

# “Be All You Can Be”

## The U.S. Army’s Recruiting Transformation

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Former Chief of Staff of the Army General Creighton Abrams said, “People are not in the Army; they *are* the Army.” His message was simple yet profound: the Army’s equipment, formations, training and doctrine mean little if it does not have Soldiers with the skills to employ them. Since war is fundamentally a clash of human wills, the quality of the U.S. Army Soldier is paramount to the nation’s ability to fight and win wars.

Since 1973, the U.S. military has been an all-volunteer force (AVF)—relying not on compulsory conscription but on individuals who freely choose to serve in the nation’s armed forces. In recent years, the U.S. military, particularly the Army, has faced the most severe recruiting crisis since the AVF’s inception 50 years ago. This crisis is due to myriad factors; how long it will persist is unknown. What is clear, however, is that this challenge poses a risk to U.S. national security and requires a whole-of-nation effort to be reversed.

Army senior leaders have recognized the urgent need to overcome this obstacle. As Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth put it, “The Army’s recruiting mission is an existential issue.” General Randy George, Chief of Staff of the Army, has said that recruiting is the “number one challenge we face and the one thing we have to be focused on,” and that solving the problem is essential “so that we remain an Army of the people and for the people—a formidable team of all-volunteer warriors.”<sup>1</sup>

The Army has approached this challenge iteratively:

- Over the past several years, the service has implemented several initiatives to grow the pool of interested and qualified recruits while leaving the structure of its recruiting and marketing enterprise intact.
- As the magnitude of the recruiting challenge became apparent, the service adapted, announcing a fundamental transformation of its recruiting enterprise in October 2023.<sup>2</sup>

### ISSUE

The U.S. military faces its most severe recruiting crisis since the inception of the all-volunteer force (AVF) in 1973, posing a risk to the Army and to U.S. national security.

### SPOTLIGHT SCOPE

This paper frames the Army’s recruiting shortfall in its national context and details the actions that the Army is taking to overhaul its recruiting enterprise.

### INSIGHTS

- Recruiting shortfalls challenge the joint force’s ability to meet the demands of the *National Defense Strategy* and, if persistent, could raise questions about the sustainability of the AVF.
- The Army is fundamentally transforming its recruiting enterprise, building on its initial, more limited initiatives to overcome obstacles to service and to better communicate with young Americans.
- The success of the Army’s recruiting overhaul depends on data-driven assessments of its impact and continuous experimentation to generate the innovative ideas required to reach the next generation of Soldiers.

1. C. Todd Lopez, “Army Chief Nominee Cites Warfighting, Recruiting as Top Priorities,” *DoD News*, 12 July 2023.  
2. “Army Announces 5 Initiatives to Boost Recruiting,” *Association of the United States Army*, 10 October 2023.



## ■ Purpose

This *Spotlight* frames the Army’s recruiting struggles in their national context and provides an overview of the Army’s continuous transformation of its recruiting enterprise to regain competitiveness in the labor market, emphasizing the need for continuous innovation to solve this urgent challenge.

Some factors contributing to this situation are outside the Army’s control. Overcoming recruiting gaps will require a societal effort that advocates the value of service to young Americans and ensures that they can meet the physical and intellectual requirements to serve. While Secretary Wormuth has stated that “broader society should be mobilizing to address” factors the military cannot,<sup>3</sup> the Army is focusing on elements of the problem it *can* control.

## ■ The Recruiting Environment

Understanding the Army’s recruiting landscape and its limitations is important. Americans ages 17–24 constitute the traditional population from which the military recruits. According to congressional testimony by the Army Chief of Staff in May 2022, only 23 percent of this group are qualified to serve without a waiver.<sup>4</sup> Most commonly, this is due to obesity, a history of drug use, or an inability to meet academic standards.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, only 9 percent of Americans in this age range are potentially interested in serving in the U.S. military.<sup>6</sup> Among the causes contributing to this low propensity to serve are economic factors, lack of recruiter access to schools during COVID-19, fear of physical or psychological harm among potential recruits and lack of familiarity with the military.

