment to AFROTC and is potentially qualified, while a *lead* is someone who has provided more information about their qualifications. Those who formally apply are called *applicants*.

In Table 2.1, we map the different terms used to the phases we have defined.

Table 2.1. Comparison of Terminology Used by Different Recruiting Sources

Phase	Description	AFRS	ANG	AFR	AFROTC
0	Air Force has no information		• Marketing		• Outreached
1	Air Force has contact information	• Prospect	• Marketing prospect • Sales prospect	• Prospect	
2	Person has expressed interest	• Lead	• Marketing lead • Marketing qualified lead • Sales lead • Sales qualified lead	• Lead	• Contact • Prospect • Lead
3	Person has started application				• Applicant
4	Person has been sworn in	• Accession to DEP	• Accession to ANG	• Accession to AFR	• Cadet

Process Maps

To understand whether there are opportunities for increased coordination and cooperation among the different forms of recruiting in the Air Force, we examined the recruiting processes for the five recruiting sources: AFRS, ANG, AFR, AFROTC, and AFPC. The primary form of data-gathering was through semistructured interviews conducted with recruiters from each of the recruiting sources or entities, supplemented by a review of documents provided by the respective recruiters. Using this information, we constructed initial process maps listing the different steps,

as described by the recruiters. We did not include USAFA because its process is more similar to that of an academic institution than it is to other military recruiting.

We created the process maps at a relatively high level of abstraction to capture the larger commonalities and differences among recruiting practices, even if it cost some detail. To add structure to the maps and facilitate comparisons, we defined a set of phases that would be common across all the recruiting sources. These maps do not attempt to capture all the details in recruiting, evaluating, and processing potential members of the Air Force. Rather, they are intended to present a high-level view of key steps in the process, with a focus on showing what is common and what is different across the recruiting sources.

Air Force Recruiting Service

The active duty (AFRS) process map starts at Phase 0 with national marketing efforts directed to the general public. We characterize Phase 0 as people for whom the Air Force or marketers have no individual contact information. Marketing efforts at this stage include social media (such as Facebook posts), event marketing (such as presence at a sports event), billboard advertising, and public service announcements on television or radio, to name a few.

Phase 1 is when the Air Force or marketing partner has contact information for a person. This could be the direct result of marketing efforts or direct contact with a recruiter, which we indicate in Figure 2.3 with a solid line. The marketing agency nurtures the person to generate interest, such as through mailings, electronic communication, or a call center. Names and information could also be generated from lists of students who take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB); these students may or may not specifically indicate an interest in the Air Force. These names would be conveyed to recruiters. Finally, names and information could be generated by the recruiter through school visits, community presentations, or other events. Recognizing that marketing efforts could have an influence on the people a recruiter meets, we show a dashed line from national marketing to the names generated by recruiters in Figure 2.3.

People who express interest, whether from recruiter or marketing efforts or through indication on the ASVAB, enter Phase 2. Recruiters follow up with these people, attempting to do so within five days. During the initial contact with the person, the recruiter prescreens them to assess whether they are potentially eligible.

Figure 2.3. Process Map

	Phase 0: AF has no information	Phase 1: AF has contact information	Phase 2: Person has expressed interest for more information	Phase 3: Person has started application	Phase 4: Person is sworn in
Active Duty	National marketing	Recruiter-generated → Recruiter nurtures; ASVAB test in school; Marketing company nurtures	Person expresses interest → Recruiter follows up → Recruiter prescreens for eligibility, nurtures	Recruiter meets with person, gathers documents → MEPS, including ASVAB, Medical → Job counsel at MEPS	Take oath at MEPS: swear into DEP → DEP → Return to MEPS. Prepare to ship out to BMT → Take oath. Accessed Active Duty → End of recruiter's role
ANG	National marketing	Recruiter-generated → Recruiter nurtures; ASVAB test in school; Marketing company nurtures	Person expresses interest → Recruiter follows up → Recruiter prescreens for eligibility, nurtures	Recruiter meets with person, gathers documents → MEPS, including ASVAB, Medical → Job counsel at ANG wing	Take oath at wing: accessed ANG → Student flight → Ship out to BMT → End of recruiter's role
Reserve	National marketing	Recruiter-generated → Recruiter nurtures; ASVAB test in school; Marketing company nurtures	Person expresses interest → Recruiter follows up → Recruiter prescreens for eligibility, nurtures	Recruiter meets with person, gathers documents → MEPS, including ASVAB, Medical → Interview AFSC and block position at AFR wing (Prior service)	Take oath at wing: accessed AFR → Student flight (Prior service) → Ship out to BMT (or tech school) → End of recruiter's role
AFROTC	National marketing	Recruiter-generated → Recruiter nurtures; Marketing company nurtures	Person expresses interest → Recruiter follows up → Recruiter prescreens for eligibility	Person applies to AFROTC → End of recruiter's role	Take oath to swear into AFROTC → Cadet
Civilian	National marketing	Recruiter-generated → Recruiter nurtures	Person expresses interest → AFPC Talent Acquisition follows up → AFPC prescreens for eligibility	Person applies for position → End of recruiter's role	Entrance on Duty

NOTE: AF = Air Force; AFSC = Air Force Specialty Code; BMT = Basic Military Training; MEPS = Military Entrance Processing Station.

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Ideally, the person will decide they want to apply as a result of the recruiter's efforts. This is our Phase 3. The recruiter will meet with the person, interview them, and have the person bring in documents necessary for the recruiter to further assess eligibility. If the person still appears to be qualified, an appointment will be made for the person to go to the MEPS, where (among other things) they will take the ASVAB (if they have not already) and undergo a medical exam. For active duty applicants, the person will be counseled at the MEPS on potential jobs in the Air Force.

Assuming the person is found to be qualified, the person then takes an oath at the MEPS. At this point, they are accessed into the DEP while they await entry to basic training. During this time, the recruiter continues to periodically engage with the person until they go to basic training and are accessed onto active duty, at which point the recruiter's role ends.

Air National Guard

The ANG process is essentially the same as that for active duty in Phases 0, 1, and 2, though the marketing company involved could be different because there are separate marketing contracts for each recruiting source. There are some differences starting in Phase 3 that are more related to how the person is processed as they enter ANG. For ANG, the person does not receive job counseling at the MEPS but instead returns to the ANG wing and is counseled there. The person takes the oath at the wing, at which point they are considered to have accessed into ANG. They are assigned to a student flight at the wing as they await entry to basic training. The recruiter maintains contact with the person while the person is in the student wing. When the person ships out to basic training, the recruiter's role ends.

Air Force Reserve

The AFR process closely resembles the ANG process. The differences pointed out by our interviewees focused on the fact that AFR heavily recruits people with prior service. In Phase 3, people with prior service experience would skip the MEPS. An ASVAB is not required for them. Instead, a medical exam would be performed at the AFR wing. Interviews for career field and reserving of a position and training occur at the AFR wing. Just as with ANG, the oath occurs at the wing, at which point the person is accessed into AFR. People without prior service are assigned to a student wing while they await being sent to basic training. Those with prior service are not assigned to a student flight and do not go to basic training but instead may ship out to technical school.

Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps

The AFROTC process is very different from that of the other recruiting sources. AFROTC recruits people to become officers, as opposed to the enlisted recruiting processes shown above. AFROTC has incentives in the form of scholarships but also has a more stringent set of eligibility requirements. People entering AFROTC are not sent off to basic training but instead

enter a training program that occurs in conjunction with their college education. Finally, people entering AFROTC do not all enter at the same point in the process: Some apply as high school students, while others apply while they are already in college. Nonetheless, to provide a comparison with active, Reserve, and Guard recruiting, we mapped the recruiting process using the same framework.

Just as with the other recruiting sources, there are national marketing efforts and efforts made by recruiters, who visit schools and attend other events; the recruiters in this case could be recent graduates of AFROTC programs, officers who serve as the faculty cadre of AFROTC detachments at the university, or AFROTC cadets at the university. When a person expresses interest for more information, a recruiter will follow up with them and, eventually, direct the person to an officer at the relevant university detachment, who continues to nurture the person. For the purposes of our diagram, we deem the recruiter's role to end when the person applies to the AFROTC program. However, because the recruiter at the detachment is a member of the faculty cadre, it is not so much that the contact between recruiter and person ends; rather, the nature of the relationship changes when the person becomes a cadet in the program.

Civilian

The civilian recruiting process is the most different from the others listed above. AFCS generally is not seeking to induct set numbers of people into the service the way that the uniformed recruiting sources are. Rather, they are trying to fill specific job openings, each of which has specific job qualifications. Further, because these are federal civil service jobs, there are set application and hiring procedures that result in the process having more in common with federal positions in other departments than with Air Force uniformed recruiting sources. Nonetheless, for comparison purposes, we map their process into the same phases.

National marketing efforts advertise AFCS. In addition, recruiters, in the form of the Talent Acquisitions personnel at AFPC, look for people who might be qualified to fill openings, through recruiting events, professional organizations, and electronic job search sites, among other means. People who express interest would be prescreened by the AFPC personnel and then be directed to apply for the position, at which point the recruiter's role ends.

Implications

Although each of the recruiting sources that we mapped in Figure 2.3—AFRS, ANG, AFR, AFROTC, and AFPC—have differences in many elements of the recruiting process, they also have some elements that are similar. The areas of similarity might be areas in which cooperation and coordination could be fruitful.

For all five recruiting sources, the most significant differences occur from Phase 3 onward, when the person has decided to apply and subsequently goes through the application and evaluation process for the recruiting source or position in question. For the enlisted recruiting

processes for active, Guard, and Reserve, the MEPS portions are very similar and that function is already conducted jointly; processing the person from that point onward is very specific to the recruiting source. The application processes for AFROTC and AFCS differ even more significantly from each other and from the enlisted recruiting processes. Consequently, there is little to be gained from coordinating Phase 3 onward.

Phases 0, 1, and 2 are where the processes for each of the recruiting sources share similarities in purpose; indeed, the earlier the phase, the more common the processes are. In Phase 0 and Phase 1, all recruiting sources conduct marketing efforts. These marketing efforts are focused on recruiting for their respective recruiting source, might have somewhat different target audiences, and might be conducted under contracts with different marketing companies. Nonetheless, they share the common purpose of increasing awareness of, and stimulating interest in, service in the Air Force.

In Phase 1, recruiters for the respective recruiting sources attend events and make presentations in an effort to generate the names of people who might become interested in serving in the Air Force. Here, the differences among recruiting sources increase somewhat, because the differences in target audiences will mean that the places recruiters would want to visit will be different. For the active, Guard, Reserve, and AFROTC, these visits will include high schools; for AFROTC, these visits will also include underclassmen at the college or university. For AFCS, the target audience will be college students about to graduate and professionals already working in the field.

Finally, in Phase 2, recruiters for all recruiting sources share the common purposes of answering inquiries from people who express interest in the Air Force, screening them for eligibility, and encouraging those eligible to apply. The act of following up with people who have expressed interest will be common, but the nature of the questions asked regarding the position and the application process will be distinct to the recruiting source, with AFROTC and AFCS diverging more significantly from active, Guard, and Reserve.

According to this analysis, we conclude that if the Air Force wishes to explore coordination or consolidation in recruiting processes, it should focus on the earlier phases (where there are more commonalities) as opposed to later phases (where there are more differences). Marketing, including not just advertising but also nurturing efforts (such as follow-up communications and call centers), is an area that could be coordinated among all recruiting sources. Recruiter visits to schools could also be coordinated, at least among the uniformed recruiting sources. There could be some benefit to coordinating recruiter follow-up with people who have expressed interest, but differences in the questions asked and the need to guide people in the application processes of the respective recruiting source might limit the potential for coordination among the recruiting sources.

Chapter 3. Similar but Separate and Uncoordinated Marketing Activities

One result of the current organizational structure of recruiting for the Total Force is the existence of different marketing contracts and agencies that provide marketing services to the various Air Force recruiting and hiring sources. In this chapter, we explore what these contracts include and the similarities and differences among them. In addition to obtaining and examining the performance work statements (PWSs) for each marketing contract (when available), we conducted semistructured interviews with individuals within each recruiting source who were associated with or responsible for that recruiting source's marketing activities.

The Recruiting Sources and Their Marketing Contractors

Air Force Recruiting Service

Recruiting for active duty is conducted by AFRS. The recruiting goal varies from year to year, but the recruiters we met with during this study stated that it is currently around 31,000 and is predominantly driven by the need for enlisted airmen.

AFRS uses four contractors for its marketing activities. The largest contract is the national advertising and event marketing contract. The solicitation for that work, solicitation number FA3002-17-R-0003, was released in June 2017 and awarded in March 2018 to GSD&M (contract number FA3002-18-D-0008, March 2018–September 2027, ceiling value $741 million).

The PWS lists the following requirements:

- strategic planning and campaign development
- pre- and post-advertising research and tracking
- creating advertising for, and purchasing time or space in, national, regional, and local markets
- websites, including the recruiting sites for the active recruiting source, AFROTC, and USAFA
- production and distribution of national radio and television public service programs
- special event and mobile marketing programs
- direct mail and email campaigns
- maintaining a sales lead processing, tracking, and management system that transmits information to AFRISS-TF[16]

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[16] AFRISS-TF is the current legacy software system used by AFRS, ANG, and AFR recruiters for tracking and processing applicants from initial contact through entering the active duty Air Force, ANG, or AFR.

- social media, including producing content and conducting chats
- airmen communications, which are communications geared toward the internal audience of airmen
- marketing mix modeling to determine the allocation of resources to different media.

In addition to the national advertising and events marketing contract with GSD&M, AFRS uses contractors for other elements of marketing, as follows:

- The online advisers contract is held by Silotech (contract number FA3002-17-C-0005, December 2016–December 2019, ceiling value $4.3 million). This includes operating a call center to handle inbound toll-free calls, some outbound calls, online chats and social media interactions, and email responses.
- The sales promotional items contract is held by National Industries for the Blind (contract number FA3002-13-D-0009, June 2013–June 2018, ceiling value $15 million).
- The national conventions contract is held by Exhibit Arts through a subcontract with Goldbelt, Inc. (contract number FA3002-17-D0005, January 2017–December 2021, ceiling value $2.9 million).

When asked which marketing activities were most effective, interviewees from each recruiting source and who are associated with that recruiting source's marketing activities responded that it varied depending on the goal and on the target population. If the goal is to generate leads, then digital ads, including those tied to user searches, were considered productive. If, however, the goal is to inspire people to consider service in the Air Force, then mass media, particularly television, was important not only for potential recruits but also for influencers—i.e., the relatives, teachers, coaches, and others who influence those potential recruits. Experiential events that are provided by presence at air shows and NASCAR races are also seen as effective inspirational activities. Magazine advertisements tended to be limited to those targeting specific populations, whether by profession, ethnicity, or both. Little is spent nationally on radio advertisements, though it was noted that some recruiters used local radio stations.

We asked whether there were needs that were not met by current marketing contracts. Interviewees replied that the contracts were flexible enough that they didn't pose a limitation per se; the limitation was in whether there was enough money in any given year to issue task orders to the marketing contractors to conduct activities.

Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps

AFROTC marketing efforts target high school students, college students, and those who influence them. Recruiting priorities follow a seasonal pattern that is tied to application deadlines, with high school students being the priority in summer and fall, culminating in the high school scholarship application deadline in January, and college students being the priority in the spring. AFROTC does not have a recruiting goal per se but has a goal for FY 2019 and FY 2020 of producing 2,400 officers per year.

