

**AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE  
AIR UNIVERSITY**

**IS FREE REALLY FREE?**

**PALACE ACQUIRE AS AN EFFECTIVE FORCE RENEWAL SOURCE FOR AIR FORCE  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

by

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**A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements**

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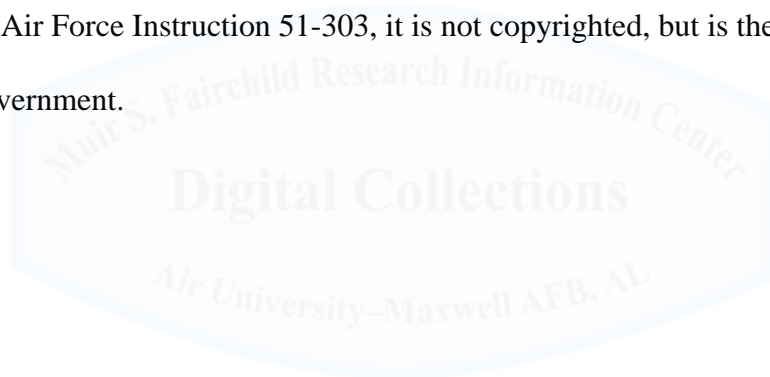
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## **ABSTRACT**

The Air Force Public Affairs career field has experienced a host of manning changes over the last 10 years. Reductions in overall active duty officer manning have not only decreased the numbers of Public Affairs professionals at each installation but have also lowered the ranks – and therefore, experience levels – of those remaining. While Public Affairs officer manning and experiences levels – particularly at wing level – have decreased, expectations have not; and Air Force Public Affairs civilians are vital to ensuring mission accomplishment.

The need for highly qualified and experienced Public Affairs civilians is a constant and force renewal efforts must be efficient and cost effective to ensure mission commanders at all levels are supported. This study focuses on force renewal efforts for Air Force Public Affairs civilians in the GS-1035-11 level, using the Evaluation Framework to compare four unique force renewal sources: PALACE Acquire Training Program trainees, promotion-eligible employees, transfer-eligible candidates, and external applicants.

Ultimately, this research reveals, the cost – in both money and manpower – does not support continued use of the PALACE Acquire Training Program for Air Force Public Affairs. Indeed, the level of effort required by wing and major command (MAJCOM) Public Affairs offices to provide the necessary training for trainees in the the PALACE Acquire Training Program, exceeds any potential returns these employees provide to their sponsoring offices in “free manning.”

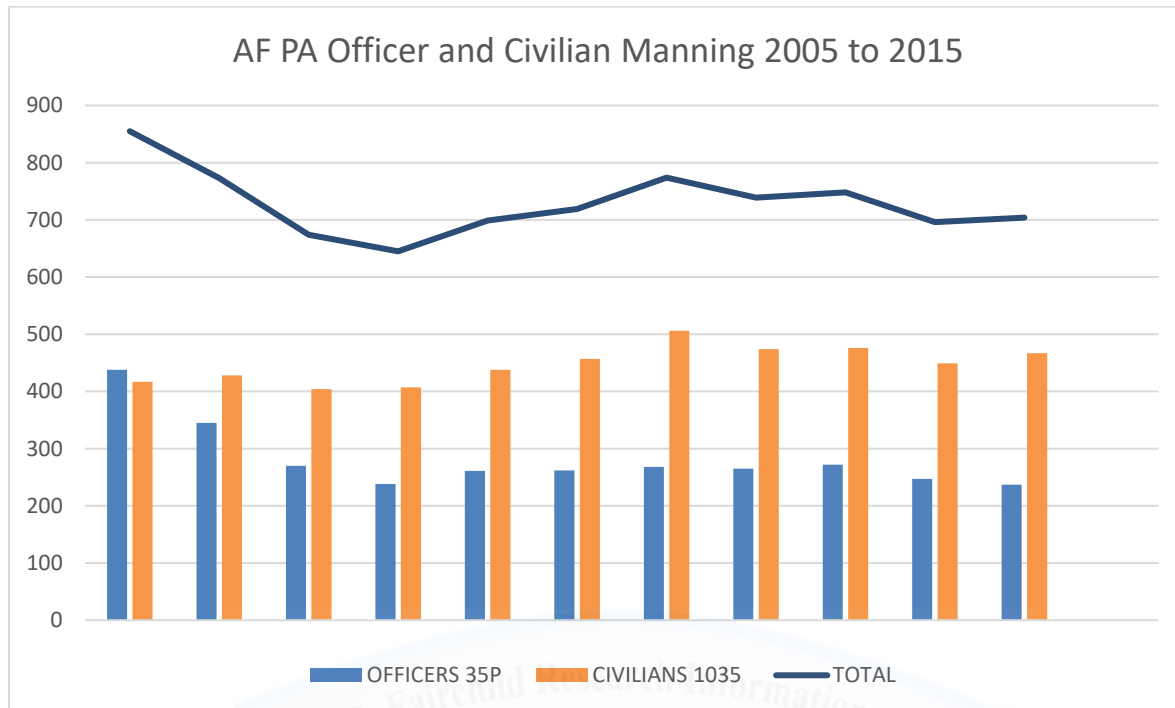
# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Public Affairs is key aspect of Air Force strategic communications. Public Affairs professionals provide trusted counsel to leaders, support Airman morale and readiness, strengthen public trust and support, and affect global influence and deterrence by engaging on the information front.<sup>1</sup> Unlike career fields with minimum educational requirements or even those requiring additional annual education or training, Public Affairs, as defined by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), requires applicable experience rather than formal education. Individuals with no previous experience in the career field can expect to achieve only the lowest defined knowledge level (i.e., GS-09) required of Public Affairs with a master's degree in a related field.<sup>2</sup> This makes on-the-job training and experience extremely valuable to the career field and to the commanders which its professionals serve.