However, the Army has identified three gaps it must address:<sup>7</sup>

1. A **knowledge** gap, in which the Army’s story is not reaching an American populace that is increasingly disconnected from serving Soldiers and veterans. The military is becoming a “family business,” with 80 percent of the young people who join the military today having a family member who served in the military,<sup>8</sup> while young Americans with a lower propensity to serve often have little contact with service-members.
2. An **identity** gap, stemming from inaccurate assumptions about Army life and culture.
3. A **trust** gap, reflected in society’s loss of trust and confidence in American institutions, including the military.<sup>9</sup>

3. Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth, “AUSA 2023: Opening Ceremony,” *U.S. Army Professional Forum*, 9 October 2023, video, 55:34, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CGtH\\_m28pQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1CGtH_m28pQ).

4. Thomas Novelly, “Even More Young Americans Are Unfit to Serve, a New Study Finds. Here’s Why,” *Military.com*, 28 September 2022.

5. Matt Seyler, “Military struggling to find new troops as fewer young Americans willing or able to serve,” *ABC News*, 2 July 2022.

6. Doug G. Ware, “‘They want purpose’: Gen Z is vital to solving military’s recruiting problems, Army secretary says,” *Stars and Stripes*, 18 November 2022.

7. “Secretary of the Army and Chief of Staff of the Army Memorandum on Recruiting,” *U.S. Army Public Affairs*, 20 July 2022.

8. David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “Addressing the U.S. Military Recruiting Crisis,” *War on the Rocks*, 10 March 2023.

9. Jeffrey M. Jones, “Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low,” *Gallup*, 5 July 2022.

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*[Recruiting] is the number one challenge that we face and the one thing we have to be focused on.*

General Randy George  
Chief of Staff of the Army

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### THREE GAPS DRIVING MILITARY RECRUITING CHALLENGES:

- Knowledge
  - Identity
  - Trust
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An important factor affecting the military's recruiting is the loss of trust in U.S. institutions among the American populace. A 2022 Gallup poll found that only 27 percent of Americans expressed "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence across 14 different institutions—a record low.<sup>10</sup> While 64 percent of Americans expressed confidence in the U.S. military, this figure had decreased by 8 percent in two years,<sup>11</sup> indicating that the armed forces are not immune from the general decline in trust. This suggests that the recruiting challenge is a problem that the Army or the U.S. military alone cannot address; it will require a societal response with whole-of-nation support.

## Recruiting Shortfalls and the Risks to U.S. National Security

The impact of the harsh recruiting environment has been significant. In Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22), the Army fell 15,000 short of its goal of 60,000 recruits in the active component (25 percent).<sup>12</sup> The service missed its ambitious recruiting goal of 65,000 Soldiers in FY23 by 10,000.<sup>13</sup> The problem is not confined to the Army; the Navy missed its FY23 enlisted Sailor goal of 37,700 by 7,464,<sup>14</sup> and the Air Force fell 2,700 Airmen short of its 26,877 enlisted goal.<sup>15</sup>

These recruiting shortfalls pose short- and long-term risks to U.S. national security. In the near term, the effects are already materializing. In FY22, the Army cut its active-duty endstrength from 476,000 to 466,000,<sup>16</sup> and the FY23 budget funded an active-duty Army endstrength of 452,000—the smallest since before World War II.<sup>17</sup> Army senior leaders are considering significant reductions to force structure to avoid a "hollow" Army with undermanned and ineffective formations.<sup>18</sup>

When considered in the context of the current strategic environment, the risks of a smaller Army are significant. The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* identifies China as the United States' "pacing challenge" and Russia as an "acute threat." Should deterrence fail, it is conceivable that the U.S. military, alongside its allies and partners, could be tasked with fighting two simultaneous major regional conflicts or, at minimum, fighting a major regional conflict while deterring opportunistic aggression elsewhere. Additionally,



Soldiers from the 780th Military Intelligence Brigade (Cyber) support a job fair at the Chicago Cyber Conference hosted by the Illinois Institute of Technology, 31 March 2023 (U.S. Army photo by Steven Stover).