The AFROTC marketing contract is already integrated with that of the active recruiting source, in the form of the AFRS contract with GSD&M, described in the previous section. AFROTC attends meetings a few times a year with AFRS and GSD&M to plan the marketing strategy for AFROTC. AFROTC does not have any other marketing contracts of their own. However, detachments are given small amounts of money by AFROTC headquarters for the purpose of purchasing detachment-specific marketing items.

The AFRS contract with GSD&M is governed by the PWS described in the previous section. AFROTC issues task orders against the contract. The PWS for the AFROTC task order (Task Order 0145) lists the following:

- media plan
- direct marketing, potentially including the purchase of SAT and ACT exam lists
- website (AFROTC.com)
- purchase time and space for advertisements, as well as the execution of the media plan
- reproduction and delivery of advertising materials
- propose creative concepts for AFRS and AFROTC review
- research and testing on messaging and communication.

In addition to the items listed in the GSD&M PWS, AFROTC purchases promotional items. Some of these are procured through AFRS, while others are purchased directly by the individual detachments, which are free to do their own marketing as long as branding conforms to AFROTC standards. AFROTC does not have a call center contract; calls to the toll-free number (about 200–400 per month) ring at the desk of one of the two captains on the AFROTC headquarters recruiting staff.

AFROTC advertising has focused on advertising on digital platforms on the recommendation of AFRS and the marketing contractor. Because much of the recruiting, particularly on campuses, involves direct contact with potential recruits, promotional items are considered an important marketing tool as well.

When asked whether advertising in other media, such as on television, in print, or in movie theaters, would be desirable, interviewees responded that all could be good but that the limitation was on the amount of available funding. Interviewees reported that, for FY 2018, AFROTC was allocated approximately $750,000 from AFRS for the GSD&M advertising campaign. However, they also reported that FY 2018 was the first time in three years that they had a marketing budget.

U.S. Air Force Academy

Marketing for USAFA is integrated with AFRS, with GSD&M covering the majority of the marketing activities. In addition, promotional items are ordered through the same contract that AFRS has with National Industries for the Blind. The money spent on USAFA marketing takes two forms. One form is money that comes from the USAFA budget, which USAFA pays to GSD&M to carry out certain tasks specified by contract line item numbers in the larger contract.

According to interviews, USAFA spending ranges from $750,000 to $1.2 million per year. The other form is money that comes from AFRS, which in turn comes from Air Education and Training Command. Most of that money is for marketing the Air Force in general, but some activities can be seen as also being focused toward USAFA. For example, one television advertisement done by GSD&M for AFRS featured USAFA; on the one hand, it could be seen as an ad specifically for the academy, but on the other hand, it built awareness for the Air Force in general. Conversely, advertisements about the Air Force help build awareness about the service among potential USAFA students. Thus, identifying the total amount of money spent on USAFA marketing is difficult.

According to interviews with USAFA representatives, marketing activities that are obtained through AFRS marketing contracts include

- website hosting and design
- mobile apps
- ad campaigns
- promotional items.

We asked USAFA interviewees which activities they found most effective. USAFA representatives reported that they do not have a good system for identifying exactly where a lead comes from and that they track people through matriculation in the academy and commissioning into the Air Force. But more importantly, interviewees responded, the nature of marketing is such that it is difficult to credit any one activity more than another. An example cited was television ads. Television ads are expensive. They reach many people, but most of them are not the target audience, and even those who are within the target audience are unlikely to apply to the academy based on just the ad. However, the ad can make it more likely for the individual to be more receptive to other, more-targeted messages. Thus, marketing activities support each other, and so it would not be easy to identify one as being most effective.

We asked whether there were things missing in the current marketing arrangements. USAFA interviewees noted that they do not have a call center. Around 2010, USAFA had dedicated staff for answering calls, but those positions were eliminated, and calls instead were routed to other staff members. This limited the hours in which calls would be answered to the business hours of the office. Interviewees noted that advertising a toll-free number but not having anyone to answer it when people call could be more damaging than not having the toll-free number in the first place. Similarly, USAFA until recently lacked a social media presence, for lack of staff. The organization determined that it was more harmful to seem to have a presence but not be responsive to interactions, so it exited social media entirely. It has since hired more staff.

Air National Guard

Recruiting for ANG differs from recruiting for the active recruiting source because of the dual nature of ANG, where units are under the control of their respective state governors unless

called up to federal service. A consequence of this dual nature is that, unlike the active recruiting source (which recruits airmen to serve in units across the country), each state's ANG focuses on recruiting to fill the needs of its specific units. Further, because service in the active recruiting source is full-time, the active duty Air Force will relocate people to where units are located and therefore can draw from people anywhere in the country. In contrast, ANG can be part-time or full-time and therefore generally draws from people who live close to ANG unit locations. Consequently, the ANG recruitment mission is focused locally by necessity. ANG tries to recruit heavily from people with prior military service, with a target of 60 percent of recruits being prior-service.

The ANG marketing contract is held by Jacob's Eye (solicitation W9133L-17-R-0037, contract W9133L-17-D-0004, awarded September 2017). According to the PWS for the contract, it is for one base year and two option years. The PWS had a ceiling valued at $103 million over three years, but ANG has had difficulty issuing task orders because of protests on the contract.

The PWS lists the following requirements:

- day-to-day management of recruiting and retention program support
- administrative websites meant for ANG recruiter use
- digital outreach and advertising, which includes the public website, social media sites, and digital advertisements
- local recruiting and retention activity support, including developing media plans and procuring advertising and local event space to support ANG wings and units—advertising includes broadcast, print, online, outdoor, direct marketing, and new mediums
- national and regional advertising—advertising includes broadcast, print, online, outdoor, direct marketing, and new mediums
- national and regional event outreach
- lead processing, which is defined in the PWS to mean inbound call center, outbound call center, chat services, social media outreach and monitoring, lead advisory screening, lead nurturing, lead fulfillment, analytics, and research
- development of the design of ANG recruiting storefront offices
- production and distribution of materials for recognition of recruiting and retention influencers
- creative support services, including pre- and post-production support for content creation.

When asked which marketing activities ANG found most effective, interviewees expressed excitement about the use of the relatively newer forms of communication (specifically, digital, mobile, and social media). These forms are part of a wider range of communication modes than what was used in their previous marketing contract, allowing ANG to reach potential recruits through the ways those recruits want to communicate. Further, these newer modes facilitate better tracking, which will enable ANG to better measure its return on investment. Respondents also noted that LinkedIn was an effective method for recruiting officers.

We asked whether there were needs not met by the current marketing contracts. The response reflected difficulties not with the marketing contract per se but with the contracting process

itself. ANG was short on experienced contracting officers, which in turn led to the procurement process being slow. As a result, ANG interviewees felt that certain opportunities for attracting recruits through marketing were missed because they could not act quickly enough.

Air Force Reserve

Although AFR does not have the dual state and federal nature that ANG has, it shares a characteristic with ANG in that it is a reserve component, recruiting personnel who will generally not be full-time, and therefore must recruit from people who are located near specific AFR units. Like ANG, AFR focuses efforts on recruiting individuals with prior service.

The AFR marketing contractor for the past 15 years has been Blaine Warren. The current contract (solicitation FA6643-16-R-0011, contract FA6643-17-D-0001, awarded April 2017) is for one base-year period and four option years. The amount of money spent in the first year was $18.8 million; the amount spent in the second year was $19.6 million. The plan for the third year was to spend $17.6 million, but only $12.6 million has been budgeted.

According to the PWS, the requirements are as follows:

- managing and operating Air Force Reserve Command recruiting advertising, including developing strategies and evaluating effectiveness
- website hosting, including sites for potential enlisted and officer recruits and sites for recruiter use
- public service advertising
- mobile marketing platforms, meaning (in this context) physical assets that are brought to events
- qualification and lead operations, which includes handling calls to a toll-free number, electronic chats, texts, and social media interaction
- television, radio, and video products
- execution of the marketing portfolio, including

  - creation of content and purchase of time or space in print media, billboards, television, radio, and digital platforms
  - live events and participation at air shows
  - peer referral program
  - direct mail
  - sponsorship of events
  - social media presence

- promotional items
- development of creative content.

AFR interviewees noted that their recruiting priorities are different than that of the active recruiting source. Active duty has a focus on hitting a number to achieve a desired end-strength but can move people around the country to meet needs. In contrast, AFR has to fill requirements at specific units and must draw from people in that area.

To reduce the need to train new personnel, AFR has a heavy focus on recruiting prior-service individuals. Because of this focus, AFR recruiters value opportunities for direct engagement with potential recruits, such as at job fairs that are geared toward the hiring of military personnel who are looking to transition away from active duty. For such events, the contractor coordinates with the uniformed recruiters so that both provide a presence.

AFR interviewees indicated that they would like to increase the amount of digital marketing, reporting that the Navy was moving toward a model in which digital was most of the activity. However, they said they did not have the budget for this increase. They also noted that digital is just one touch point: Although it could generate a lead, the lead is only as good as the recruiter who looks at it and works it.

We asked whether there were needs not met by current marketing contracts. The response was that the big challenge was to have consistent funding. The fact that, for many years, money has been appropriated through continuing resolutions rather than a budget makes it difficult to plan activities in advance, and when money finally is released, there is too little time to plan. Although there was a budget during FY 2017, the amount of money allocated was smaller than planned: The plan was to spend $17.6 million, but only $12.6 million was budgeted.

Air Force Civilian Service

Recruiting for AFCS is not centralized. AFPC has the largest group of recruiters, but other commands and agencies in the Air Force have their own recruiting efforts as well. According to AFPC personnel we interviewed, there is a concerted effort to consolidate marketing to present a unified voice with consistent branding.

A distinction that was made by interviewees is that AFPC does not "recruit" in the same sense that AFRS recruits; rather, it "hires." Whereas AFRS seeks to access large numbers of people to meet end-strength requirements and who will be trained and moved to fill requirements as needed, AFPC seeks to fill specific openings with people who have the necessary skill set, degrees, and credentials. Consequently, although AFPC recruits in the sense of attracting people to AFCS, drawing people in without a matching opening is unproductive. AFPC needs to find the correct person to hire to fill the openings they have.

AFPC does not have a marketing contract per se. Rather, they have a memorandum of understanding with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Human Resource Solutions. OPM hires marketing contractors to conduct tasks as needed; in this case, OPM has hired MarCom Group. AFPC spends about $2.5 million per year. Note again that AFPC is not the only Air Force civilian entity conducting recruiting and marketing; for instance, AFPC officials said that the acquisition community spends $1 million through a separate contract.

The statement of work with OPM lists the following deliverables:

- management plan
- refining the communications plan, brand identity, and employee value proposition, including

- – campus partnerships and outreach
- – social media
- – lead generation via online media
- – return on investment analysis

- develop advertising materials, branding, and campaigns
- develop, maintain, update, and host websites
- enhancement of the Recruitment Opportunity Activity system, which is the AFPC's customer relationship management (CRM) system
- develop and maintain recruitment support materials
- recommend and implement data and résumé mining tools
- video and podcast development
- development and maintenance of a virtual career events system
- conference support, including maintenance of exhibit assets
- support for Air Force–specific recruitment and hiring events.

Much of AFPC's marketing has focused on the branding of AFCS as the identity for Air Force civilians. AFPC focuses on this connection with the Air Force, as opposed to identifying Air Force civilians simply as federal employees. However, AFPC wants to establish its identity as distinct from the uniformed service. AFPC interviewees point out that what is seen in Air Force marketing is the Air Force and the uniform; civilians do not appear. However, AFPC is trying to recruit a different demographic: college graduates, especially those with technical skills, who are not interested in uniformed service, therefore an overidentification with the uniform might not be an attractor.

Activities Performed by Marketing Contractors

As indicated in the previous section, the PWSs for marketing contracts for each recruiting source differ in how they categorize and describe the deliverables that are required. Despite this difference, there is much in common across the contracts. To allow for comparison across the recruiting sources, we group the marketing activities into the categories listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Activities Done by Marketing Contractors

Activity	Examples
Planning and evaluation	Developing an overall plan, coordinating with the client, and conducting research to evaluate the effectiveness of various marketing strategies.
Advertisements	Creating content and purchasing time or space in media, including digital.
Direct marketing	Renting contact lists and directly contacting individuals via paper or electronic mail.
Social media	Creating content, conducting outreach on the platform, and interacting with users.
Website	Hosting the websites and maintaining the content.
Lead management system	Capturing the contact information of potential recruits and passing that information to the relevant Air Force system.
Call center	Receiving calls to answer questions about joining and capturing information to pass along to the Air Force.
Promotional items	Procuring, warehousing, and distributing the items.
Events	Storing, maintaining, and transporting displays and demonstrations that are brought to career fairs, conventions, air shows, and sporting events, among others. This category also includes making the arrangements with the venue and providing staffing for the displays in conjunction with Air Force recruiters.

In Table 3.2, we list the activities that are common to more than one recruiting source and identify for each recruiting source the contractors responsible. The final row of the table lists activities that are distinct to the recruiting source. Cell colors in the table identify different contractors.

Table 3.2. Contractors Responsible for Marketing Activities, by Recruiting Entity

Activity	AFRS	AFR	ANG	AFROTC	USAFA	AFPC
Planning and evaluation	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	GSD&M	GSD&M	MarCom Group via OPM
Advertisements	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	GSD&M	GSD&M	MarCom Group via OPM
Direct marketing	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	GSD&M	Internal	Internal
Social media	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	Internal	Internal	MarCom Group via OPM
Website	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	GSD&M	GSD&M	MarCom Group via OPM
Lead management system	GSD&M	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	Internal	Internal	MarCom Group via OPM
Call center	Silotech Group	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	Internal	Internal	internal
Promotional items	National Industries for the Blind	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	Various	National Industries for the Blind	MarCom Group via OPM
Events	GSD&M Exhibit Arts	Blaine Warren	Jacob's Eye	Internal	Internal	MarCom Group via OPM
Activities in the contract that are distinct to the recruiting source	GSD&M: Communications to internal audience	Blaine Warren: Recruiter dashboard; peer referral program	Jacob's Eye: Storefront office support			MarCom Group via OPM: Data and resume mining; virtual career event system

NOTE: *Internal* means that the activity is not conducted by an outside marketing agency but is conducted by the recruiting source itself.