Public Affairs is led by a cadre of experienced officers and civilians with additional manning coming from the enlisted ranks of photojournalists and broadcasters. During the last 15 years, Public Affairs officer manning has decreased, and Air Force civilians in Public Affairs have helped make up for the manning decline (Figure 1.1). This cut in active duty officer manning has led to a need for more Public Affairs civilians to take on more leadership responsibility. At the very least, Public Affairs offices that are facing critical staffing levels are eager to offer training opportunities to new civilian employees because trainees are typically fast learners and can offer “free” manpower to these stressed offices once training has achieved a minimum level of competency.

Figure 1.1 Air Force Public Affairs Officer and Civilian Manning 2005 to 2015



Source AFPC Secure RAW<sup>3</sup>

While cuts in funding and manpower can lead to decreased workload in some mission areas, this is not the case for Public Affairs. For instance, a cut in flying hours will decrease the need for maintenance operations, and reductions in manpower will reduce the numbers of employees served by a finance office, Public Affairs is a career field that, regardless of manning and funding, is expected to provide a fairly stable level of services whether that be the production of a weekly newspaper, providing photographic support for personnel and mission needs or responding to media or congressional queries with authoritative and timely information.

Public Affairs civilians have the same functional responsibilities as their officer counterparts at the various levels of grade/rank. Air Force Public Affairs civilians are recruited through a variety of sources and an evaluation needs to be made to determine if the Air Force is approaching Public Affairs civilian force renewal through the most effective and efficient method possible.

## CHAPTER 2

The author has spent the last 11 years with Air Force Public Affairs and had the opportunity to work with Public Affairs professionals at various levels including a field operating agency, a major command (MAJCOM), a center, and at the Secretariat. At each level, it is clear how important civilians are to the Air Force Public Affairs career field, filling in the experience gaps as officer manning and grades have decreased over the years.

### **Background / Literature Review**

Since Public Affairs is one of the Air Force's smallest career fields, the career field's approach to implementing the PALACE Acquire Training Program varies somewhat from the guidance provided in the Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide.<sup>4</sup>

Both the PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Training programs are Air Force initiatives for civilian force renewal. These programs implement portions of Air Force Policy Directive 36-6, *Civilian Career Field Management*, dated 7 March 2012, which requires the establishment, development and maintenance of "sustainable and healthy career fields via a comprehensive program that forecasts, accesses, sustains, develops and separates civilian employees through a process of continual renewal."<sup>5</sup> PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap, it should be noted, are recruitment programs that seek individuals with no previous career field experience for the explicit purpose of providing the necessary training to meet career field needs.

While the COPPER Cap program is unique to acquisitions career field employees such as contracting, the PALACE Acquire Training Program is actively used in most of the Air Force's other 21 civilian career fields. This research paper discusses the PALACE Acquire Training Program (i.e., trainees), not the Air Force's Pathways Program (i.e., interns) which covers employees currently in a degree study program. Pathways Program interns, upon completion of



education requirements for their degree programs are offered trainee positions in the PALACE Acquire program. In essence, interns – in the Air Force civilian service – refers to employees who are not yet trainees.

The Air Force has grouped civilian employees into 22 separate career fields. These career fields include categories such as Audit, Contracting, Financial Management, Program Management, Security, Weather and even Chaplain and the Air Reserve Technicians. Since each career field has unique requirements – engineers have different requirements than international affairs practitioners or logisticians – each is supported through their own career field team, as required by AFPD 36-6.<sup>6</sup>

Public Affairs PALACE Acquire trainees are centrally recruited and hired; then assigned to installations where major command (MAJCOM) headquarters are located to ensure the broadest wing and MAJCOM experience possible without the necessity of relocation during the training period. Public Affairs deviates from guidance in that the MAJCOMs where the trainees are assigned for training are not required to guarantee outplacement for graduating trainees.

Instead, the Public Affairs Career Field Team at the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) negotiates outplacement for Public Affairs trainee graduates. Supervisors must provide the Public Affairs Career Field Team completed training records and certify the trainees are ready for outplacement to the full performance level of GS-11 before outplacement is started.

Because the career field centrally manages recruitment, hiring, formal training coordination and outplacement responsibilities, this decreases the level of effort required from the MAJCOM responsible for ensuring all on-the-job training requirements are met.