10. Jones, "Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low."

11. Jones, "Confidence in U.S. Institutions Down; Average at New Low."

12. Lolita C. Baldor, "Army misses recruiting goal by 15,000 soldiers," *Army Times*, 2 October 2022.

13. Jared Serbu, "Army plans major changes to recruiting after falling short of 2023 goals," *Federal News Network*, 4 October 2023.

14. Heather Mongilio, "Navy Misses All Recruiting Goals in FY 2023, Raises Goals for FY 2024," *USNI News*, 11 October 2023.

15. Rachel S. Cohen, "Entire Air Force to miss recruiting goal, the first failure since 1999," *Air Force Times*, 14 September 2023.

16. Michelle Kurilla, "The President's Inbox Recap: The U.S. Military Recruiting Crisis," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 June 2023.

17. Todd South, "The Army keeps getting smaller," *Army Times*, 13 March 2023.

18. Davis Winkie, "Exclusive: Army secretary talks force structure cuts, SOF 'reform,'" *Army Times*, 28 June 2023.

the joint force must continue to mitigate “persistent threats” in North Korea, Iran and from violent extremist organizations.

Against this complex web of threats, the Army consistently meets about two-thirds of DoD’s readiness demands, despite only having about half of the U.S. military’s active-duty endstrength.<sup>19</sup> Preventing conflict or prevailing in it requires a significant global presence, and an Army that is too small—and the joint force for which it is the linchpin—will face increased risk. As the Army Chief of Staff noted in 2021, “When I take a look at what the requirements are, when I take a look at what historically we needed, and now that we’re in a time of great power competition, I’m very, very concerned about the size of the Army.”<sup>20</sup>

Soldiers and their families pay a heavy price for a smaller Army. If operational demands stay relatively flat, Soldiers will face more demanding deployment-to-dwell ratios, and units will struggle to meet readiness requirements. A more demanding tempo could exacerbate endstrength shortfalls if it harms retention and if Soldiers are less willing to encourage others to serve.

If recruiting shortfalls persist over the long term, the viability of the AVF could be uncertain. Lieutenant General Tom Spoehr, USA, Ret., observed that, while conscription is not imminent, the recruiting environment has led some to “question the sustainability of the all-volunteer force.”<sup>21</sup> If the AVF becomes untenable and the nation must once again rely on conscription, the U.S. military is likely to experience a reduction in education levels, professionalism and proficiency, all of which have seen marked increases since the AVF’s inception.<sup>22</sup> A return to conscription would likely be politically divisive, potentially reducing public support for the military. Reversing these recruiting struggles is thus an imperative for the Army, for DoD and for the nation.

## ■ The Army Moves Out on Recruiting

The Army’s October 2023 announcement of a fundamental overhaul of its recruiting enterprise comes after several years of initiatives aimed at closing the recruiting gap. These earlier initiatives have focused on expanding the pool of willing and qualified recruits as it maintains accession standards. While these changes have shown promising early results, the Army has realized that they were unlikely to meet the severity of the recruiting challenge on their own.

Four of these initiatives include:

- the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC);
- the Soldier Referral Program (SRP);
- the Army Recruiting Ribbon; and
- the return of the “Be All You Can Be” marketing campaign.

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19. John E. Whitley, *Underfunding the Army Has Risky Implications*, Association of the United States Army, Special Report 23-1, 11 January 2023, 8.

20. Kyle Rempfer, “The force is still too small, Army chief says, and Afghanistan withdrawal won’t really help,” *Army Times*, 27 April 2021.

21. Courtney Kube and Molly Boigon, “Every branch of the military is struggling to make its 2022 recruiting goals, officials say,” *NBC News*, 27 June 2022.