Alternative Ways of Integrating Marketing

In Table 3.2, we see that each recruiting source has a contractor who handles most (and in some cases, all) of the marketing activities for that recruiting source, as indicated by the cells within each column being dominated by one color but each column having different colors. We will call such marketing *vertically integrated*, borrowing terminology from the manufacturing industry, where vertical integration indicates a company that controls all of the elements of production, from the raw materials to delivery to the consumer.[17]

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[17] Robert D. Buzzell, "Is Vertical Integration Profitable?" *Harvard Business Review*, January 1983.
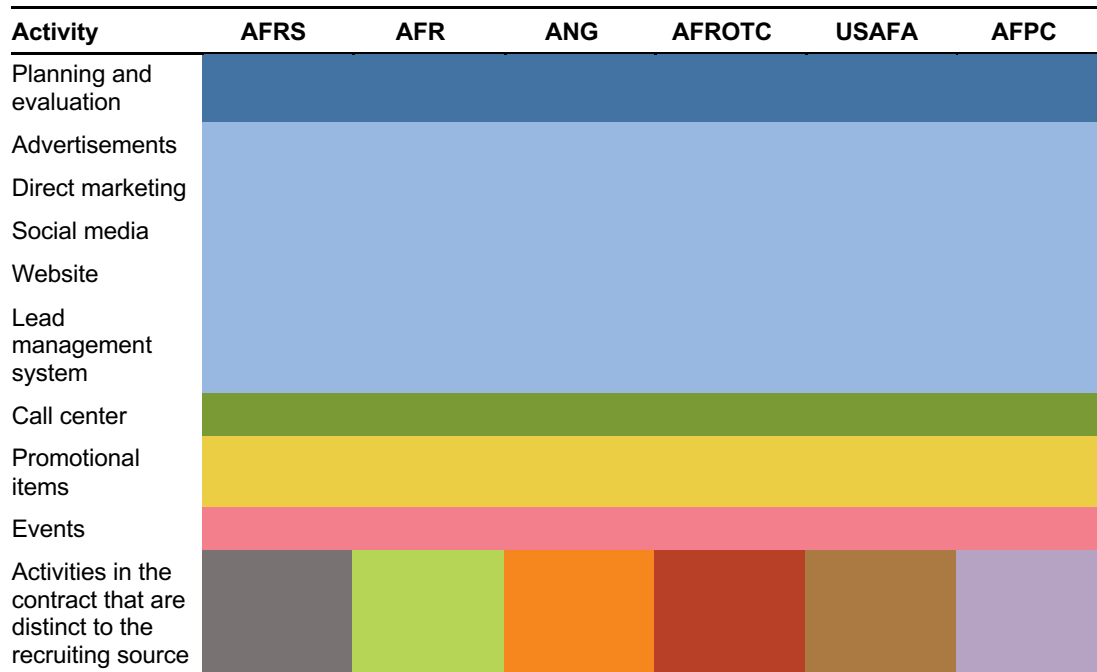
Marketing for a few of the recruiting sources (specifically, AFRS, including AFROTC and USAFA) is also horizontally integrated to a limited extent, as seen in the first three columns of Table 3.2, in which several of the rows for those three columns have the same color, signifying the same contractor. Here, too, we borrow terminology from manufacturing, where *horizontal integration* means that a company that performs one function acquires a company that is in the same segment. In our context, we use the term to mean that one contractor conducts a set of activities for multiple recruiting sources. The marketing contracts for AFROTC and USAFA are integrated with the contract that the active recruiting source has with GSD&M.

Interviewees reported that discussions in the Air Force have often focused on having a single marketing contract across all recruiting sources. In such a scenario, the single contractor would be responsible for all marketing activities for each of the recruiting sources. An argument in favor of a single marketing contract for all recruiting sources is that it would reduce the number of contracts, eliminate duplication of efforts, and ensure coordination across the recruiting sources. Elimination of duplication and ensuring coordination are worthy goals, but other interviewees pointed out that a single marketing contract is not necessary to accomplish these goals. The key thing, one interviewee said, is not the number of contracts but the coordination of effort among the contractors and, especially, among the clients (the recruiting sources).

Indeed, an example of coordination despite having different contractors can be seen within the marketing efforts of AFRS. As discussed earlier, AFRS has four separate contracts, with different contractors for advertising, call center, promotional items, and events (some events are handled by its advertising contractor, whereas conventions are handled by a different contractor). For AFRS, what enables the coordination is that all four contractors report to the same organization (AFRS), which does the overall planning and manages the multiple contracts.

Thus, coordination among marketing efforts could be accomplished without necessarily requiring everything to fall under a single contract. Still, there could be economies of scale to be gained in having, for instance, one advertising campaign instead of four, one builder of websites instead of four, one call center instead of four, and so on. If consolidation of contracts is desired by the Air Force, but a single contract is undesirable, an alternative could be to integrate marketing horizontally rather than vertically (as they are now). This method is illustrated in Figure 3.1, in which each colored band indicates a company conducting one or more activities for all of the recruiting sources, but no single company conducts all of the activities for any one, much less all, of the recruiting sources.

Figure 3.1. Illustration of How Contractors Could Be Assigned Under Horizontal Integration

Activity	AFRS	AFR	ANG	AFROTC	USAFA	AFPC
Planning and evaluation						
Advertisements						
Direct marketing						
Social media						
Website						
Lead management system						
Call center						
Promotional items						
Events						
Activities in the contract that are distinct to the recruiting source						

NOTE: The colors signify the different contractors that could conduct different marketing activities for each of the Air Force recruiting sources. In this illustration, a set of activities could be conducted by a single contractor across all the recruiting sources, but no single contractor would conduct every activity for every recruiting source.

In Figure 3.1, we notionally indicate which activities might be grouped together to be performed by the same contractor. Determining the right split was not an area we studied. Many other combinations could be chosen, and the choice would lie with the TFRC and would be brought to decisionmakers in the recruiting sources.

Concerns About Integration

Interviewees said they saw some advantages to integrating marketing. Their hope is that integration would result in increases in efficiency and effectiveness. Among interviewees who were more positive about integration, there was a recognition that it would not be possible to meet the Air Force's recruiting goals if the recruiting sources did not work with each other. Some of the smaller recruiting sources wanted to be able to leverage the resources of the larger recruiting sources, especially in areas in which they were short on staff and short on specialized expertise, such as in guiding marketing efforts or writing marketing contracts. Recruiting sources that lacked dedicated call centers had to answer telephone inquiries with their headquarters personnel, adding to the burden on their small staff.

However, interviewees also approached the idea of integrating marketing with some degree of concern. Concerns that were raised primarily related to the question of how to ensure that the different interests of the recruiting sources would be balanced. Although each recruiting source recognizes in concept that it is part of one Air Force, the recruiting sources also recognize that

they are distinct organizations, each with their own commanders and recruiting targets to meet. Smaller recruiting sources were therefore concerned that their needs would lose out compared with those of the largest recruiting source (active duty).

Desire to Retain at Least Some Distinctions Among Recruiting Entities

Representatives of the recruiting entities talked about having worked hard over the years to develop their distinct brand identities. For instance, the civilian service has worked to counteract the perception that service in the Air Force is synonymous with uniformed service, a distinction that can be critical in attracting the people needed to fill civilian positions. Although the civilian service does not shy from its connection with the Air Force, interviewees also observed that civilians are not shown in Air Force television advertisements. Similarly, AFROTC is conscious that cadets in USAFA uniforms are shown when cadets appear in marketing materials.

Distinct Needs Mean One Approach Will Not Fit All

Beyond brand identity, the recruiting sources have distinct needs, according to our interviews. The active recruiting source must recruit a large number of people but can recruit from anywhere in the country and relocate and train those people as needed. The reserve recruiting sources, AFR and ANG, are composed of people who typically serve part-time and are constrained to recruiting from areas near their units. Further, interviewees emphasized the recruitment of individuals with prior service experience, with AFR targeting around 70 percent and ANG targeting around 60 percent for the percentage of recruits with prior service experience. (By comparison, the active recruiting source targets only 1.6 percent for its prior-service recruiting figure.) USAFA and AFROTC seek high school students who are bound for college: USAFA is one school in particular, whereas AFROTC offers scholarships at a variety of institutions. AFROTC also recruits first- and second-year college students. The civilian service is even more distinctive. It does not recruit generally for people to join the civilian service with the idea of training them to fill needs as required, but rather seeks to hire individuals with the specific skills and degrees needed to fill open positions. Therefore, each recruiting source has distinct needs to meet and therefore does not want its needs to be lost in a combined marketing effort.

Concern About Competing with Other Air Force Recruiting Entities

Yet despite these distinctive needs, the various recruiting sources are concerned about competing with each other for qualified candidates. On the one hand, as one interviewee described, the full-time versus part-time nature of active duty versus reserve service would seem to offer distinct experiences that would appeal to different people, and geographic considerations would seem to limit the competition among reserve component units. On the other hand, another interviewee wondered whether a candidate who had not made a firm decision might be swayed to one form of service or another, depending on who they talked with first. There was concern

that the larger active recruiting source (with a larger requirement to fill) would keep leads for itself. Similarly, AFROTC and USAFA compete for top college students, and AFROTC is conscious of the prestige that USAFA carries.

The recruiting sources are thus caught in a bind. To the extent that their recruiting needs are different, they will be competing for the attention of the marketing effort to meet their specific needs. To the extent that their recruiting needs are similar, they will be competing for candidates. These concerns are exacerbated by the fear that whenever efforts are merged, the total amount of resources devoted to the combined effort ends up decreasing. Thus, smaller recruiting sources are concerned that their needs would be a lower priority and would be lost among the needs of the larger recruiting sources.

With the recruiting function of each recruiting source reporting to its respective command, there are bound to be competing needs. Balancing the competing needs of the different recruiting sources is not a problem that will be solved in marketing contracts per se. Contractors will carry out the requirements of the contract. Rather, it is a problem of governance: that is, of setting the priorities and allocating the resources to those priorities so that they are written into the contracts. Interviewees cautioned against governance by committee, which they considered to be too unwieldy. They also cautioned against being too mechanical in attempting to establish fairness, citing as an example a case in which there was a question about which recruiting source's name should appear first on a webpage: The proposed solution was to rotate the names of the recruiting sources on that webpage. The interviewees who cited this example viewed it as the opposite of a unified marketing message.

Implications

In this chapter, we described the marketing activities being performed on behalf of the various recruiting sources by their separate marketing contractors. Although there is some coordination among AFRS, ROTC, and USAFA, those three recruiting sources do not coordinate with the other three recruiting sources, which all do marketing separately. This stovepiping has been seen by some as beneficial because it has allowed each recruiting source to develop its own brand identity, but it has also resulted in an outward-facing image of the Air Force that reveals the lack of connection among the entities. To best serve the needs of the Air Force in total, a more-integrated approach to marketing for recruiting is needed. We discuss this further in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Website Marketing for Air Force Recruiting Reflects Separation and Lack of Coordination

Air Force websites play a critical role in Air Force marketing and recruiting. For potential recruits and job-seekers, Air Force websites are key sources of information about the Air Force. Despite the Air Force's progress toward Total Force integration, each recruiting source within the Total Force—active duty, Reserves, National Guard, and civilian—has its own distinct outward-facing web presence, as do USAFA and AFROTC. In this chapter, we examine the websites of the six Air Force recruiting sources to understand how the collection of sites work together to support recruiting for the Total Force.

First, we explored the extent to which the six recruiting sources' websites were clearly connected to one another in terms of links (via a single click) and branding (as represented by logos, design, and messaging). Second, we analyzed the extent to which gender, racial, and ethnic diversity of the recruiting sources was depicted in homepage image and video content, given that diversity and inclusion are important to meeting the HCA objectives discussed in Chapter 1.

We found that the vision of a Total Force is not clearly evident online, whether in connections among the sites or in unified branding. Additionally, although most websites' imagery depicted a wide variety of people, the ways in which some individuals were depicted came across as stereotypical, meaning that some individuals seemed to be unnecessarily boxed in to roles of lesser authority. We provide recommendations for improving website branding and imagery to better reflect the Total Force.

Methodology

To compare recruiting source websites, we conducted a content analysis[18] of the .com and .edu homepages of the websites for the U.S. Air Force, USAFA, AFCS, AFR, AFROTC, and ANG.[19] In addition to the websites reviewed, each recruiting source has a .mil webpage. We focused on the .com and .edu sites because these tend to be oriented toward public audiences.

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[18] *Content analysis* is a way to systematically identify and code topics or themes present in data; Michael Eid and Ed Diener, eds., *Handbook of Multimethod Measurement in Psychology*, Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2006. It is a common method used for quantitatively analyzing visual media; Paul J. Lavrakas, ed., *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2008.

[19] Websites examined include U.S. Air Force, homepage, undated a; U.S. Air Force Academy, homepage, undated; U.S. Air Force Civilian Services, homepage, undated; U.S. Air Force Reserve, homepage, undated; U.S. Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, homepage, undated; and Air National Guard, homepage, undated.

Notably, the presence of .mil and other recruiting source sites in search results is also a possible point of confusion for users who are seeking information about the Air Force.

We observed recruiting source websites periodically from May 29 through June 21, 2018. Images used in this report were captured on June 17, 2018. We developed a content analysis framework to compare elements of the sites, including imagery, information about recruiting sources, and aesthetics of the sites.[20] See Table 4.1 for the content analysis framework. Our observations focus on what was visible on the homepages or easily accessed within one click. Table 4.2 provides an overview of how the websites compare in terms of the extent to which they link to other websites, demonstrate differentiation from other recruiting source websites, and provide contact information that was easily accessible from the homepage and in terms of whether vignettes or imagery about recruiting source members were featured.

In the following section, we describe observations that cut across the sites, along with recommendations.

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[20] We used a qualitative content analysis approach, which is a systematic method for describing the meaning underlying a data set through the use of a "coding frame, generating category definitions, [and] segmenting the material into coding units"; Margrit Schreier, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in Uwe Flick, ed., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2014, p. 173. Like quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis is a method that is systematic and consistent (e.g., reliable and valid), rather than interpretative. Whereas quantitative content analysis focuses on primarily numerical results (e.g., frequency counts), qualitative content analysis allows for the analysis of context-dependent or latent meaning in a data set (Schreier, 2014).

Table 4.1. Description of Content Analysis Categories

Category	Variable	Description
Air Force symbols	Logo	Design of logo used on homepage.
Information about how the entity relates to other parts of the Air Force	Connection with other recruiting sources	Website provides hyperlinks to, or descriptions of, one or more other recruiting sources on homepage.
	Differentiation from other recruiting sources	Website provides information about how the recruiting source differs from, or relates to, other Air Force recruiting sources on homepage or within one clearly accessible click.
	Contact information	Website provides clearly accessible contact information for recruiting source representatives (or modes for contacting them), such as a phone number, chat function, or a link to another mode of contact.
	Vignettes about recruiting source members	Website provides vignettes about service member experiences in some mode (video, text, audio, etc.). These vignettes include day-in-the-life stories, interviews with members, and other narratives about what it is like to be part of a recruiting source.
Usability and aesthetics	Mobile device functionality	Site is easy to use on a mobile device (e.g., site uses responsive design, which makes sites easier to read on a mobile device, or hybrid design, which is the use of a separate mobile site).
	Contemporary aesthetic	Homepage uses contemporary design elements rather than outdated elements. A well-executed contemporary site tends to follow principles of good user design[a] and often uses some combination of a minimalist aesthetic and the creative use of images, such as large background images or stylized scrolling (e.g. parallax scrolling).[b] A site can look outdated if it includes elements associated with other periods of web design history, such as table-based designs.[c]
Representation of diversity	Gender diversity in imagery	Site depicts men and women in proportionate[d] numbers in images and video content.
	Racial and ethnic diversity in imagery	Homepage depicts ethnic and racial diversity among the people in images and video content. Individuals from various ethnic and racial backgrounds are represented proportionately.
	Representation of authority	Site depicts diversity of gender, race, and ethnicity among people in positions of authority in images and video content.
	Avoids gender stereotypes	Homepage content does not display gender stereotypes in images or video content.

NOTE: In Table 4.5, we address representation of diversity in more detail.

[a] Sheena Lyonnais, "Do the 10 Usability Heuristics Still Hold Up over Two Decades Later?" *Adobe Blog*, May 5, 2017; David Travis, "List of Home Page Usability Guidelines," Userfocus, undated.

[b] Alex Black, "14 Stunning Parallax Scrolling Websites," Creative Bloq, February 6, 2018; Myia Kelly, "A Look Back at 20+ Years of Website Design," *HubSpot Blog*, July 10, 2013.

[c] Kelly, 2013.

[d] By *proportionate*, we mean near parity of representation among different categories of interest (for example, 50 percent men and 50 percent women). This baseline assumption is not meant to be definitive or limiting (for example, the category *gender* often includes more categories than just "men" and "women"), but it provides a parsimonious, high-level approach to evaluating the visual representation on these websites. In addition, we do not mean to imply that proportionate refers either to the current proportions of a category within the Air Force or to what those proportions should be.