Additionally, by not requiring the MAJCOM to commit to outplacing these trainees, the career field can better take advantage of vacancies – no matter where they occur – and not increase

demand on the Air Force's Central Salary Account (CSA) by extending trainees in place to wait for corresponding vacancies within their current commands.

To date, no research has been conducted to evaluate the value of the PALACE Acquire Training Program for Air Force Public Affairs with respect to the manpower and funding costs associated and the return on investment.

### **Force renewal needs**

Overall, Public Affairs officer and civilian manning during the last 15 years has shown a fairly stable level with civilian numbers increasing as officers decreased (Figure 1.1).<sup>7</sup> This number includes all 35P (Public Affairs) officers and civilians assigned to the 1035 Public Affairs Specialist occupational series, regardless of rank or grade, respectively. (It should be noted that this research does not address the differences between authorized versus assigned positions nor current manning levels of each rank relative to authorized levels.)

In evaluating civilian force renewal requirements, the target population is defined as the GS-1035-11 pay plan, occupational series, and level. It is this level that most closely corresponds to the officer requirements defined in the Public Affairs AFSC 35P, Career Field Education and Training Plan.<sup>8</sup> It is also the GS-1035-11 level that will be evaluated for turn-over, i.e., the force renewal requirement.

It is important to understand that the hiring of officers and civilians is, other than in the obvious military commitment, fundamentally different. When an officer is accessioned, he/she is hired without the training necessary to perform his/her job. The Air Force invests in the career field-specific training necessary to ensure the officer is capable of performing the essential functions required by his/her functional authority. (The exception to this is any career field that requires specific licensure, such as doctor, engineer, lawyer, etc.) For civilians, the opposite is

true. Civilians are hired “fully qualified” for the jobs to which they are assigned. The exception to this is any civilian hired into one of the Air Force’s training programs. These trainees are, in essence, treated the same as an Air Force officer in pipeline training – that is, the job training that begins after initial officer training and before fully assigned their Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) duties.

Air Force Public Affairs has a total population of less than 1,000 civilian employee positions. Of these, approximately 120 positions are at the full performance level of a graduating PALACE Acquire trainee – GS-11. The requirement for highly qualified individuals to fill these positions is critical to ensuring mission accomplishment. Civilian employees in GS-1035-11 positions can serve in a variety of roles that range from chief of Public Affairs at a small operational training wing to a staff member of a major command’s civic engagement division. Employees serving in these greatly varied types of positions must be fully versed across the full Public Affairs spectrum of competencies – media, internal, civic engagement, and even resourcing and requirements.

During the time period from October 1, 2013 until September 30, 2015, 120 of these positions turned over. That is a 100 percent rate (Figure 2.1) that includes 18 employees who left federal service completely through either resignation, retirement or separation; 60 employees who left their GS-11 positions by either transferring to another GS-11 position, being promoted to a GS-12 position or moving down to a GS-09 position; 14 individuals hired from external sources and new to federal civilian service; and another 28 positions that were still in the recruiting/fill source selection that had yet to be resolved when this data was retrieved.<sup>9</sup> For purposes of this research, force renewal is confined to the appointment category. During this two-year period, only 14 new civilian employees were hired into GS-11 level positions and five

of the promotions were the result of graduating PALACE Acquire trainees.<sup>10</sup> So, of the 120 total movements into and out of the GS-1035-11 positions, 14 were filled by hiring candidates from external sources and only five additional positions were filled from graduating PALACE Acquire trainees.

*Figure 2.1 GS-1035-11 Personnel Actions, Oct 1, 2013 thru Sep 30, 2015*

Nature of Action	Number of GS-1035-11 Positions
Appointment	14
Change to Lower Grade	5
Promotion	32
Reassignment	23
Recruit / Fill	28
Resignation	3
Retirement	2
Separation	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>

Source Public Affairs RPA Tracker<sup>11</sup>

### **Force renewal sources**

In the larger scale, force renewal refers to new civilian employees from external sources. For this research, force renewal is not limited to only external candidates but all sources that potentially renew the target population: GS-1035-11 for Air Force Public Affairs.

To better understand the data presented here, an overview of Air Force civilian position management is required. In general, the Air Force groups all civilian occupational series into one of 22 separate career fields. Furthermore, each career field identifies positions for central

management and those that are locally managed. Positions that are centrally managed receive permanent change of station (PCS) expenses, leadership training opportunities, access to career field tuition assistance and other functional training opportunities. Positions that are locally managed only receive PCS expenses when authorized and paid for by the hiring organization and have access to installation-level tuition assistance. In some cases, employees in these positions may be identified for functional training opportunities.