22. Bernard D. Rostker, “The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force,” *RAND Corporation*, 2006.

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## U.S. ARMY

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- 2/3 of DoD readiness demands
  - 1/2 of U.S. active-duty force
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## *Future Soldier Preparatory Course (FSPC): A Chance for Improvement*

To address the issue of candidates willing to serve but unable to meet physical fitness or academic standards, the Army established the FSPC in August 2022 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The FSPC provides candidates with education and physical fitness training to **help them meet the requirements for military service**. FSPC candidates are afforded a maximum of 90 days to improve their physical fitness or academic shortcomings. Every three weeks, those who meet the accession standards depart the course for Initial Military Training (IMT).<sup>23</sup>

FSPC has shown promising early results. From August 2022 to early May 2023, more than 8,500 students attended the course; 6,188 graduated and shipped to basic combat training.<sup>24</sup> Of the candidates who came with an academic shortcoming, 95 percent of students moved up at least one test category on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery and increased their score by an average of 18 points.<sup>25</sup> For those who initially failed to meet physical fitness requirements, 87 percent graduated within their first four weeks, with an average weekly body fat loss of 1.7 percent.<sup>26</sup> Based on the Army's success, the U.S. Navy has established a similar program: the Future Sailor Preparatory Course.<sup>27</sup>

While this early data is promising, how effectively those who graduate from FSPC perform throughout their military service remains to be seen. Given that the program is not quite two years old, longer-term studies of its impact are not yet possible, but it is something that the Army is likely to pay close attention to as it retains its commitment to retaining accession standards.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, its overall impact on the Army's recruiting shortfalls could be modest, as its focus is not on expanding the pool of Americans with a propensity to serve.

## *The Soldier Referral Program (SRP) and the Army Recruiting Ribbon: An All-Hands Approach to Telling the Army Story*

The Army created two initiatives to incentivize all Soldiers to support recruiting: the SRP and the Army Recruiting Ribbon. These initiatives complement the Total Army Involvement in Recruiting program, which enables all Soldiers, regardless of rank or component, to share their Army story and to be rewarded when a referral joins the Army.



*Two Future Soldier Preparatory Course students compare notes during a study hall session at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The course is helping America's youth overcome academic and physical fitness barriers to service and to meet or exceed the Army's enlistment standards (U.S. Army photo by Robin Hicks).*

23. U.S. Army Public Affairs, "Army announces creation of Future Soldier Preparatory Course," 26 July 2022.

24. Lieutenant Colonel Randy Ready, "Future Soldier Preparatory Course now offers recruits opportunity to do both academic, fitness tracks," *U.S. Army*, 2 June 2023.

25. Ready, "Future Soldier Preparatory Course."

26. Ready, "Future Soldier Preparatory Course."

27. Rebecca Kheel, "Navy follows Army in offering Prep Course to recruits who don't meet fitness, academic standards," *Navy Times*, 22 March 2023.

28. Haley Britzky, "US Army secretary emphasizes that service is 'not going to lower our standards' despite recruiting challenges," *CNN*, 20 July 2023.

The SRP encourages all Soldiers to support recruiting by offering early promotion opportunities. As a 12-month pilot program, Soldiers in the grades of E-1 to E-3 may receive advancement to one rank higher for providing a valid referral of someone who both enlists and ships to IMT.<sup>29</sup>

The Army Recruiting Ribbon recognizes Soldiers for contributing to the recruiting effort and is awarded to all Soldiers who provide a valid referral to the U.S. Army of an individual who both enlists and ships to IMT. Regardless of rank, any Soldier, whether officer or enlisted, can receive the ribbon. The Army Recruiting Ribbon can be awarded up to four times in a Soldier's career, for a total of 40 promotion points for four valid referrals. The program encourages Soldiers to stay engaged with their communities, helping potential recruits to better understand life and available opportunities in the Army.

A potential limitation of these programs is that, because they are Soldier-driven, they may be more likely to attract prospects who already live near an Army installation. Soldiers can also leverage their contacts with friends and family back home, but these prospects may already be more familiar with the Army and the opportunities it offers compared to other Americans. To target areas with less military base exposure, the Army has surged resources to a number of cities that have historically been strong areas for recruiting but have dipped in recent years.