Table 4.2. Degree to Which Variables Were Present on Recruiting Source Websites

Variable	USAF	AFR	ANG	AFROTC	USAFA	AFPC
○←→● Connection	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Red
≠ Differentiation	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red
📞 Contact	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
👤 Vignettes	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
📱 Mobile device	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
▦ Aesthetic	Green	Green	Gray	Green	Green	Yellow

NOTE: Red indicates a lack of presence, yellow indicates a limited presence, and green indicates a relatively strong presence. Gray indicates that information was not available.[21]

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[21] The following observations explain the content of Table 4.2:

- **USAF.** For connection, AirForce.com linked to USAFA on the homepage but not to other recruiting sources. For differentiation, USAF did not offer information comparing or differentiating itself.
- **AFR.** For connection, AFR did not link to other recruiting sources. For differentiation, AFR did not offer information comparing or differentiating itself.
- **ANG.** At the time of this research, the ANG website seemed like it could be a work in progress because there was not as much content on the site as there was on the other Air Force websites. For connection, ANG did not link to other parts of the Air Force. For differentiation, ANG did not offer information comparing or differentiating itself. The site provided limited information, and contact information was there but was very hard to find. Unlike the other Air Force sites, which provided relatively detailed vignettes about airmen, the vignettes on this site were superficial and stylized; the emphasis of these vignettes was on their design aesthetic rather than on details about ANG members presented in a way that could be considered equivalent to the content on the other sites. The possibility that the website was incomplete meant that it was difficult to fully assess the aesthetic variable.
- **AFROTC.** For connection, AFROTC linked to USAFA but not to other recruiting sources. For differentiation, AFROTC provided a link to information about Air Force careers and defined some key terms, (specifically, *officer* versus *enlisted*), but there was no other information that addressed differentiation.
- **USAFA.** For connection, USAFA did not link to other recruiting sources. For differentiation, the USAFA website had more in common with other university websites in terms of style and substance than with the other Air Force websites; therefore, differentiation was considered somewhat mixed in that the website offered a great deal of information but did not touch on the different parts of the Air Force specifically.
- **AFPC.** For connection, AFPC did not link to other recruiting sources. For differentiation, AFPC did not offer information comparing or differentiating itself. For aesthetic, the heavy use of stock images and their prominent placement at the top of the site at the time of this research meant that although the

Lack of Consistency in Branding

The sites lacked consistent branding,[22] meaning that there was no consistency in the design of the recruiting source websites or among the visual cues available to the user. Differences in logos, website design, and usability mean that the sites failed to reflect a common Total Force brand image; instead, sites appeared to be distinct and almost unrelated to each other.

Logos

Regarding the logos used on the website homepages, there were a few similarities: USAF, AFR, and AFROTC use a version of the official Air Force symbol, and USAFA, AFCS, and AFROTC used blue in their font or symbol. For the most part, however, the logos used on each website demonstrated inconsistency across the following visual elements (see Table 4.3 for a depiction of logos from recruiting source websites):

- **Symbols.** Some logos used the Air Force symbol, some did not; AFCS used an adapted version. USAFA, AFCS, and ANG stood out for not using the standard version of the Air Force symbol.
- **Font types.** Font style differed across logos.
- **Font alignment.** Some logos were a single line, whereas others were multiple lines.
- **Font spacing.** Some logos, such as AFROTC's, used wide kerning rather than narrow kerning.
- **Color palettes.** Colors of background, fonts, and symbols differed.
- **Scale of text in relation to the symbol.** Some logos used small text and a large graphic, whereas others had text and graphics at a similar scale.

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website functioned well technically, the dominant images did not provide information or branding that seemed relevant to AFPC.

[22] *Branding* has a strong marketing connotation, but the term at its core is about the management of meaning. Branding can be defined as the attempt "to emphasize specific values to be associated with the organization and/or its products and services"; Dan Kärreman and Anna Rylander, "Managing Meaning Through Branding: The Case of a Consulting Firm," *Organization Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January 2008, p. 103. *Corporate branding* means aligning "strategic, vision, organizational culture, and stakeholder images"; Majken Schultz and Mary Jo Hatch, "The Cycles of Corporate Branding: The Case of the LEGO Company," *California Management Review*, Vol. 46, No. 1, Fall 2003, p. 9. Although the Air Force is not a corporation, the importance of conveying meaning to stakeholders is critical for recruitment.

Table 4.3. Logos on Homepages

Recruiting Source	Logo on Homepage
AFRS (recruiting source for active duty)	
AFR	
ANG	
AFROTC	
USAFA	
AFPC (recruiting source for AFCS)	

NOTE: The Air Force homepage is the entry point for active duty recruiting. In this report, we refer to AFRS as the recruiting source. Similarly, we refer to AFPC as the recruiting source for AFCS and its homepage.

Website Design

The six sites lack consistency in design elements, including layout, color scheme, font type and size, amount of information displayed on the homepage, and imagery. In Figure 4.1, we briefly describe each recruiting source website and provide screenshots captured on a laptop (as opposed to a mobile device[23]).

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[23] All of the websites used some form of responsive design, which allows websites to adapt existing content to fit on smaller mobile devices. Because of this, we did not do a separate analysis of mobile website design.

Figure 4.1. Visual Elements Incorporated in Air Force Recruiting Source Websites

U.S. Air Force: The U.S. Air Force homepage included a set of looping, one-second video clips showing airmen in action-oriented shots (in zero gravity, jumping from aircraft, flying an aircraft, a woman putting on her flight cap). Scrolling down the homepage, there were several opportunities to engage with the site, including by filling in a partially completed sentence that asks who the user is and what they are looking for, viewing vignettes about airmen in various careers and videos of airmen on the job, reading information about bases, and clicking a link to begin the application process. There was a heavy emphasis on images rather than text, which gave the site a contemporary and eye-catching feel.
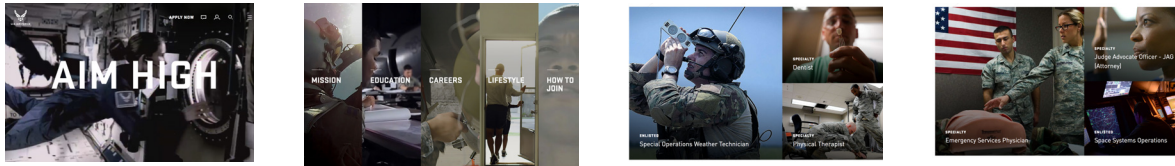
**AFR:** The AFR homepage displayed three rotating vignettes about Reserve airmen, including photos, a quote, and videos about each person. The site's main function appeared to be providing information about how to join. There were related links about where to serve, jobs, and benefits. In the upper-right corner of the site, there were clearly marked links to chat with a recruiter, open an application, or call a toll-free number.
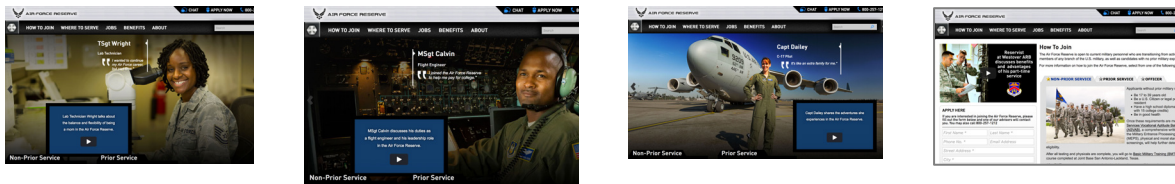
ANG: The ANG site appeared to be a work in progress.[24] The limited homepage content included looping, one-second clips (similar to the U.S. Air Force homepage) and some single-sentence vignettes about exemplar ANG members. The design of the site has a contemporary feel, but the branding differed significantly from other Air Force recruiting source sites, including the U.S. Air Force website, which is its closest analog.

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[24] At the time of our initial analysis in June 2018, the homepage only featured the looping GIFs and very limited vignettes (GIFs playing in the outline of a person's head with names and brief descriptions, such as "Carlos jumped 22' for a team medal"). As of September 20, 2018, the homepage appeared unchanged in several browsers; in Safari, some additional images with broken hyperlinks were visible. It is unclear what work is being done to this website.

AFROTC: The AFROTC homepage is very informative and features a variety of scrolldown images, including the use of parallax scrolling (when text and images move at different rates as the user scrolls down). The site features information about program requirements, scholarships, college life, careers in the Air Force, and other resources, including featured vignettes about AFROTC careers. Like USAFA, this site features a heavy mix of text-based information and relevant imagery to target a variety of stakeholders.
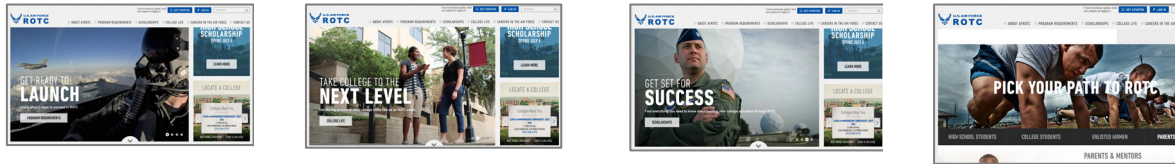
USAFA: The USAFA.edu site resembled other academic websites, with information readily available about academics, admissions, news, research, cadet life, institutional values ("Character"), and athletics, as well as links targeted at parents and other stakeholders. The homepage featured a video about a day in the life of a female cadet. The site had a contemporary, academic design in which images were used effectively. A great deal of informative, text-based information is also prominent on the homepage.

AFPC: The AFCS website stood out from the other recruiting source sites because of the prominent use of light blue overlaying (what appear to be) stock photos of mostly young adults. Rather than showing organizational members (employees, students, etc.) in realistic settings (as the other recruiting source sites did), the use of stock photos provided vague imagery of professionally dressed people but no information about what AFCS employees do in their roles, which was a consistent goal of images and video clips on the other recruiting source sites. The site provided access to news and information and text-based updates about some individual employees. The homepage links to an "about" page, a career page, and "find a job." The site heavily uses ambiguous stock photo images across pages.

Connections Across Websites

We explored the degree to which sites clearly linked to other recruiting sources within the Air Force. Clear hyperlinks to other recruiting sources are important in supporting the Total Force. When a potential recruit or job-seeker visits an Air Force website, they should be able to easily find information on (1) the multiple options for service, (2) what it is like to be part of the Air Force, and (3) how to apply. Although the collection of Air Force websites provided this information in pieces, the connections among sites were often difficult to find or were absent, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2. Links Among Air Force Websites
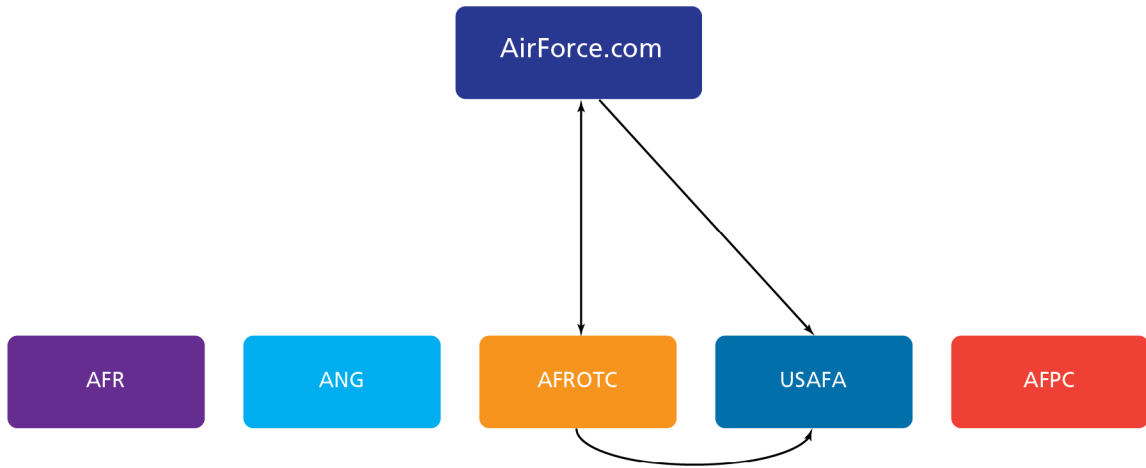
Notably, several sites failed to link to other Air Force recruiting sites from their respective homepages; among the few that did link to other sites, not all were reciprocal. Further, the links that did exist tended to be hard to find. Ideally, the main Air Force website, AirForce.com, should connect via readily accessible hyperlinks to each of the recruiting sources, and each of the recruiting sources should provide quickly accessible hyperlinks to one another, as represented in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Ideally, Air Force Websites Should Have Reciprocal Links
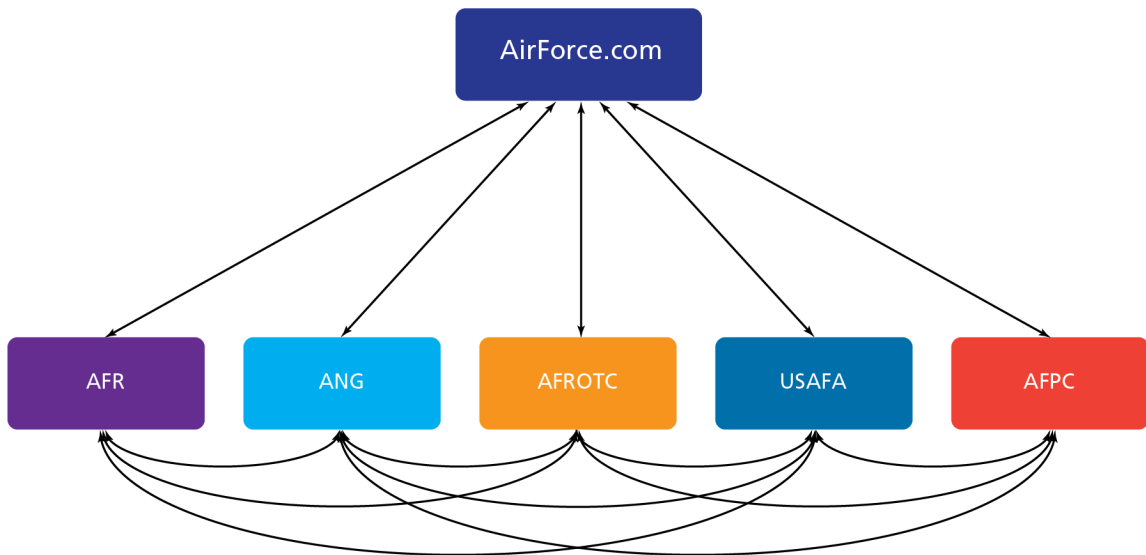
Representation of Diversity on Websites

The Air Force emphasizes the diversity of its ranks, and representing this institutional strength well in outward-facing media is extremely important.[25] In our analysis of recruiting source websites, we focused on depictions of diversity in terms of (1) the presence of individuals representing gender, racial, and ethnic diversity, (2) the degree to which power dynamics in images might privilege one type of person over another (e.g., if underrepresented individuals are frequently depicted in lower-status roles or positions), and (3) whether individuals are depicted in ways that reinforce gender stereotypes. Table 4.4 presents an overview of how recruiting source websites represented diversity variables.

The *gender diversity* and *racial and ethnic diversity* categories were determined using frequency counts of individuals in website imagery as a proxy for representation. We used a binary coding scheme to capture broad measures of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in photos and videos on websites by identifying perceived racial or ethnic ("white" or "racial or ethnic minority") and gender ("male" or "female") diversity.