For Public Affairs, centrally managed positions are those that are non-joint, GS-12 or above, and in one of the core occupational series (i.e., 1001, 1020, 1035, 1060, 1071 and 1084). All other positions are locally managed and generally receive no Air Force or career field level funding for support or training.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 2.2 Air Force Public Affairs Career Field Chart<sup>13</sup>

Category	Sub	Time Limit	PCS Costs	Training	Tuition Assistance
Centrally Managed	Key Career Position: 11 PA positions	36-48 months (mobility agreement required)	Yes and DNRP – central account	central and functional	central account
	Career: non-joint GS-12s and above, core series*	No	Yes – central account	central and functional	central account
Locally Managed	Career-Developed: GS-11s, core series	No	Maybe – local	local and functional	central account
	Core: all others	No	Maybe – local	local and functional	central account and local

\*Core public affairs occupational series are: 1001-General Arts and Information, 1020-Illustrating, 1035-Public Affairs, 1060-Photography, 1071-Audiovisual Production, and 1084-Visual Information.

## PALACE Acquire trainees

As described above, the Air Force implements Air Force Policy Directive 36-6, *Civilian Career Field Management*, dated 7 March 2012, through – currently – 22 separate career fields ranging from Audit to Weather. Civilian career field teams use the PALACE Acquire Training

Program to recruit civilians for career field-specific positions that require two-to four-years of formal training in both classroom and on-the-job settings to achieve the “fully qualified” level.<sup>14</sup>

Feedback from Public Affairs MAJCOM PAQ supervisors<sup>15</sup> regarding the level of effort required to provide the necessary training for these employees indicates the number of individuals involved in PAQ training varies according to office manning. In offices with larger numbers of employees, more people are involved in the trainee’s development. In addition, the number of hours devoted to trainees also varies by office; but generally equals 20 hours per week for approximately the first three months of the trainee’s development in the MAJCOM Public Affairs office.

These findings also hold true with the wing Public Affairs offices. The more people assigned to the office, the higher the number of individuals involved in PAQ training requirements. This front-loaded training period mirrors the MAJCOM assessment as well, with PAQ trainees requiring near full-time attention and hands-/eyes-on attention for the first months of training, tapering off with time and demonstrated aptitude.

Without exception, MAJCOM and wing PAQ supervisors indicated that PAQ trainees with previous Public Affairs experience (e.g., retired or separated military veterans) required significantly less training time and oversight than those hired without previous Public Affairs experience. And trainees hired with Air Force or other service experience and no Public Affairs familiarity fell somewhere in the middle of the training continuum required by the assigned office personnel.

PALACE Acquire trainees also place a monetary requirement on the Air Force. These employees are eligible for various programs including permanent change of station (PCS) expenses, tuition and temporary duty (TDY) expenses for Department of Defense-sponsored

training, tuition and temporary duty expenses for private sector training, tuition assistance and student loan repayment, and manpower expenses for recruiting and managing the program.<sup>16</sup>

Prior to 2013, the Public Affairs Career Field Team funded as many as three PCS moves for each PAQ trainee. These moves included, the first duty move, which covers most traditional PCS expenses for civilian employees to relocate trainees to their wing Public Affairs office of assignment. After approximately 18 months, the trainees would then be reassigned to a MAJCOM Public Affairs office located at a different installation, accomplishing their second PCS move. And upon completion of the PALACE Acquire Training Program, a final PCS would be authorized, if necessary, to outplace the graduating trainee to his/her permanent GS-1035-11 position. This is similar to the Public Affairs assignment length deviations for the officer corps, as well. Public Affairs relies on ensuring officers have the broadest opportunities for mission exposure by relocating lieutenants so that they experience at least two separate wings and/or major commands during their first commitment.

The number of PCS moves for Public Affairs PAQ trainees was reduced in 2013 to, in most cases, only one. During recruitment, potential candidates are advised of the requirement to relocate themselves, if necessary, to their assigned installation where they will remain for their entire training period of two- to three-years with rotational assignments at various locations in the local area. PCS would be authorized, if necessary, upon their successful completion of the training program to relocate to the permanent GS-1035-11 assignment installation.

In addition to PCS expenses, Public Affairs PAQ trainees are required to successfully complete two formal DoD training courses – one of which is nine weeks long, the other two weeks – at the Defense Information School, on Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. The Public Affairs Qualification Course is the DoD's foundational training solution for Air Force, Army,

Navy, Marine, Coast Guard and international students in the Public Affairs career field.<sup>17</sup> The Visual Information Manager course is also hosted by the DINFOS. For most services, this course is for experienced officers, enlisted and civilians because it concerns the management of visual information.<sup>18</sup> Because the Air Force develops PAQ trainees for future leadership, this course is mandatory for successful completion of training requirements.

PALACE Acquire trainees are also eligible for the Student Loan Repayment Program, which pays \$10,000 per year for up to two-years to repay existing student loans. Acceptance of SLRP results in a service commitment of one year for each \$10,000, with time running concurrently. In addition, PALACE Acquire trainees are also able to apply for tuition assistance for current education efforts.

Furthermore, the Public Affairs Career Field Team also provides PAQ trainees other training opportunities to enhance development efforts such as attendance at the Air Force Public Affairs conference, the annual National Association for Government Communicators Communication School, and other training identified as useful and valuable to trainee development. In past years, conferences from Ragan Communications were selected to enhance trainee development in social media, informational graphics, etc.<sup>19</sup>

To graduate from the Public Affairs PALACE Acquire Training Program, employees must successfully complete the formal training courses identified as required, obtain training completion verification on all elements of the 35P CFETP checklist, complete at least one year of successful service at the GS-09 level and receive supervisor certification for promotion and outplacement. The one year at the GS-09 level is an Office of Personnel Management requirement for time-in-grade to be eligible for the next higher promotion level of GS-11.