### *Reinventing "Be All You Can Be" for a New Generation*

In 2023, the Army launched a revival of its "Be All You Can Be" recruiting campaign of the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> This return was a data-driven decision based on years of research. According to Secretary Wormuth, this phrase "resonated by far the best with audiences of all ages" during research conducted by the Army Enterprise Marketing Office, and it "evokes limitless possibilities for people from all walks of life."<sup>31</sup>

**The campaign aims to appeal to the needs of young Americans while conveying that the Army can meet these needs.** Thus, the campaign is pushing to close the knowledge and identity gaps discussed above. Major General Alex Fink, USA, Ret., then Chief of Army Enterprise Marketing, stated, "We know youth seek purpose, passion, community and connection, but we also know many don't recognize the Army's ability to deliver on those needs. We need a brand that effectively communicates the possibilities of Army service."<sup>32</sup> The Army hopes to expand the pool of potential recruits by highlighting the diverse opportunities available to young Americans. As the campaign is less than a year old, it is too early to assess it.

With the FSPC, SRP, Army Recruiting Ribbon and changes to Army marketing, the service is helping those who want to serve to overcome accession challenges, and it is expanding the pool of interested recruits. However, the Army has realized that the overall impact of these programs may be limited by its recruiting enterprise that was "built in the Industrial Age for

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then Chief of Army Enterprise Marketing

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29. Sarah Sicard, "Army unveils ribbon for soldiers who refer a friend," *Army Times*, 27 March 2023.

30. "Army Revives 'Be All You Can Be' Campaign," *Association of the United States Army*, 8 March 2023.

31. "Army Revives 'Be All You Can Be' Campaign," *Association of the United States Army*.

32. "New Army brand redefines 'Be All You Can Be' for a new generation," *U.S. Army*, 8 March 2023.

the Industrial Age.”<sup>33</sup> As Secretary Wormuth said, “Doing more of what we were doing already—sort of trying to do it harder—was just not going to get us the returns that we needed.”<sup>34</sup>

## The Transformation of the Army Recruiting Enterprise

Reflecting the severity of the moment, in October 2023, the Army announced a “sweeping overhaul” of its approach to recruiting after a detailed study of its recruiting over the past 25 years.<sup>35</sup> According to Lieutenant General Douglas Stitt, the Army’s deputy chief of staff for personnel, the transformation centers around **five new initiatives** to revitalize “who we recruit, how we recruit, and with whom we are doing our recruiting”:<sup>36</sup>

- transforming **how** the Army prospects;
- transforming the Army’s recruiting **workforce**;
- creating an **experimentation** capability within U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC);
- enhancing the **evidence base** for recruiting policy decisions; and
- **aligning** Army recruiting **leadership and structure**.

While the Army can implement some of these reforms almost immediately, others will take several years to enact fully. A brief overview of each initiative follows.

### Transforming How the Army Prospects

The Army has recognized a demographic gap between the Americans it typically recruits compared to the characteristics of the current U.S. labor market. In 1973, at the inception of the AVF, only 46.6 percent of recent high school graduates were enrolled in college. Today, the figure is around 70 percent.<sup>37</sup> Those with only a high school education represent 15–20 percent of the U.S. labor market. However, the Army has focused most of its recruiting resources on this demographic, with about 50 percent of recruits being high school seniors or high school graduates. Secretary Wormuth explained that the Army has not focused adequately “on a significant population of . . . the people who are thinking about employment.”<sup>38</sup>

The Army plans to increase its accession targets for recruits who have attended some college or graduated from college. By FY28, the Army’s goal is to have 33 percent of its enlisted accessions come from those with some



The Army’s modern brand comes to life with a new look and feel, showing the possibilities of “Be All You Can Be” (U.S. Army Enterprise Marketing Office).

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Christine Wormuth  
Secretary of the Army

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33. Davis Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting,” *Army Times*, 9 October 2023.

34. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

35. Lolita C. Baldor, “The Army is launching a sweeping overhaul of its recruiting to reverse enlistment shortfalls,” *Associated Press*, 3 October 2023.

36. LTG Douglas Stitt, “AUSA 2023: Contemporary Military Forum #1: BAYCB - Attracting Talent for the 21st Century,” *U.S. Army Professional Forum*, 9 October 2023, video, 29:41, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbw7WZzAqLE>.

37. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

38. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

college credits. Currently, this demographic makes up only 20 percent of new enlisted recruits.<sup>39</sup>

This will require changes to how the Army taps new prospects. Instead of more traditional approaches, like focusing on recruiting high school students in person at schools, the Army will better leverage private sector tools, like digital job boards, and will implement new recruiting practices, like attending career fairs.

According to General George, making this shift will also require better informing this target demographic about the opportunities for career acceleration available in the Army. He noted, “They still think of the Army as only infantry, armor and combat arms when we have a gamut of critical career fields. I don’t know if many in the labor force and those in school understand what we truly do for this nation.”<sup>40</sup> General George has also pointed to a broader misconception among many young Americans that they are “putting their life on hold in the Army.” On the contrary, when he first thought about joining, he was told, “It’s going to accelerate your life. And I still use that because it was, because it has, and I think we need to get that word out.”

### *Transforming the Army’s Recruiting Workforce*

To fill its recruiting ranks, the Army has traditionally assigned outstanding NCOs from across the force. The Army believes that this “generalist approach to recruiting” has limited the success of its recruiting workforce by not giving recruiters adequate training compared to their primary fields. Likewise, traditional Army recruiting has not followed practices from the private sector, where nearly all companies rely on a specialized recruiting workforce instead of rotating specialists in other positions out of their roles for several years to recruit new employees.

Additionally, the Army’s traditional method of assigning recruiters has likely diminished recruiter morale and motivation and has not adequately ensured that all recruiters have the specialized skillsets necessary to be successful.

With the Army’s overhaul, the service is professionalizing its recruiting workforce by creating a new military occupational specialty (MOS): 42T, talent acquisition specialist. This new MOS will allow the Army to rely on recruiters who volunteer to recruit and are selected for the right talents and motivation. This will align the recruiting workforce more closely with the selection process for other highly specialized assignments in the Army, such as special operations forces or Security Force Assistance Brigade Advisors, who complete aptitude tests and training to determine their fit for these unique roles.<sup>41</sup> As Secretary Wormuth noted, “People who have chosen to



*Educators and school board officials receive an informative brief during a Georgia Army National Guard Recruiting and Retention hosted Open House on 14 September 2023, at Clay National Guard Center in Marietta, Georgia. More than 50 educators attended the open house and were informed of the various educational and career opportunities available within the Georgia Army National Guard (U.S. Army photo by Sergeant Kinsey Geer).*

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*I think that the big perception is [they’re] putting their life on hold. . . . I remember that and was basically told . . . [the Army is] going to accelerate your life. I still use that . . . because it has. And I think we need to get that word out.*

General Randy George  
Chief of Staff of the Army

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39. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

40. Shannon Collins, “Army details five ways to bring recruiting into 21st century,” *Army News Service*, 10 October 2023.

41. Charles McEnany, *The U.S. Army’s Security Force Assistance Triad: Security Force Assistance Brigades, Special Forces and the State Partnership Program*, Association of the United States Army, Spotlight 22-3, October 2022.

be in a certain profession or industry tend to be better performers in that field.”<sup>42</sup>

### *Aligning Army Recruiting Leadership and Structure*

Organizationally, the Army will flatten the structure of its recruiting and marketing enterprises. The Army Marketing Enterprise Office will be reassigned under USAREC. USAREC will be elevated to a three-star command reporting directly to the Secretary of the Army and the CSA. As opposed to its current two-year tenure, the USAREC commander will now serve in his or her role for four years.

These structural reforms provide the USAREC commander with the authorities needed to enact meaningful changes to the Army’s recruiting and marketing enterprises and enough time in the position to put initiatives into place, to see their impact and to make adjustments.<sup>43</sup> The changes will also modernize the Army’s recruiting enterprise to reflect that of the private sector, “where you have [employment] marketing reporting to the same person who has responsibility for talent acquisition and talent management.”

### *Creating an Experimentation Capability within USAREC*

CSA General George observed, “Most of the great ideas come from the people who are actually doing the mission,” and called to “empower the people who are out there innovating for the Army.”<sup>44</sup> The Army will still need experimentation, refinement and bold new ideas to overcome recruiting shortfalls.