The *gender authority, racial and ethnic authority*, and *avoids gender stereotypes* categories were determined using a contextual analysis of how individuals were depicted in terms of power and authority and gender stereotypes in website imagery. For example, to assess the authority categories, we analyzed how individuals were shown in apparent positions of authority in relation to other individuals in the imagery (e.g., senior airmen interacting with junior airmen). In terms of gender stereotypes, contextual analysis focused on how imagery depicted active versus passive roles (e.g., airmen doing activities versus posing statically) and how family versus job priorities or roles were reflected (e.g., whether both men and women discussed family topics). For example, it is possible for a website to have strong representation in terms of the presence of individuals in imagery, while repeatedly depicting minority groups in subordinate or stereotyped roles, which would be problematic.

Website content can be changed and updated relatively easily, so these observations do not mean that these Air Force websites *always* or *never* depict content in certain ways, nor do these observations attribute any intention (either positive or negative) underlying the choices made by the individuals tasked with publishing content on these websites. Rather, these observations provide an overview of the areas in which those who oversee and publish website content can consider their content choices going forward.

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[25] U.S. Air Force, "Air Force Diversity & Inclusion," webpage, undated b; Jay Silveria, "Air Force Academy Leader: Why Diversity?" CNN, February 14, 2018.

Table 4.4. Degree to Which Diversity Variables Are Represented in Recruiting Source Homepage Imagery

Variable	USAF	AFR	ANG	AFROTC	USAFA	AFPC
♀♂ Gender diversity	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow
Racial and ethnic diversity	Green	Green	Gray	Green	Green	Yellow
♀♂ Gender authority	Green	Green	Gray	Red	Green	Green
Racial and ethnic authority	Green	Green	Gray	Green	Green	Green
Avoids gender stereotypes	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green

NOTE: Red indicates a lack of presence or problematic representation, yellow indicates limited presence or mixed representation, and green indicates relatively strong presence or general equity of representation across categories. Gray indicates that information was not available.[26]

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[26] The following observations explain the green, yellow, and red indicators in Table 4.4, organized by recruiting source:

- **U.S. Air Force.** This site had several videos, vignettes, and images that portrayed diversity across the analytical categories.
- **AFR.** The homepage for AFR featured three rotating images that linked to video vignettes of an African American woman (a lab technician), a Caucasian woman (a captain and pilot), and an African American man (a flight engineer). The site demonstrated a strong example of *gender diversity* and *racial and ethnic diversity* in terms of presence, but in regard to *gender stereotypes*, the two women featured in the vignettes discussed raising their families while the man did not.
- **ANG.** In regard to *gender stereotypes*, the site featured some abstract vignettes. One described "Susan" as a mother of three (the text explained that Susan "takes care of 3 kids at home, she has 72 siblings protecting her on base." The male vignettes did not address family topics. In regard to *gender diversity*, although autoplay videos featured both men and women in uniform, the videos primarily featured men in active roles and women in posed roles (e.g., smiling).
- **AFROTC.** For *gender diversity*, only two of the 13 images visible on the homepage at the time of this analysis featured women. Both of those images featured women in civilian attire rather than in uniform. They contrasted with images of men in uniform, men preparing to run in an athletic event, and a male supervisor talking with a male subordinate. One positive portrayal of diversity in gender roles was the choice of an African American male as the image used for the "parents and mentors" section of the website instead of featuring a woman in a more stereotypical family role. For *gender authority*, women were not featured in visible roles of authority (e.g., appearing to lead a group, mentor another person, etc.).
- **USAFA.** This site's homepage video featured a female student's typical day. Images further down on the homepage showcased a mix of men and women, including a man and woman working together at a table, a man studying, and a woman in dress uniform. Women and people of color were depicted in equitable positions of authority.

Representation of Gender and Racially and Ethnically Diverse Imagery

As depicted in Table 4.4, the green indicators demonstrate many positive examples of visual representation across the websites. The red and yellow indicators represent areas that can be improved on these websites.

Most sites had relatively proportionate representations of images of people who were categorized as "racial or ethnic minority" and "white." The U.S. Air Force, USAFA, AFR, and AFROTC sites had strong representations of people of color. For example, the homepage for AFR featured three rotating images that linked to video vignettes. The members who were featured included an African American woman (a lab technician), a Caucasian woman (a captain and pilot), and an African American man (a flight engineer). These vignettes were a good example of the portrayal of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in featured imagery and video content, and they provided an informative glance at different careers within the different parts of the Air Force.

The USAFA website also showcased gender diversity well at the time of this analysis. A homepage video featured a female student's typical day. Images further down on the homepage showcased a mix of men and women, including a man and woman working together at a table, a man studying, and a woman in dress uniform. Women and people of color were depicted in equitable positions of authority.

Although AFPC visually represented a wide variety of men and women of color, the use of apparent stock photos rather than images of "real" individuals (particularly those connected to the specific part of the Air Force in some way) connoted "cosmetic diversity" rather than an authentic representation of organizational diversity. The Air Force emphasizes having a diverse and inclusive population of airmen, and the way the Air Force depicts diversity across its communication outlets affects the degree to which audiences see the organization's approach as authentic versus superficial. Because the other recruiting source sites had such a heavy emphasis on vignettes and images of members, AFPC's use of stock images made this website seem even less visually connected to the other recruiting sources or to a single Air Force brand identity.

Those who oversee and publish website content should continue building on the areas of relatively equitable representation (i.e., the green indicators in Table 4.4) and should consider how to improve areas in which better representation can be portrayed. For example, when considering content for websites, one can consider what would happen if the genders in an image or video were switched. Such a practice can help with identifying subtle stereotypes that can be easy to overlook.

- **AFPC.** For *gender diversity* and *racial and ethnic diversity,* the use of apparent stock photos rather than images of "real" individuals (particularly those connected to AFPC in some way) connoted "cosmetic diversity" rather than an authentic representation of organizational diversity; Ellen Ernst Kossek and Susan C. Zonia, "Assessing Diversity Climate: A Field Study of Reactions to Employer Efforts to Promote Diversity," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January 1993.

Gender Stereotypes

Imagery featuring the presence of underrepresented individuals alone does not mean the diversity of the specific parts of the Air Force is depicted as well as it could be. For example, despite the useful vignettes that depict racial and ethnic diversity among AFR members, the two women who were featured discussed raising their families, while the man did not. Similarly, the ANG site featured some abstract vignettes. One described "Susan" as a mother of three. The male vignettes did not feature information that addressed family topics. Describing how members handle both work and family life is important and can be viewed as a selling point for the Air Force, perhaps particularly for the Reserve and Guard. However, these examples exclusively link women to both family life and careers, while they link men only to their careers. This reinforces the gender stereotype that the challenge of balancing family and work falls on women but not on men.

For AFROTC, the homepage was very informative and featured several racially and ethnically diverse individuals. The site also was notable for a positive portrayal of diversity with the choice of an African American male as the image for the "parents and mentors" section of the website instead of featuring a woman in a more stereotypical family role. However, of the 14 images on the homepage, only two featured women. In one of these images, two women in civilian clothes talk with each other; in the other, a woman (labeled a high school student) smiles at the camera. These images contrast with images of men in uniform, men preparing to run in an athletic event, and a male supervisor talking with a male subordinate. This website provides an example of how, despite many positive characteristics (such as informative text, good design, and visual indicators of racial and ethnic diversity), the representation of power and authority within the images can still be made more equitable (men and women and people of color in proportionate positions of authority). For example, sites could feature an equivalent number of photos of diverse individuals in uniform, in poses that connote authority over others, and demonstrating work or action versus static poses.

It is worth noting that we focused on just two aspects of diversity: gender and race and ethnicity. However, diversity can include a variety of categories: age, disability, sexuality, religion, national or regional origin, professional or educational background, etc. Future efforts can and should assess these sites' content in greater depth to quantify or describe how different types of people are represented on the sites and take appropriate actions to improve representation if needed.

Recommendations

Although there is value in differentiating the recruiting sources to some extent, we found substantial differences in salient elements of branding, such as the logos (as shown in Table 4.3), website design style, and messaging. These inconsistencies, along with the limited

interconnectedness of the sites, communicate more about the individuality of each specific part of the Air Force than they do about the Total Force.

As a result, those seeking information about joining the Air Force could face difficulties finding important information about which part of the Air Force best matches their interests and qualifications. For example, a person who begins by exploring the site for USAFA, one of the most well-known parts of the Air Force, will not easily find information about the Reserves, Guard, AFROTC, active duty, or AFCS. The case is similar for the other Air Force websites, meaning that a person well suited for one part of the Air Force might not learn about it if they do not visit that website directly.

Additionally, content creators for recruiting source websites can take steps to ensure that imagery and other website content represent the Air Force's strong commitment to diversity by portraying different types of individuals in more-equitable ways.

When individuals seek out information about military careers, Air Force websites are sources of critical information early in the recruitment process. Therefore, we recommend the Air Force increase attention to unifying its web presence in the following ways:

1. Display the distinct identities and features of specific organizational units while simultaneously communicating how units link to a larger organization and mission.
2. All websites should be no more than one click away from each other, and hyperlinks should be easy to access so that a potential recruit or job-seeker is able to more easily find information on (1) the multiple options for service, (2) what it is like to be part of the Air Force, and (3) how to apply.
3. Provide (or, if possible, develop with input from the various Air Force recruiting sources) guidelines and design elements that the external marketing agencies (e.g., web design contractors) can use to present a minimum level of consistency in website design. For example, design elements might include a common logo, a color scheme, other graphic elements, or a suggested typeface and size. These types of design guidelines and design resources can be helpful for visually signaling to audiences a clearer connection across the recruiting sources. However, we recognize the value of each entity retaining its identity, and this is not a recommendation for complete consistency across all sites. Rather, it is for a minimal level that would convey cohesion among the various recruiting sources.
4. Provide consistent content across .mil pages and other (.com or .edu) websites. Use landing pages to orient users by clarifying the type of content one can find on the recruiting source's .mil page versus its .edu or .com website.
5. Websites should aim to provide equitable representations of diverse groups (for example, to better reflect and advertise gender, racial, and ethnic diversity). The designers could also consider other dimensions of diversity, such as age and disability (which could be relevant for civilian service), geographic locations, and culture. Equitable representation means proportionate representation of diverse individuals in general and of diverse individuals in positions of power or authority—for example, by having an equivalent number of images of diverse individuals in uniform, in poses that connote authority over others, and demonstrating work or action versus static poses.

6. Because website content is updated often, we recommend developing a checklist or steps that content creators can use to foster greater connectivity across the recruiting sources and to seek equitable imagery that highlights the diversity of the Air Force as an important strength. Examples of checklist categories reflect those used in our analysis, as follows:

   a. Do recruiting source websites have a minimum level of coordinated branding that demonstrates their connection to the Air Force in terms of logo and website design?
   b. Do recruiting sources provide links to, and information about, other recruiting sources to enable potential recruits and job-seekers to find information that is useful to them?
   c. On recruiting source website landing pages, will users find clear information about the information that can be found on the website as compared with that found on related .mil websites?
   d. Does website imagery and other content portray diverse individuals in an equitable and authentic way?
      i. Are different types of people represented in images, video, and other content?
      ii. Are different types of people treated in an equitable way in website content? In images, for example, who does and does not wear a uniform? Who appears to be in a position of authority over others?
      iii. Does website content avoid representing individuals in roles primarily according to their gender or race and ethnicity? For example, do only women discuss family life in online content?

Implications

There are many avenues for gaining a better understanding of the issues addressed in this chapter. First, understanding how Air Force recruiting sources manage their websites, and other external communications that target potential recruits, will be an informative way to develop practical steps for increasing coordination in communications content while allowing recruiting sources to maintain their identities. Future research can examine how other organizations can display the distinct identities and features of specific organizational units while communicating how units link to a larger organization and mission. Case studies on military, nonprofit, and/or commercial firms' websites and other online materials could be used to develop a set of best practices. Guidelines for additional information that can be featured on the websites and is relevant to potential recruits can be developed through surveys or interviews with users. For example, it is possible that information about how AFR and ANG compare would be very helpful to some potential recruits; this pool of people might be less interested in learning more about AFROTC or USAFA. Similarly, this pool of people might be interested in how AFR or ANG compares with other Reserve or Guard units in other branches of the military.

Chapter 5. The New England Recruiting Test Project

The New England Recruiting Test was conceived in spring 2016. The test was characterized as "prototype enhanced contact management and lead generation capabilities to support a Total Force collaborative approach to recruiting officers, enlisted and civilian candidates to maximize numbers, talents, and diversity within the New England applicant pool" in materials provided to RAND by the Air Force. In this chapter, we describe the objectives of the test and lessons from Phase 1.

In this chapter, we describe the objectives of the test, lessons from Phase 1 and Phase 2, and implications for integrating recruiting for the Total Force.

Overarching Objectives of the New England Recruiting Test

The New England test was a pilot effort to roll out this comprehensive recruiting strategy. Materials that described the New England test and that were provided to RAND by the Air Force listed three objectives:

- synchronizing recruiting efforts across the Total Force through increased collaboration among recruiting sources
- developing ways to recruit an optimal mix of agile and inclusive airmen across the Total Force
- taking advantage of big data analytics to improve targeting and microtargeting.

The region of focus, six states in New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine), was selected because the region has historically produced fewer recruits than other regions relative to the size of its eligible population.

The test was planned to consist of three phases:

- **Phase 1.** Officer recruiting.
- **Phase 2.** Enlisted recruiting.
- **Phase 3.** Civilian recruiting.

Focus of Phase 1

In Phase 1, the following changes were tested.

A new way of identifying national leads was used.[27] The AFRS marketing contractor, GSD&M, tested a new way of identifying national leads to be added into AFRISS-TF that would be made available to Air Force enlisted accession recruiters. According to information shared by

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[27] This change pertained only to national leads. During the New England test, recruiters continued to develop leads locally using the same practices they had used previously, such as through school visits and local events.

AFRS and GSD&M, the leads in Phase 1 were identified from a list of 354,000 names of potentially eligible individuals in the region. Two PRIZM[28] groups were identified according to high- and low-propensity population clusters. The targeted groups for this type of lead included only females, African American males, and Hispanic males, all residing in the New England region.

In the traditional system, GSD&M would identify a potential lead, communicate with the lead, and develop and nurture the lead prior to moving the lead information into AFRISS-TF. In Phase 1, GSD&M identified a potential lead and sent that person an email with a link in it; if the potential lead clicked on the link in the email, GSD&M moved that lead into AFRISS-TF. Therefore, the essential difference was that the potential lead in the Phase 1 test received neither development nor nurturing before being moved into AFRISS-TF.

Using AFRISS-TF to enable lead-sharing among recruiting sources. For the New England test, all participants—AFRS, ANG, AFR, AFROTC, USAFA, and AFPC—were given access to AFRISS-TF for the purpose of sharing leads. Each participating organization was given a folder in AFRISS-TF. AFRS, ANG, and AFR had already been using AFRISS-TF. If a recruiter encountered a lead who was not suitable for that recruiter's specific part of the Air Force but who potentially was suited to another part of the Air Force, the recruiter was to share the lead with the appropriate recruiting source of the Air Force. No specific notification that a lead had been placed into a folder was provided. Recruiters were expected to regularly check their folders for new leads.

Lessons from Phase 1

As the first phase in the test, Phase 1 was necessarily a learning phase. Important lessons from this phase included the following.