## **Air Force promotion-eligible candidates**

Air Force promotion-eligible candidates are civilian employees already in the Air Force civilian service at the GS-09 level. These civilians meet the Office of Personnel Management requirements for the GS-11 level if they have successfully completed at least 52 weeks of qualifying experience at the GS-09 level; meaning they have worked in the Public Affairs career field for at least one year and performed successfully on the annual appraisal. These are employees who are ready to increase their levels of responsibility and/or complexity. Other than normal new position acclimatization, these employees do not require nor do they receive any additional training if selected for promotion.

Supervisors of civilians at both wing and MAJCOM levels regarding the training requirements of civilian employees selected for promotion were consistent in their assessment of the training requirements for these employees. Other than the typical on-the-job orientation required, these employees required little to no additional supervision to successfully complete their assigned tasks.<sup>20</sup>

Since GS-1035-11 positions are locally managed, these positions are not authorized PCS funds from the Central Salary Account. In most cases, civilians hired into locally managed positions either come from the local commuting area or are responsible for funding their own relocation, if necessary. Therefore, for the majority of these positions, the Air Force incurs no PCS expenses for this category of employee.

Employees in this category are not authorized Student Loan Repayment Program funding but do, however, have access to civilian tuition assistance through the local education office and, in some cases, the Air Force Public Affairs Career Field Team.

### **Transfer-eligible candidates**

These are civilians already at the GS-11 level looking for opportunities in different offices, commands or geographic areas. This group also includes employees in higher grades willing to accept the lower-grade GS-11 position. These employees have already met the OPM requirements of the GS-11 level and, in most cases, are eligible for advancement to the GS-12 level. As with the promotion-eligible candidates above, other than normal new position acclimatization, these employees do not require or receive any additional training, if selected for such a position.

Feedback from wing and MAJCOM supervisors regarding the level of effort required to manage and supervise these employees compared with PAQ trainees and other civilian employees indicates this group of employees are similar to the promotion-eligible candidates described above.<sup>21</sup> These employees tend to require slightly more orientation only if they come from outside the Air Force or Department of Defense as a whole, such as Department of Energy, Department of Agriculture, etc. Understanding the cultural differences among other organizations and the DoD, or Air Force, specifically, is the biggest training/orientation requirement of this group of employees.

As described above, these employees are generally not eligible for PCS expenses or formal training. They are, however, able to access civilian tuition assistance for job-related college courses. As with all civilian employees, each time a civilian accesses tuition assistance, he/she does incur a service commitment of equal time, running concurrently.

### **External candidates**

These are civilians not currently serving in the federal competitive service – normal civilians. These candidates must demonstrate they meet the OPM requirements of the GS-11

level. For Public Affairs, the 1035 Public Affairs Position Classification Standard.<sup>22</sup> This standard requires at least one year of specific experience at the next lowest level that, in this case, would be GS-09. To qualify with education in lieu of experience, the OPM requirement is a master's degree for the GS-09 level. Civilians in the external category who qualify with one year of experience can be hired; and, just like the promotion and transfer candidates, other than normal new position familiarization, do not require or receive any additional training if selected.

Due to federal hiring laws, preference for federal positions goes to veterans and individuals with Schedule A disabilities. In all instances, these employees have the necessary skills to perform the functions of the positions; and, as with the promotion, internal and external categories, require little additional training other than normal oversight of new employees and adaptation to Air Force culture.

Determining the right mix of force renewal sources to fill the critical GS-1035-11 Public Affairs Specialists positions within Air Force Public Affairs is key to ensuring the career field meets its requirements to not only, Air Force senior leadership but also Airmen at all levels, and the American people. The right mix of civilian force renewal will help ensure Air Force Public Affairs has the right mix of diversity, fresh ideas and experience necessary to lead Air Force communication efforts for internal and external publics.

## **CHAPTER 3**

This research uses the Evaluation Framework to assess the various force renewal sources. In addition to addressing the funding necessary to implement force renewal efforts, the Air Force must also comply with federal hiring laws and Department of Defense and Air Force regulations and instructions, therefore, manning must also be evaluated. Manning for these purposes refers to the number and experience level of personnel already on staff that are necessary to provide the appropriate training or orientation necessary for newly hired civilian employees.

### **Methodology and Criteria**

In order to appropriately assess the costs associated with the various force renewal sources, both the manpower and money required must be assessed. In this section the dollar costs of force renewal are assessed across various categories including relocation, student loan repayment, tuition assistance, etc. In addition, the manning necessary to implement force renewal through the four different sources is also evaluated. In order to comply with federal hiring laws and policies, civilian hiring involves a variety of organizations including the recruiting Public Affairs office, civilian personnel flight, Air Force Personnel Center and even the specific career field team. Review of the four force renewal sources reveals the only category of employee that consistently costs the Air Force in either time, money or manpower is the PALACE Acquire Training Program.