To this end, USAREC will appoint a deputy commanding general to oversee an experimentation team tasked with developing and testing new recruiting techniques.<sup>45</sup> The team will consist of recruiters and experts in information management, data management, survey design, labor market analysis, marketing, operations and procurement.<sup>46</sup>

Army leaders have recognized that USAREC currently lacks incentives to experiment, as utilizing recruiters to generate new initiatives and recruiting methods could risk falling short of recruiting goals.<sup>47</sup> However, the fear of failure must not deter these experimental units from trying new, bold ideas. These teams, therefore, will not be required to meet recruiting targets and can devote all of their focus to future initiatives that could revolutionize Army recruiting.



Students participating in the Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) program at their high schools take part in the Team Development Course event during the JROTC Cadet Leadership Challenge (JCLC) held June 5–10 at Fort Jackson, SC. JROTC Cadets from across the country have opportunities throughout the summer to attend both JCLC and STEM Camps and have fun while developing their leadership and teamwork skills (U.S. Army photo by Sarah Windmueller).

42. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

43. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

44. Collins, “Army details five ways to bring recruiting into 21st century.”

45. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

46. Collins, “Army details five ways to bring recruiting into 21st century.”

47. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

## Enhancing the Evidence Base for Recruiting Policy Decisions

Perhaps most importantly, the Army will improve the formal measurement and evaluation of recruiting policy decisions. To date, USAREC has “lacked the resources to accurately assess whether the changes it does make are having an impact.”<sup>48</sup> It has struggled to determine what initiatives have proven successful and why, or to definitively attribute success to specific initiatives as it implemented many changes concurrently. Secretary Wormuth described the challenge: “We don’t have a very good way of knowing whether the new things we’re actually trying are actually successful. . . . Sometimes it was hard to tell which things were really giving us bang for the buck.”<sup>49</sup>

According to General George, the service will “establish an evidence-based learning capability in the Army headquarters that will incorporate data collection and program evaluation design into accessions policy planning and implementation.” The Army seeks to leverage more data-informed analysis of its recruiting initiatives to better determine return on investment and more effectively allocate resources.

### ■ The Way Ahead: Continuously Monitor, Adapt and Evolve

With these preceding five initiatives, the Army is overhauling its recruiting enterprise for the demands of the era. However, given the grave implications of the recruiting challenge for U.S. national security, the service cannot mistake change for results. The current recruiting landscape is driven by trends that have been years in the making and will take time to address. The Army must consistently monitor the results of its new initiatives, refine where possible, and be willing to change course when necessary.

Two of the Army’s new initiatives—evidence-based recruiting decisions and continued experimentation—are directly focused on this need for continuous evaluation and change. Given an environment of flat or decreasing budgets, data-driven analysis to identify which lines of effort do and do not prove effective, as well as ongoing experimentation to generate innovative ideas to tap into the next generation of recruits, will be vital. **Success will be reflected in the service’s ability to increase accessions of well-qualified Soldiers so that the Army can continue to meet its essential role in U.S. national defense.**

### ■ Conclusion

The Army recognizes the scope of its recruiting challenge and has taken bold steps toward overcoming it. While the Army can do more, it cannot solve this problem alone. Many factors driving the recruiting shortfalls are



Brigadier General Jason Kelly, Fort Jackson commander, speaks to a group of potential recruits during the Future Soldier for a Day event on 8 July 2023. He said some people think the Army can weigh them down and keep them from being who they want to be, but “I think it’s the exact opposite. I think it’s an accelerant. The Army is gas to whatever it is you want to be” (U.S. Army photo by Emily Hileman).

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48. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

49. Winkie, “The inside story of how the Army rethought recruiting.”

outside of the Army's control. Fostering the future talent essential to U.S. national security will require robust support from Congress and the nation, with a societal commitment to imparting the value of service to rising generations.

Since before the nation's founding, the Army has relied on the talents of the American people to deter war and to fight and win when called upon. It is only since 1973 that the Army (and the U.S. military as a whole) has depended solely on volunteers who willingly choose to serve. This volunteer force has provided security for Americans at home and abroad for 50 years, and it is a force worth maintaining in an increasingly complex, uncertain world.



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