The application of a particular new approach to using data analytics in Phase 1 was not effective. Traditionally, once a national lead was identified by the marketing firm (GSD&M), the lead would be nurtured until they indicated an interest in the Air Force. At that point, the lead would be entered into AFRISS-TF for a recruiter to contact. In this part of the New England test, GSD&M identified lists of prospects according to PRIZM segments that included the kinds of individuals who are already in the Air Force and used the resulting lists to send recruiting emails. If the recipient simply opened the email and clicked on a link within it, the recipient's contact information was passed into AFRISS-TF as a lead. Thus, no nurturing of these national leads occurred prior to them being added to AFRISS-TF in the New England test. This approach to generating national leads was not effective: Recruiters noted that contacting these leads was like a cold call in which the lead had no idea why they were being contacted by an Air Force

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[28] PRIZM Premier, developed by Claritas, Inc. (formerly a part of the Neilsen Company), divides U.S. consumers into 68 segments for behavioral marketing. More information is available at Claritas, "Prizm Premier," webpage, undated.

recruiter. According to the results of this test, AFRS concluded that the use of data analytics alone to identify someone who would theoretically be receptive to contact by an Air Force recruiter did not work as well as traditional marketing tactics, which include personal engagement to raise the prospect's interest level. However, this conclusion does not mean that data analytics are broadly ineffective for recruiting, only that the specific approach tried during this three-month period was ineffective.

Lead-sharing in Phase 1 produced limited results, but participants valued collaboration. In Phase 1, recruiters from across the Total Force were asked to collaborate by sharing leads with one another. Although the lead-sharing in this phase produced few accessions or hires, all participants expressed appreciation for the collaboration and increased communication with their counterparts. The limited results should not be interpreted to mean that lead-sharing will never be productive. It is possible that the results could simply reflect the drawbacks of the microtargeting method that was tried in Phase 1, the limitations of AFRISS-TF, and the newness of the practice of lead-sharing. A more rigorous design will be needed to better understand the results of lead-sharing.

The use of AFRISS-TF was limiting. Participants noted that AFRISS-TF was not agile enough, and it was limiting to require recruiters to use a Common Access Card–enabled system to retrieve lead data. Further, participants noted that changes to AFRISS-TF, such as adding data fields that could be useful for the test, were not easily made and could take several weeks. However, even though participants acknowledged the limitations of their data systems and wished for compatibility among the various systems in use, they all said that they did not want to be made to give up their systems in favor of a single, enterprisewide system.

Participants expressed interest in an integrated call center as one way to reduce stovepiping and improve Total Force recruiting. The lack of an integrated call center means that there is no single number that an individual can call to explore the complete set of opportunities that the Air Force offers. Participants at the February 22–23, 2017, Phase 1 update meeting agreed that an integrated call center is desirable.

Recruiters from different recruiting entities needed more information about one another's requirements. The requirements to be considered a qualified lead differ from one recruiting source to another, and recruiters expressed the desire to know more about one another's needs in recruiting so they would be better prepared to share leads effectively.

Subsequent phases of the test will require clearer guidance to participants for desired actions, data collection, and reporting. As might be expected in the initial phase of a pilot effort, the participants did not all understand what was expected during the test, and the data provided by participants were inconsistent or limited as a result. Subsequent phases of the test should include clear instructions to participants for the desired actions, data collection, and reporting to make the results of the next phases as informative as possible.

An important organizational gap exists: There is no single Air Force–wide entity with responsibility for recruiting across the Total Force. Although they did not suggest that a

single Air Force–wide entity should be created to oversee Total Force recruiting, representatives of the various recruiting sources noted that (1) competition exists among the recruiting sources for recruits, (2) changes that affect all or several recruiting sources require the expenditure of time and resources to reach a shared decision, (3) the use of multiple marketing agencies creates some redundancies, and (4) separate applicant tracking and recordkeeping data systems create difficulties with collaborating across recruiting sources.

Phase 2 Activities

Although Phase 1 was launched with some planning and guidelines for participants, Phase 2 did not receive the same degree of detailed planning. There was limited oversight of Phase 2's execution. Some of the resulting difficulty might have been related to staff turnover in the office of SAF/MRM and the various recruiting entities. There was also limited time available to maintain ongoing communication and engagement between the staff members of the office of SAF/MRM and participants. Consequently, this phase of the test was not clearly defined to the participants, and many had little understanding of its purpose and goals. Next, we describe the activities that took place during this phase.

Modifications to Lead Identification and Development

Phase 2 was intended to focus on enlisted accessions in the New England region and officially began on April 4, 2018. Like Phase 1, the focus was on the development of leads by the AFRS marketing agency and on lead-sharing across the Air Force recruiting sources.

To provide leads that would fit the needs of the active duty force, ANG, AFR, and the civilian workforce, AFRS provided lists of individuals that it obtained from the Department of Defense Joint Advertising, Marketing, Research and Studies program (High School Master File [$N = 6,269,836$], Selective Service [$N = 1,623,510$], and Prior Service [$N = 113,946$]). Targeted display[29] and paid social media methods were used to develop leads to provide to recruiters.

Figure 5.1 depicts the flow of activities in Phase 2, beginning with lists of names and ending with leads provided to recruiters. In addition, new Total Force creative elements were developed, including two landing pages on airforce.com: one for those without prior service and one for prior-service individuals. As part of Step 7 in Figure 5.1 (creating and executing the communication strategy), new social media posts, custom emails, online videos, images, and banners were also developed and used.

Two major modifications were made to the normal practice followed by GSD&M when identifying and passing leads to AFRS prior to the start of Phase 2. First, the inclusion of target recruiting populations for ANG, AFR, and AFPC (for civilian hiring) meant that GSD&M began

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[29] *Targeted display* advertising is a form of digital advertising that displays banner ads on mobile and computer websites. The banner ads are targeted to be relevant to the individual user according to such factors as location, demographic characteristics, and web-browsing behavior.

with a wider variety of lists than it would have if it only focused on active duty recruiting (see Step 1 in Figure 5.1). This variety is caused by these additional recruiting sources focusing on different audiences than active duty recruiting. For example, ANG and AFR focus more heavily on individuals who have prior military service. Also, the past practice for GSD&M was to have a subcontractor score the leads just prior to passing them to AFRS.[30] In Phase 2 of the New England Recruiting Test, lead scoring was done earlier in the process (see Step 3 in Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Phase 2 Lead Identification and Communication Strategy
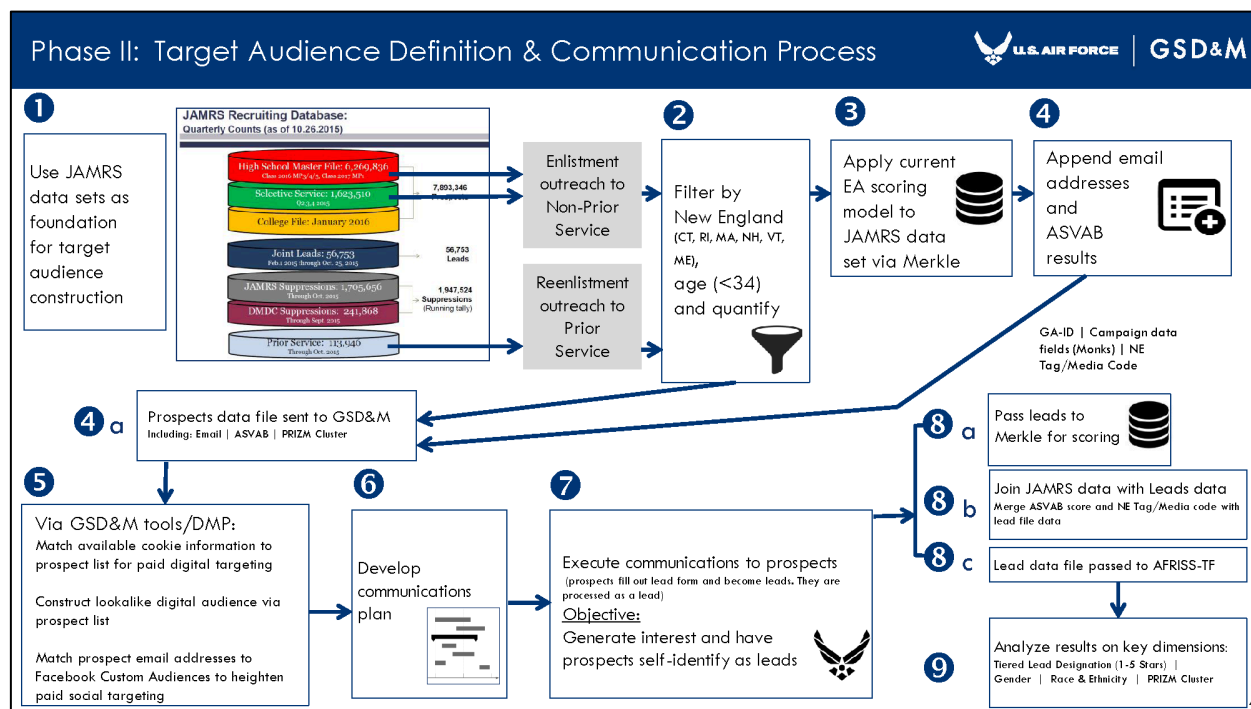
SOURCE: April 4, 2018, briefing by GSD&M to AFRS.
NOTE: DMP = data management plan; JAMRS = Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies.

Lead Transfer Training

In Phase 1, AFRISS-TF was modified to facilitate the transfer of leads among recruiters from all of the recruiting sources. One shortfall identified in Phase 1 was that recruiters from different recruiting sources are unfamiliar with each other's requirements and target markets and thus did not have a clear understanding of which leads to transfer to another recruiting entity. As we have noted previously, ANG and AFR rely more heavily on recruiting prior-service personnel and individuals within a local radius of ANG or AFR locations. As a result, if someone is interested in serving in the Air Force but wants to remain close to their home, they are more likely to be a

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[30] The scoring algorithm resulted in one to five stars and was devised to indicate the likelihood that an individual would join the Air Force.

better target for being recruited into ANG or AFR than for active duty. In addition, ANG and AFR bases might have distinct requirements for career fields in different proportions than Air Force active duty career field needs writ large.

To address these issues, a one-day training session was hosted at Hanscom Air Force Base in April 2018 that included both the details of how to transfer a lead in AFRISS-TF and discussions of the recruiting targets and qualifications that are the focus of each recruiting source.

Total Force Recruiting Council

The representatives of the recruiting sources who had been attending meetings associated with the initial New England Recruiting Test came to recognize that if progress were to be made toward integrated Air Force recruiting, a more formal coordinating and decisionmaking body was required. Among the reasons for this need was a recognition that efforts at creating an integrated recruiting environment for the Air Force had to occur without disrupting the critically important work of ongoing recruiting by any of the recruiting sources. The TFRC was formed in June 2017 with working group members from each of the recruiting sources. The primary goal of the TFRC is to "promote increased communication and identify efficiencies and synergies among recruiting programs."[31] However, the TFRC did not originally include working group members from USAFA, AFROTC, or AFPC (civilians) in its structure. TFRC was expanded to include these organizations in June 2018.

The TFRC also recognized the need for personnel to actually carry out the work to bring integrated recruiting into reality and created a staffing plan for an integration cell to be colocated with AFRS at Randolph Air Force Base. The integration cell would consist of 15 permanent positions tasked with making progress on the following elements, foreseen as necessary for integrated recruiting:

- full integration of technical training for recruiters from all recruiting sources
- development of an integrated marketing and advertising strategy
- development of courses of action for an integrated call center
- test of a new CRM system
- study of data analytics for integrated recruiting.

As of this writing, three full-time staff were already at work in the integration cell, with plans to fill out the remainder of the integration cell staff.

Lessons from Phase 2

The following lessons emerged from Phase 2.

Continuity of leadership staff is critical for the success of projects that span multiple years and phases. The lead staffer who was responsible for coordinating the New England

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[31] AFI 36-1901, 2017, p. 5.

Recruiting Test moved to another position after Phase 1 was completed and prior to Phase 2 gaining momentum. Although another staff member was temporarily assigned to coordinate Phase 2, some responsibilities were not transferred until a permanent hire was made. It is possible that staff turnover in the office that spearheaded and coordinated the New England test slowed progress in Phase 2.

The rotational nature of military personnel assignments (in this case, the assignments of recruiters and those above them) means that more-frequent and more-detailed communication is necessary. In addition to the staff turnover noted above, many individuals in the several Air Force recruiting sources joined the New England test in midstream. Greater confusion among participants ensued as a result, and overall progress was slowed by the need to bring new participants up to speed and by the occasional failure to do so in a timely manner.

An oversight and coordinating committee (TFRC) proved valuable in achieving progress toward integrating Air Force recruiting. Large meetings with several individuals from each of the recruiting sources were beneficial in creating a shared vision for integrated recruiting. A smaller group of representatives, the TFRC, carried out some of the detailed planning, decisionmaking, and implementation steps to move forward.

Implications

The New England Recruiting Test was conceived as a way to pilot test changes to the way the Air Force uses data for recruiting and to the way the various recruiting sources coordinate and share recruiting leads with one another. Although these two phases of the test did not result in large increases in numbers of recruits, they did achieve other important results. First, the numerous meetings that brought stakeholders from the recruiting sources together appear to have facilitated collaboration. Second, we observed increased communication among the stakeholders over the course of the test and increased openness to practices associated with integrating marketing. Although we cannot say for certain, it is possible that the progress of the TFRC thus far might have been facilitated by the communication that took place because of the New England test.

The New England test piloted organizational changes on a small scale. Moving forward, integrating recruiting for the Total Force will require careful and deliberate planning for organizational change on a much larger scale. Those efforts will need to include elements of any organizational change, such as clear articulation of a strategic vision, a guiding coalition, removal of organizational barriers, and finding ways to achieve measurable goals, among other things. The lessons from the New England test highlight some of what the Air Force will need to do as it continues to integrate recruiting.

Chapter 6. What Can the Air Force Learn from Private Sector Data-Enabled Recruiting?

In the preceding chapters, we examined the current state of certain aspects of Air Force recruiting. In this chapter, we look outside the Air Force at private sector companies with similar characteristics or needs to derive lessons for Air Force recruiting. It is important to note that private sector recruiting and hiring practices continue to change rapidly, as do the resources and methods they use. Therefore, this chapter provides a snapshot of practices at the time this study was conducted, which are likely to have changed even by the time of publication of this report. Many of the references and links in this chapter are likely to have changed by the time of publication. Thus, the key takeaway is not in the details of those practices but in the differences that existed between Air Force recruiting practices and those in the private sector when this report was written.[32]

The availability of big data, advancement in artificial intelligence (AI), the development of expansive information technology (IT) infrastructure, and increased computing power have transformed business strategies and practices in the 21st century.[33] These new business practices use data and analytics differently compared with traditional business practices. Organizations have used data and analytics to assist decisionmakers and evaluate the impact of the decisions they make to improve their performance for several decades.[34] Now, an increasing number of organizations use big data and analytics to enable employees to perform their tasks in the frontline operation. As the employees are performing their tasks, the organizations continue to collect new data from a variety of sources (including their employees), update the analytics, and deploy the operational instructions to the employees in near–real time. The transformation, fueled by big data and AI, is largest in the areas of marketing and recruiting.[35] These new data-enabled marketing and recruiting practices potentially are more efficient and effective because the organizations can target a segment of the population with tailored messages that are optimized to resonate with the audience.

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[32] The companies referred to in this chapter and the software systems and methods they were using for recruiting and hiring during the course of this project may have changed since this research was completed.

[33] Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, "Big Data: The Management Revolution," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 90, No. 10, October 2012.

[34] Thomas H. Davenport and Jeanne G. Harris, *Competing on Analytics: The New Science of Winning*, updated ed., Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.

[35] Michael Chui, James Manyika, Mehdi Miremadi, Nicolaus Henke, Rita Chung, Pieter Nel, and Sankalp Malhotra, *Notes from the AI Frontier: Applications and Value of Deep Learning*, Washington, D.C.: McKinsey Global Institute, April 2018.