### **The dollar cost of force renewal sources**

The dollar costs for PAQ training include formal training tuition and temporary duty (TDY) costs (Figure 3.1). Additionally, since PALACE Acquire trainees are eligible to receive PCS costs, in some cases, these expenses are also included.

Costs for PCS run, on average \$8,000 to \$12,000 for PAQ-level employees. Since the Public Affairs career field no longer requires three PCS moves during the two- to three-year

training program, only one move, valued at approximately \$10,000 will be calculated for the PCS costs.

The average cost of the Public Affairs Qualification Course at the Defense Information School, Fort Meade, Maryland is \$15,000. This cost was calculated using the GSA.gov website for per diem rates, using \$121/\$69 for the daily rate and approximately \$400 for roundtrip travel.<sup>23</sup> This cost does not include tuition since this is a pipeline school for DoD Public Affairs practitioners and quotas for each service are allotted and filled through service-unique processes and will be used regardless of the student actually occupying the seat.

The Visual Information Management course costs approximately \$5,000<sup>24</sup> per student. Again, tuition costs for this school are not calculated.

Various TDY costs for week-long training, generally runs \$2,500 for travel, lodging and registration, per student.<sup>25</sup> Registration costs for these various training opportunities tend to run between \$500 and \$1,500 per opportunity are included in the \$2,500 approximated cost.

The PALACE Acquire trainees in the Public Affairs career field generally request and receive the maximum \$20,000 for the Student Loan Repayment Program per student.

Few, if any of the PAQ trainees have applied for tuition assistance in recent years, making this expense too low to document and compare.

*Figure 3.1 Dollar Cost of Force Renewal Sources*

	<b>PALACE Acquire Trainee</b>	<b>Promotion- Eligible</b>	<b>Transfer Eligible</b>	<b>External Hire</b>
<b>Permanent Change of Station</b>	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Defense Information School Public Affairs Qualification Course</b>	\$15,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Defense Information School Visual Information Management Course</b>	\$5,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Air Force Public Affairs Conference</b>	\$2,500	\$0	\$0	\$0

<b>National Association of Government Communicators Communication School</b>	\$2,500	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Ragan Communications course average</b>	\$2,500	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Student Loan Repayment Program</b>	\$20,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Tuition Assistance</b>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Grand Totals</b>	\$57,500	\$0	\$0	\$0

### **The time cost of force renewal sources**

Since all other force renewal sources are hired “fully qualified,” the time costs primarily focus on the investment needed to train PALACE Acquire trainees in compliance with the Public Affairs AFSC 35P, Career Field Education and Training Plan.<sup>26</sup> The CFETP outlines the various requirements and the training level necessary to be “fully qualified” as an Air Force Public Affairs Specialist. While it is the responsibility of the trainee to learn the required information and gain the necessary skills, the qualified personnel in the trainee’s assigned office are the individuals tasked with creating an appropriate training environment, assigning meaningful work, assessing progress and mentoring throughout the two- to three-year program.

### **Manpower needed to support**

Recruiting and onboarding of civilians is relatively the same for the various force renewal sources, with the exception of the PALACE Acquire Training Program. PAQ requires additional resources to vet the numerous applicants. For the Public Affairs career field, recruiting and the majority of vetting activities are performed by the Public Affairs Career Field Team at the Air Force Personnel Center. In recent years, the Public Affairs Career Field Team streamlined recruitment by announcing all opportunities and locations in one USAJobs.gov announcement. The team then requests, one at a time, the certificates for each location and performs the following vetting procedure:

1. All candidates, generally between 20 and 50, are contacted by email. The email clarifies the requirement to move themselves to the position installation, if selected; and requires a list of references if they want to still be considered, be submitted within 48 hours.
2. The candidates who reply with references are then sent a writing prompt assignment and given several days to complete.
3. During this time, the Public Affairs Career Field Team develops a matrix of the candidates, assessing prior military experiences, level of education, field of study, resume of experiences, reference recommendations, and finally, writing prompt assessment for those candidates who complete this task to remain competitive for consideration.
4. The cumulative values from the matrix determines which candidates “earn” the opportunity for an interview. The Public Affairs Career Field Team organizes and conducts panel interviews which generally take 30 minutes each.
5. Once the panel determines the top to to three candidates, these names are provided to the MAJCOM where the PAQ will be assigned. The MAJCOM then determines, either through additional interviews or based on the resume and writing prompt package which candidate to select and any alternates.

Additionally, the training program requires the appointment of an Air Force mentor and the coordination of the specific career field-required training.<sup>27</sup>

Evaluation of the costs of the various force renewal sources reveals extensive costs associated with the PALACE Acquire Training Program while other sources require very little time or money to obtain a qualified GS-1035-11 employee. These calculations take into account

not just the hard dollar costs of various expenses such as relocation services and per diem associated with formal training; but also the time and level of effort necessary to provide quality training opportunities to comply with federal and Air Force policies.





## CHAPTER 4

### Results of evaluation

There currently exists no published analysis of the PALACE Acquire Training Program with respect to return on investment for Public Affairs or any of the other career fields which employ this program. This research will be the first such analysis and may provide sufficient data that other career fields can employ the same methodology to review their own use of this force renewal program.

In evaluating each of the four force renewal categories defined in Chapter 2 (PALACE Acquire, promotion eligible, transfer and external), it is clear the only category of force renewal that costs the Air Force recruiting and training funds is the PALACE Acquire Training Program. All other categories are comprised of civilian employees or externally hired employees employed as a result of demonstrating the experience necessary to be fully qualified to perform the duties of their positions. Only minimal on-the-job training to orient these employees is required, as it would be with any other type of employee hired into a new office.

It is vital that Air Force Public Affairs understands the level of effort required to recruit, train and place a PAQ graduate and weighs this cost against other force renewal sources such as transfers from other agencies and appointments of fully qualified external candidates. Understanding the cost/benefit of the PAQ program with respect to Air Force Public Affairs will enable the function to make better use of manpower and money currently being spent on this training program.

## CHAPTER 5

### Analysis of results

The interviews conducted with the various PAQ supervisors revealed a consistent theme: attitude. Each supervisor made clear the attitude of the PALACE Acquire trainee was the most important factor in determining the trainee's success and the manpower efforts needed to achieve the fully trained status.

In all cases, regardless of the force renewal source, employees with positive attitudes and a desire to be a part of the Public Affairs career field, were more successful faster than those who were interested only in obtaining federal employment or seeking promotion without regard for the requirements of the position.

Once all four categories of force renewal are compared, the results demonstrate that all civilian employees require a foundational level of on-the-job training that is necessary to acclimate them to the local mission, organization, culture and responsibilities. This is the same requirement all employers would face in hiring new talent. In all cases, the force renewal source produced a fully qualified Public Affairs professional at the GS-1035-11 level once training – either orientation-level for existing employees, or the full two- to three-year program for PAQ trainees – was completed.

Although it is impossible to assess the retention rate of other force renewal sources, analysis of Public Affairs PALACE Acquire graduates, reveals interesting data that should also be considered in this evaluation.

Since 1989, more than 100 civilians have been recruited for the Air Force Public Affairs PALACE Acquire Training Program (Figure 5.1)<sup>28</sup>. Retention, for purposes of this discussion, is

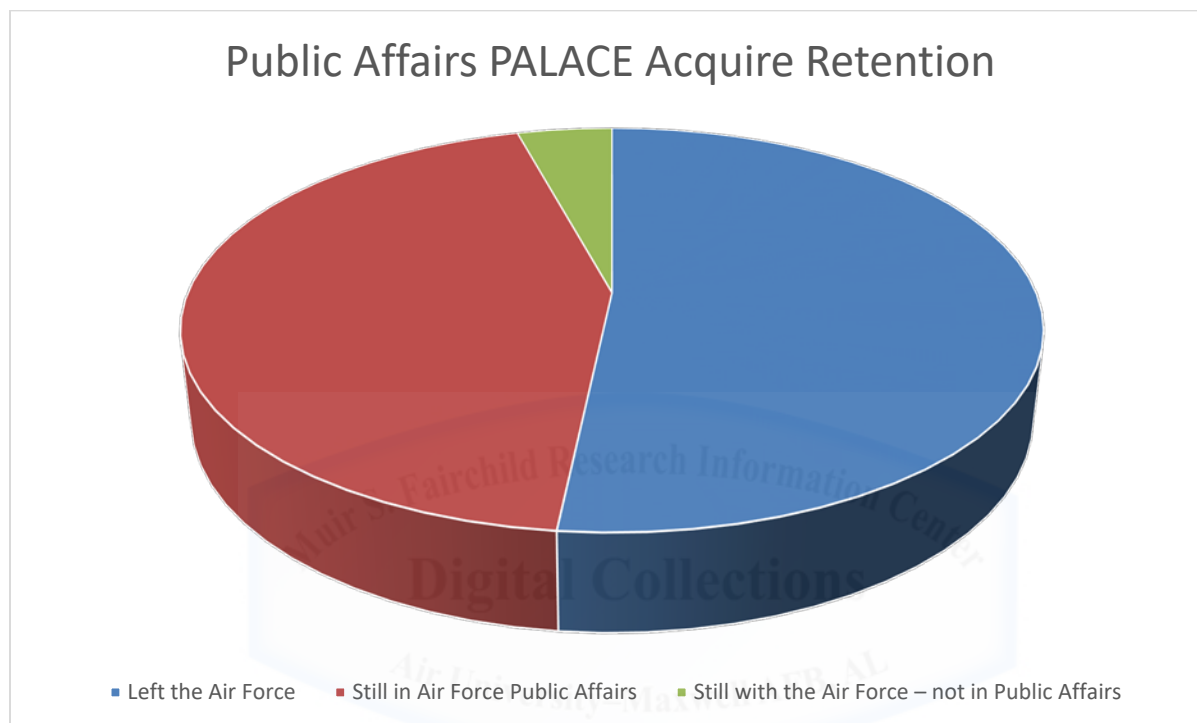
two-fold: employees who remain with the Air Force after training; and employees who remain with Air Force Public Affairs after training.