Next, we describe how marketing and recruiting has changed in the private sector and what lessons or insights these changes could provide for the Air Force. Additionally, we discuss issues the Air Force will face in implementing similar changes to its marketing and recruiting practices.

Case Studies: Practices at Companies with Attributes Similar to the Air Force

The companies we describe here were among those on the leading edge of using technology in recruiting and of emphasizing a positive, high-touch, streamlined candidate experience. We present these case studies not by company but instead in categories that directly speak to how these organizations were addressing recruiting challenges also faced by the Air Force.

Criteria for Selection

To select companies to examine, we considered what types of organizations have attributes of interest to the Air Force in its implementation of Total Force recruiting. We made a list of these characteristics and then considered a multitude of companies that share these attributes before determining which of these companies could provide the most valuable insight. The criteria are presented in Table 6.1.

The companies selected for detailed analysis shared at least one of the identified criteria. Our examination of these companies showed they also were either undergoing or had recently undergone a substantive change in how they approached recruiting from a technological perspective. Moreover, these changes were further evaluated to enhance the effectiveness of their overall recruiting strategy in a way that could be informative for the Air Force. The companies were Amazon, AT&T, FedEx Ground, McDonald's, and Texas Roadhouse.

Table 6.1 Companies' Attributes in Common with the Air Force

Attribute	Amazon	AT&T	FedEx Ground	McDonald's	Texas Roadhouse
Hires same population (including entry level)	•	•	•	•	•
Hires diverse skill set	•	•			
Provides entry-level training	•	•		•	
Multiple product offerings and/or business units	•	•			
Large or multinational	•	•	•	•	•
Legacy organization		•		•	

Case Study Approach

We employed multiple methods to construct these case studies. Methods included online research, review of publicly released corporate documents, online videos and tutorials, and interviews. Because these were public companies that generated news, business, and other media coverage, our online investigation yielded a large amount of information related to their hiring processes and use of technology in recruiting.

In addition to the literature on these companies, there were many publicly available online videos, including organization testimonials and executive interviews. We found video content related to corporate hiring processes, job opportunities and expectations, and job applications. This content allowed for a deeper understanding of how companies are using technology not just in managing and tracking applications but also in managing and creating an entire applicant experience. Moreover, online videos related to the recruiting software platforms used by these companies demonstrate their capabilities and functionalities, as they pertain to both the recruiter using the platform and the prospective candidates the recruiter engages with.

When possible, we also conducted interviews with representatives from our case study organizations to supplement the information gathered through other means. Table 6.2 identifies the list of interviews conducted and organizations contacted for this study.

Table 6.2. Interviews Completed for Case Studies

Company	Interviews
FedEx Ground	Yes
Amazon	Contacted and agreed to review
AT&T	Yes
McDonald's	Contacted
Texas Roadhouse	Contacted and agreed to review

Although we did not conduct interviews with Amazon or Texas Roadhouse, representatives from both companies agreed to review our analysis to ensure accuracy.

Organizations and Analytic Focus of the Case Studies

As described above, we selected private sector companies that had characteristics in common with the Air Force, even though each one's business focus was very different from that of a military service. Table 6.3 lists the organizations included in the case studies and the characteristic that we focused on. These characteristics, which presented challenges to these private sector organizations and to the Air Force, drove the analytic focus.

Table 6.3. Organizations Studied and Their Relevant Recruiting Challenges

Company	Relevant Recruiting Challenge
Amazon	Large and diverse organization competing for technical talent
AT&T	Integrating hiring and lead-sharing across units
FedEx Ground	National strategy for localized recruiting
McDonald's	Hiring entry-level youth
Texas Roadhouse	Hiring entry-level youth

Large and Diverse Hiring Needs at Amazon

At the time of this study, Amazon was a multibillion-dollar international company involved with many product and service markets. These markets include their flagship online retail exchange with Prime membership; online video content delivery platform; hardware and software, such as Alexa, Fire TV Stick, and Kindle; grocery chain Whole Foods; and Amazon Web Services, which provided cloud computing and storage. At the time, Amazon employed approximately 566,000 full-time and part-time workers, along with independent contractors and temporary workers.[36] Its large employment numbers were a result of substantial growth over the past few years. Its number of employees grew almost 70 percent in 2017 because of its acquisition of Whole Foods and other companies, along with strong hiring internally.[37]

Amazon had large and diverse hiring needs, from staffing its fulfillment centers across the country to onboarding programmers and software developers to maintain and grow its lines of products and services. The technology company was open about its recruiting and talent acquisition strategy, posting online content related to its hiring strategy and application

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[36] Julie Bort, "Amazon Now Employs a Whopping 542,000 People and Plans to Hire Thousands More," *Business Insider*, October 26, 2017.

[37] Matt Day, "Amazon's Employee Count Declines for First Time Since 2009," *Seattle Times*, April 26, 2018.

processes.[38] The company also designed an online experience intended to attract, engage, and inform prospective applicants about the variety of job opportunities at Amazon, including video testimonials. Other literature showed that Amazon invested significantly in cultivating a strong applicant pool for its high-skill positions, both through prominent branding and outreach and through engaging big data analysis to identify and target high-quality talent.

Amazon was recruiting technology-capable workers through its data-enabled CRM and applicant tracking system (ATS) platforms. The company had separate platforms for each capability, building its own CRM for sales management. Second, at the time this research was undertaken, Amazon was using iCIMS for applicant tracking.[39] The platforms were distinct but with some integration. Amazon also used its CRM as a data source for identifying potential candidates for jobs.[40] Second, Amazon was employing an advanced ATS that allowed for comprehensive functionality among its recruiters. The company was using iCIMS, a commercial recruiting software platform, for all of its recruiting, screening, tracking, and hiring. It was designed to integrate with other platforms the company might use—for example, accounting and payroll and a CRM.[41]

Literature on iCIMS's website at the time of this study also noted that the platform offered many functionalities to help recruiters perform their job more effectively—features that were not available in AFRISS-TF. For example, the iCIMS metrics dashboard could be described as providing recruiters with a variety of information related to their postings and applicants that could be tracked over time. Recruiters could use this dashboard to monitor postings, control advertising, track applicant numbers and backgrounds, and conduct initial screenings.

Integrated Hiring and Lead-Sharing at AT&T

AT&T is a large telecommunications company that, at the time of this study, was continuing to grow and evolve into new markets. Its services included satellite television, mobile phone and internet service, and fixed broadband service. The company had a diverse workforce of more than 270,000 employees, from high-skill engineers and computer programmers to maintenance technicians and retail sales associates.[42]

AT&T was hiring approximately 30,000 people annually across business units, depending on need and market demand. A significant portion (about half) of hires were entry level and mid–

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[38] See, for example, Inside Amazon Videos, "Amazon Student Programs: Talent Acquisition Development Program," video, YouTube, May 5, 2017; and Indeed, "Interview With Susan Harker, VP of Global Talent Acquisition at Amazon," video, YouTube, September 15, 2015.

[39] "An Applicant Tracking System Uncovered: iCIMS," *Jobscan Blog*, November 18, 2015.

[40] Rob Binns, "Amazon CRM Case Study," Expert Market, undated; Elyse Mayer, "Be Better in Recruitment: Do as Amazon Does," *SmashFly Blog*, July 23, 2015.

[41] iCIMS, "Applicant Tracking with iCIMS Recruit," webpage, undated.

[42] AT&T, "2Q 2018 AT&T by the Numbers," fact sheet, 2018.

entry level. This portion included customer service representatives, service technicians, repairers, and retail associates. The company's high-skill workers were primarily technical: They included engineers, data scientists, marketing and human resources, and app developers.

The company spent years integrating technology into its recruiting practices.[43] As the company diversified and took on more business lines, recruiting became siloed because each unit had its own platform and process. This limited the effective allocation of talent and resulted in inefficiencies in the hiring process. Metrics showed attrition in the share of applicants completing applications and long periods between posting and filling vacancies. The company embarked on a concerted effort to revamp its hiring processes to make them more streamlined and more integrated, allowing it to leverage the skills of all applicants and raise application completion rates.

As AT&T acquired new business units, it continued to integrate the new business units into a single recruiting technology. To execute this integration, AT&T had to decide what it wanted its ATS platform at the time (Oracle's Taleo) to do and customize it accordingly. The ability to maneuver the facets of an ATS platform, such as Taleo, meant that the IT team had to work closely with human resources to set it up properly. Such large-scale migrations are not always easy: For AT&T, it required extensive and careful programming of Taleo. The ability to work across different business units was not an intuitive feature of Taleo or other ATS platforms, but the company dedicated a team of developers internally to make it happen.

Ultimately, AT&T talent acquisition planners wanted applicants to be able to apply to postings across units, and they wanted recruiters across units to share leads. For example, most engineering positions had a similar basic set of requirements but, depending on the unit and position, had additional requirements that could be more specific. If an applicant applied who could be a better fit in another unit, AT&T used its ATS platform to enable recruiters to refer the candidate to a recruiter in the other unit.

To facilitate this process, the job application was very similar across skill sets, with add-ons for specific skill sets. This way, everyone used the same application, which could be stored for future search and consideration. If the applicant was not selected for a particular vacancy, the recruiter could move the applicant into an occupational pipeline for that occupational category. To ensure recruiters got the most from these capabilities, they were generally cross-trained on the hiring needs across units. They could then work with candidates in any division, since everyone had the same base application and was on the same system.

Another interesting feature of AT&T's approach was its use of data mining and machine learning for identification of potential prospects. Because of concerns about bias, and the general need to actively search for applicants, the focus of these efforts was on hard-to-fill locations where the company did not have a sufficient talent pool. Marketing and outreach efforts were

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[43] "Infographic: How AT&T Transformed the Job Application Process and Saved $1M," *Indeed Blog*, July 14, 2016.

also primarily focused only on these hard-to-fill locations. The company also continued to experiment with other applications of AI in recruiting, including the use of chatbots.

A key takeaway was that AT&T did not get to this level of technological integration in recruiting without investment. This effort required extensive planning, commitment from management, and dedicated resources.

A National Strategy for Localized Recruiting at FedEx

FedEx Ground is a ground shipping company that operates across the United States and Canada with strategies tailored to local contexts. (It is part of FedEx but operated as an entirely separate subsidiary.) At the time of this study, it employed 95,000 workers across its locations, of which 75,000 were package handlers (drivers were contractors and were not considered FedEx employees). Because of the nature of the work, employee demographic, and seasonal hiring needs, turnover was high, at about 50 percent annually. As a result, the company was always actively recruiting. Annually, FedEx Ground received more than 300,000 applications and during its peak season alone hired about 50,000 employees.

Over the past few years, technology helped the company make large improvements in meeting its hiring needs. The average time to hire and onboard was cut in half by automating processes where possible and leveraging technology to get better use out of its online resume banks. For example, its system automates applicant notifications, interview scheduling, and announcements of new opportunities, all of which can be sent via email or text.

FedEx Ground used IBM's Kenexa for its ATS platform, which was among the largest ATS providers in the United States, along with Taleo and iCIMS.[44] The platform was a national platform, although applicants applied for specific locations, and hiring was then coordinated locally using the system. FedEx Ground also works with third-party vendors to make its application process mobile friendly (also referred to as *mobile optimization*), which was a top priority for attracting and retaining potential applicants, given the company's target demographic. Part of the applicant experience was that they could apply from any device connected to the internet.

FedEx Ground also leveraged technology in recruiting in other ways. For example, it engaged in some data mining for candidates, primarily through the resumes it collected in its ATS. For high-skill and headquarters positions, the company also created online talent communities to stay engaged even if there was not a job for a potential recruit at that time. Such online talent communities allowed recruiters to have a bank of potential applicants and provide a more proactive way to reach out. While waiting for a potential opening, prospective candidates could use the community as a forum for discussion about jobs. The online communities were a relatively new mechanism for recruiting that launched during the period of 2017–2018. FedEx

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[44] Phil Strazulla, "The Best Around: The Top 100 Applicant Tracking Systems in Talent Today," Recruiting Daily, April 26, 2017.

Ground has several communities, including one just for veterans. The company also actively expanded its brand and recognition outside of its website through other career sites, such as LinkedIn.

Similar to recruiting, marketing was also coordinated nationally but implemented at the local level. FedEx Ground's national headquarters in Pittsburgh was responsible for monitoring, tracking, and oversight of recruiting and marketing. In addition, all marketing campaigns were conducted through the company's brand group in Memphis.

Finally, to further leverage technology, FedEx Ground stood up a corporate-level talent acquisition unit that worked to create tools for recruiters and monitor advertising. The goal of the unit was to help monitor and track emerging technologies and bring in these technologies to recruiting processes as appropriate. This approach was suited to FedEx Ground's large U.S. and Canadian reach and its large annual recruiting needs. An added feature of this unit was that it centralized recruiting and marketing plans: Now, everyone working on recruiting and marketing efforts or strategy was working with the same recruiting and marketing plans.

Hiring Entry-Level Youth at McDonald's and Texas Roadhouse

McDonald's and Texas Roadhouse are global restaurant chains that heavily target entry-level and youth populations for hiring. At the time of this study, according to corporate documents, McDonald's employed over 230,000 people through its corporate and corporate-owned restaurants in 2017,[45] although the vast majority of its workforce was employed separately through its franchise restaurants. Similarly, most of Texas Roadhouse's workforce was employed in its restaurants. Texas Roadhouse's website reported that the eatery employed over 50,000 workers (known as "Roadies") across its 420 locations.[46]

Although both chain restaurants targeted similar workers, they had different recruiting strategies at the national level. McDonald's centralized vacancy announcements and applications for corporate and franchise locations on its ATS platform, PeopleMatter. Through the corporate website, which was designed to simplify the application process, prospective applicants could search for vacancies by location.[47] However, once candidates applied, hiring decisions were made by the franchise owners for the franchise locations, which made up about 94 percent of the locations in the United States.[48]

All of Texas Roadhouse's U.S. locations, on the other hand, were owned and operated by the corporation (only international locations were franchised). Therefore, the company handled

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[45] As discussed in the company's 10-K U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing for 2018, available through the corporate investor relations page (McDonald's Corporation, "Annual Reports," webpage, undated a).

[46] Texas Roadhouse, "We Are Family," webpage, undated b.

[47] McDonald's Corporation, "Application Process," webpage, undated b.

[48] As stated in public materials from McDonald's 2018 10-K U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filing and on its job vacancies pages.

hiring for all restaurants, each of which employed about 100 people. The company received more than 40,000 applications per month for its restaurants and used its ATS to process, track, and manage potential Roadies.[49]

At the time of this study, Texas Roadhouse was undergoing a transition with its ATS, moving to a CRM (SmashFly). According to SmashFly's website, the platform enabled many of the same features as other leading ATS software. Among the platforms examined for this study, it was the closest to the ATS used by AFRS (AFRISS-TF), perhaps because AFRISS-TF is also designed to function as a CRM. SmashFly was advertised as a platform to manage potential applicants before they even applied, enabling prospect input, lead nurturing, campaign tracking, and source identification, among other features.[50] For every lead, SmashFly had an information page that resembled one in AFRISS-TF, along with notes, a star ranking, and an activity tracking section.

SmashFly's reporting metrics resembled some of the additional analyses conducted outside of AFRISS-TF by various Air Force recruiting entities, including AFRS. For example, because it had all of the sourcing and tracking data on the potential pool of applicants, SmashFly could create visualizations to describe the lead pipeline and identify opportunities for future engagement. In addition, the platform appeared to be heavily automated so that recruiters did not physically enter information that was sourced from other websites or platforms.

McDonald's and Texas Roadhouse had similarities in how they leveraged technology. For example, both used social media to strategically reach and engage youth. However, McDonald's particularly distinct approach was to harness the social media app Snapchat as a platform for applications, an example that other companies also adopted.[51] In summer 2017, McDonald's rolled out "Snaplications," with which people could watch a video on Snapchat about working at McDonald's and get referred to a mobile-friendly online application.[52] In Australia, the company took the idea a step further, allowing applicants to actually apply through Snapchat by sending a ten-second video interview.[53] The company developed a filter that put applicants in the McDonald's uniform and asked them why they would be a good candidate. The idea behind this campaign was to reach young people, engage them on a platform they were already actively using, and make applying easy.

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[49] Snagajob, "Texas Roadhouse at Collaborate '16," webpage, accessed September 25, 2018.

[50] A demonstration video for SmashFly's platform is available at SmashFly, "SmashFly Recruiting CRM," webpage, undated.

[51] Maxwell Huppert, "'Snaplications' Are a Thing: How Companies Like McDonald's and Grubhub Are Using Snapchat to Recruit," *LinkedIn Talent Blog*, June 15, 2017.

[52] Valerie Bolden-Bennett, "McDonald's opting for 'Snaplications' to Attract Young Job Applicants," HR Dive, October 13, 2017.

[53] Pippa Haines, "McDonald's Snaplications: Case Study," video, Vimeo, March 28, 2018.

What the Case Study Companies Have in Common

Some of the similarities between McDonald's and Texas Roadhouse were common across all of the companies considered here. All of the companies maintained interactive, experiential careers pages that were linked to their application platforms.[54] These pages emphasized a culture of community and attractive employee benefits and perks. They also had videos that explained what it was like to be employed at that company, advancement opportunities, and instructions for applying.

Applying Insights from the Private Sector to Air Force Recruiting

As noted in the case study of AT&T, large-scale migrations to data-enabled recruiting were not always easy and required extensive and careful effort. The data-enabled business practices found at the companies we examined relied on creating tools that frontline users, such as recruiters, were willing and able to integrate into their day-to-day recruiting activities. Therefore, it was essential to first learn how Air Force recruiters actually performed their day-to-day recruiting activities. To do this, we met with a dozen Air Force recruiters in the New England region from three of the six Air Force recruiting sources.[55]

The recruiters reported that their current IT systems were not stable or reliable. Further, the recruiters told us that the service-mandated paperwork (such as security clearance forms) and entering information into outdated systems in recruiting offices was time-consuming and raised privacy and security concerns. The outdated systems restricted recruiters' mobility and flexibility. For example, one participant commented,

> I have to print out the security clearance by hand, fill it out [with the applicant], and type it in the system by hand, just to send them to MEPS. [The recruiters] have to do the clearance applications. So if [the applicant] has multiple jobs or been to 50 countries, it takes me three and a half hours to fill out the application just for the clearance.

Successfully Implementing Data-Enabled Recruiting Practices

Successful implementation of new, data-enabled recruiting practices requires more than just new technical capabilities. It also requires changes to the organization and its culture. As Henke, Libarikian, and Wiseman reported, "an analytics-enabled transformation is as much about a cultural change as it is about parsing the data and putting in place advanced tools."[56] The key

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[54] See, for example, Amazon's career page (Amazon, "Find Your Opportunity," webpage, undated), AT&T's careers website (AT&T, "AT&T Careers, webpage, undated), and Texas Roadhouse's careers website (Texas Roadhouse, "Jobs and Careers," webpage, undated a).

[55] We did not meet with recruiters representing USAFA, AFROTC, or AFPC in the New England region.

[56] Nicolaus Henke, Ari Libarikian, and Bill Wiseman, "Straight Talk About Big Data," *McKinsey Quarterly*, October 2016.

factors include establishing an organizationwide data orientation, ensuring that the employees have the appropriate skills, and setting up an IT infrastructure that can support the interconnected and interactive nature of big data and AI. In addition, a programmatic introduction for frontline employees is essential for their adoption of data-enabled business practices.

Implications

Attracting, engaging, nurturing, and retaining top talent is a challenge that many companies and organizations face. Companies in the private sector are integrating data-enabled technology in recruiting and integrating recruiting across distinct business units. The companies we selected for detailed exploration have characteristics similar to the Air Force in terms of organizational reach and complexity, targeting a similar population for potential recruits, and even the numbers recruited. However, as with these companies, achieving the changes that the Air Force desires requires not just a change in technology but also acceptance and adoption by frontline recruiters. The three key takeaways from the experience of these companies were as follows:

- **Integrating and streamlining recruiting technologies requires a significant investment in technology and in the people who will use it.** Efforts to implement these new technologies have been expensive. The new technologies require significant changes with respect to both hardware and software systems, and they require retraining IT and human resources staff.
- **Moving to new recruiting technologies is no longer optional.** To compete in the marketplace that has moved ahead of the Air Force in terms of tracking and enlisting or hiring applicants, the Air Force needs to implement new technologies.
- **The new technologies must be selected and configured to align with the needs of the organization and of the recruiters.**

Chapter 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this report, we described the findings of our work to assist SAF/MRM with integrating recruiting across the Total Force. Specifically, we looked at the current state of recruiting processes across the various recruiting entities, derived lessons from the New England Recruiting Test, and examined recruiting processes in private sector organizations that could be informative to the Air Force. Using the results of these investigations, we offer the following conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

The current organizational structure for Air Force recruiting is not well suited to integration. As we point out in Chapter 2, the current organizational structure is composed of six accession or recruiting sources, each of which reports to its own leadership. Moving up the organization chart, there is no single point of authority to provide leadership to these efforts other than the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. In the current situation, we see some instances of smaller-scale integration, such as the recent joining of AFR recruiting with AFRS active duty recruiting; however, these are only two of the six suborganizations that conduct recruiting.

Within the stovepiped recruiting sources, there are some similarities for recruiting uniformed personnel. As described in Chapter 2, we found that AFRS, ANG, AFR, and AFROTC had recruiting processes that were fairly similar. However, the processes used by AFPC and USAFA were very different because of their distinct requirements.

Along with stovepiped recruiting processes, the marketing activities for recruiting are mostly separate and uncoordinated, with very limited sharing or coordination. In Chapter 3, we provided a high-level inventory of the marketing activities that are named in the PWSs of the various marketing contracts held by the individual recruiting sources. We found that similar marketing activities were being conducted for the various recruiting entities but by different marketing vendors under separate marketing contracts, with no coordination among them. There was a modest amount of integration in that the AFRS marketing contract with GSD&M includes marketing for USAFA. However, AFR, ANG, AFROTC, and AFPC all conduct marketing separate from AFRS and one another.

The marketing outreach found on Air Force websites reflects the separation and lack of coordination among the various Air Force recruiting sources. In Chapter 4, we described the differences we found among the various Air Force recruiting websites in terms of links and branding. We found that the vision of a Total Force is not clearly evident in Air Force recruiting websites—whether in connections among the sites or in branding.

The New England Recruiting Test provided important experiences and insights to inform Air Force recruiting integration moving forward. As we note in Chapter 5, we observed that although participants began the test with reservations about or resistance to integration, their openness to it increased over time. However, they expressed concerns about (1) not being overlooked while in the shadow of other Air Force stakeholders, (2) the need to better understand one another's recruiting needs, and (3) a sense of competition among the recruiters in AFRS, ANG, AFR. Further, they often commented on the limitations of their data systems and how the legacy recruiting data systems impeded their ability to do their jobs, both in the confines of their recruiting entity and in the context of collaborating across the Total Force.

Case studies of private sector companies demonstrate that integrating and streamlining activities across a large organization inevitably requires a significant investment in technology, organizational change, and the people who will use it. In Chapter 6, we point out that it is not surprising that implementing these new technologies has been expensive. These new technologies require deliberate and well-planned transitions, integration with existing systems, and substantial training at various levels of an organization. Even so, the companies we researched indicated that moving to the new recruiting technologies was essential, not optional, to remain competitive.

Recommendations

Building on these conclusions, we offer the following recommendations.

Consider establishing an organizational structure with a single point of authority that is responsible for all recruiting across the Total Force and that operates between the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the recruiting sources. With no single authority overseeing all recruiting for the Total Force, the activities of the six recruiting entities are almost certain to remain uncoordinated. The creation of the TFRC in 2017 has been a step in the right direction, but it lacks authority over the collection of Air Force recruiting entities. Thus, although it can foster collaboration and make recommendations, it cannot direct actions or require accountability except within its sphere of identified responsibilities. We recommend that the Air Force consider appointing or creating a single point of authority to lead and manage recruiting for the Total Force.

Move forward with integration of selected marketing activities, such as a unified call center, for which recruiting stakeholders expressed support. Currently, there are several call centers, with each recruiting entity having its own. The resources available for call centers varies substantially across the recruiting entities. For example, although AFRS has a call center staffed with employees specifically to answer calls from potential recruits, the toll-free recruiting number for ANG rings to the desk of a Staff Sergeant, who must handle those calls along with many other recruiting-related responsibilities. Implementing a unified call center will ensure a consistent experience for everyone who inquires about joining the Air Force, in whatever way

they might be interested in serving, and it would provide a means to channel inquiries systematically so that potential recruits are more likely to receive an appropriate response.

Reduce the sense of competition among the Air Force recruiting sources by developing recommended practices for channeling leads that best serve the interest of the Air Force. Further, consider establishing a system whereby recruiters get credit not only for the recruits they sign for their part of the Air Force but also for the passing of a lead that results in an accession elsewhere in the Air Force. Figure 7.1 represents a decision tree that could assist with these decisions. Many recruiters are likely to be following this approach already, but concrete sharing of this approach could alleviate some concerns about one recruiting entity cannibalizing possible recruits of another.

Figure 7.1. Decision Tree for Sorting Leads to Recruiters
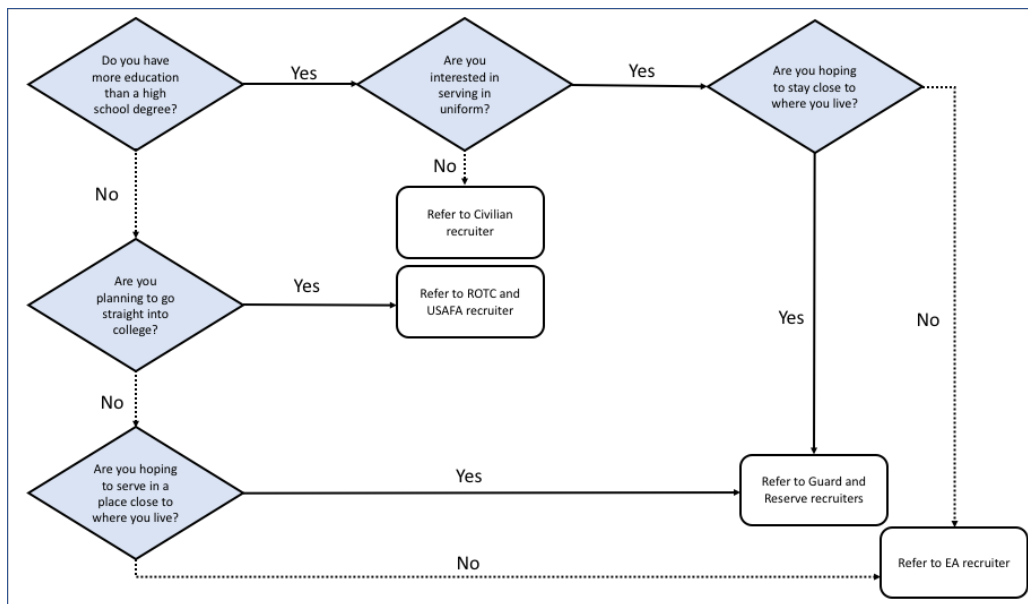
NOTE: EA = enlisted accession.

Finally, to address the problem created by recruiters being incentivized only for their own goals and not for Total Force goals, the Air Force should consider ways to incentivize recruiters for passing on leads who they cannot recruit but who can be successfully recruited into some other area of Air Force service. Such incentives could include credit toward recruiting goals or some other form of recognition.

Without requiring a single marketing contract (which we do not recommend), establish a more-unified web presence for recruiting. We recommend developing and implementing a protocol for Air Force marketing websites to connect to one another via easily accessible links and to portray the Air Force with branding that communicates the image of one Air Force, not many. Further, without requiring uniformity, we recommend that the Air Force establish a

minimum level of consistency for website design, such as a common logo, color scheme, and font type to signal a connection across the different recruiting sources of the Air Force.

Continue to pilot recruiting processes that integrate recruiting across the Total Force and foster collaboration among the various recruiting sources, applying lessons from prior phases of the New England Recruiting Test to improve the outcomes of the pilot testing each time. Phases 1 and 2 of the New England Recruiting Test piloted changes in lead identification and changes in lead-sharing among recruiters across the Total Force. We observed that the changes in lead identification in Phase 1 were not fruitful; in Phase 2, they were slightly more informative. However, the practice of lead-sharing and the semiregular convenings of stakeholders from across the recruiting entities appeared to be very beneficial. Over the course of two years, we observed recruiting stakeholders expressing greater openness to collaboration and increased understanding of one another's organizations. Moving forward, we have learned that SAF/MRM has decided to locate Phase 3 of the recruiting test in Texas rather than New England. The participants in Phase 3 will test the use of a new CRM system. We recommend that the lessons from Phases 1 and 2—specifically, that participants must be fully apprised of the purpose of the test, the importance of their active engagement and collaboration, what is needed of them while participating, and the recruiting needs of their collaborators—be taken into account in the design and execution of Phase 3.

Looking Ahead

Throughout the two years of this study, we have heard from stakeholders across the Air Force that they are aware of the need to integrate recruiting and understand its value. The regular meetings of representatives from the various Air Force recruiting entities—AFRS, AFR, ANG, AFROTC, USAFA, and AFPC—that took place first because of the New England Recruiting Test and then for the TFRC have been important in making the goal of integration closer to the forefront and more tangible through incremental progress and collaborative decisionmaking. These examples of progress will serve as important reference points for the challenges ahead, which will involve large investments of funding and human capital to achieve the goal of fully integrated recruiting to keep the Air Force competitive in recruiting talented individuals for service.

Appendix. Search Parameters to Support Private Sector Case Studies

We searched six databases. This search enabled a large sampling of publication types, including academic and nonacademic technical and business publications that write extensively on emerging corporate trends in software platforms and application in recruitment. The databases searched for this review are

- Business Source Complete
- Academic Search Complete
- eBooks Business Collection
- Scopus
- Social Sciences Abstracts
- Web of Science.

Search Terms

We also detailed specific search terms for this review. These were

*=wildcard for truncation

(employee* OR workforce OR "work force" OR personnel OR talent)

AND

(recruit* OR select* OR screen*)

AND

(analytics OR digitize* OR software OR "social media" OR data OR method* OR technique* OR platform* OR "candidate relationship management" OR algorithm*).

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The Air Force faces challenges with recruiting. Externally, the number of individuals who are both interested in and eligible for military service is declining. Internally, those who conduct Air Force recruiting activities have for decades been stovepiped by organizational lines, separate recruiting and marketing activities, and incompatible information systems.

To help the Air Force achieve a modern, comprehensive, and integrated recruiting system, the authors evaluated the first phase of an Air Force recruiting pilot test, compared the ways Air Force organizations conduct their recruiting operations, and identified current recruiting practices in the private sector that could provide lessons for Air Force recruiting. The authors also addressed barriers to integration and how they can be overcome.

The authors found that the current organizational structure for Air Force recruiting is not well suited to integration and recommend that the Air Force consider establishing an organizational structure with a single point of authority that is responsible for all recruiting across the Total Air Force and that operates between the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the recruiting sources.

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