*Figure 5.1. Retention Rate of Public Affairs PALACE Acquire Trainees.<sup>29</sup>*

Year	Left the Air Force	Still in Air Force Public Affairs	Still with the Air Force – not in Public Affairs	Total PAQs Hired
1989	1	1		2
1990	4			4
1991	1			1
1992	2			2
1993		1		1
1994	2			2
1995	4	2	1	7
1996	7			7
1997	3			3
1998	3	1		4
1999	3			3
2000	1	4		5
2001	3			3
2002	2	2		4
2003	3	2		5
2004	2	1		3
2005	5	3		8
2006	1	1	2	4
2007	1	2		3
2008	2	4		6
2009	3	4	1	8
2010	3	7		10
2011	3	2		5
2012	1	4		5
2013	1	4		5
2014		4		4
2015		3	1	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>118</b>

Of the 118 PALACE Acquire trainees hired, 57 remain employed by the Air Force. In five cases, employees transitioned to career fields other than Public Affairs. 52 of the graduated Public Affairs PALACE Acquire trainees remain in Air Force Public Affairs, just 44%.

*Figure 5.2. Public Affairs PALACE Acquire Retention.*



From a financial and manpower investment standpoint, the cost of maintaining the PALACE Acquire Training Program for Air Force Public Affairs is exponentially higher than recruiting through all other sources. In order to comply with program rules,<sup>30</sup> not only does the Air Force incur significant costs associated with relocation, training and education; but also through extensive manpower investment to ensure compliance with Air Force training standards.<sup>31</sup>

However, these costs alone cannot be used to determine whether or not this program is valuable for Air Force Public Affairs force renewal needs. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that PAQ supervisors did not perceive the trainees as a free labor pool. Rather, most saw a

reasonable return on investment; that is, a period of productivity that came after a period of involved and effective training. Because the PAQ program for Public Affairs requires the trainees spend at least one year working in the wing, or installation, Public Affairs office trainees are generally not assigned to one office for more than a year at a time. Once the trainee has been trained sufficient to demonstrate competency in the required tasks, it is time for the trainee to transition to a new area of assignment. This rotation seems to be helping ensure trainees are not used as manning shortfall solutions in their assigned offices.

Additionally, feedback from graduated trainees during the last several years, reveals that those who experienced formal rotations and had clearly assigned tasks and responsibilities place great value on their training and credit it for contributing to their professional success.<sup>32</sup> Of those who had left the Air Force, they indicated that while they valued their training and experiences, after graduation advancement came too slow and the ability to grow or develop in new areas was limited. Specifically, once hired into their permanent outplacement positions, these employees found limited opportunities within their new permanent offices to take on additional areas of responsibility, a major departure from their previous training experiences. Those that left the Air Force, despite the high cost of training they had received, complied with the terms of their service agreement and fulfilled their required training commitment so that none were required to reimburse the Air Force for expenses incurred.

Both MAJCOM and wing PAQ supervisors expressed pride in being responsible for providing training to the next generation of Public Affairs civilian employees.

## CHAPTER 6

### Recommendations

While it could be argued that the PALACE Acquire Training Program infuses the Public Affairs career field with youth by recruiting potentially younger candidates into a training program, compliance with federal hiring rules makes the hiring of veterans a priority and limits this as a potential incentive. What is clear, is that this program is expensive when compared to other methodologies for force renewal such as transfers, promotions and external hires. Not only is there a financial burden on the Air Force to support these trainees but the offices to which they are assigned also invest significant time and effort in ensuring effective training.

Additionally, in interviews with graduated PALACE Acquire employees there is a clear indication of “let down” after graduation. After two years of dynamic assignments rotating through various wing and major command Public Affairs office sections and divisions, numerous formal training courses and temporary duty assignments, after graduation it all comes to an abrupt halt. Opportunities for continued on-the-job expansion of competencies are limited to those specifically for which the employee was hired – just like all other civilians. Prospects for continuing developmental education are limited to those available to all civilians through the Air Force’s Civilian Developmental Education programs; and most of these are out of bounds for Public Affairs civilians at the GS-11 level since Public Affairs now requires PAQs complete Squadron Officer School through distance learning to complete their PAQ training program.

The Public Affairs career field should reconsider use of this program. While it is clear that wing and MAJCOM offices that provide PALACE Acquire trainees with their training assignments think highly of the program and are enthusiastic about the employees who successfully complete program requirements,<sup>33</sup> none provided any information that could justify

the expense of the program in relation to it being a superior method of producing qualified GS-1035-11 employees. It is conceivable that the Public Affairs career field will realize more benefit from expanding the number of positions in the Career Broadening program in lieu of continuing to devote resources to the PALACE Acquire Training Program and levying additional training responsibility on wing and MAJCOM offices already understaffed and over tasked.



## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusions

As the Air Force continues to examine ways to operate more efficiently and effectively, continuing to participate in the PALACE Acquire Training Program comes at a cost neither the Air Force nor the Public Affairs career field can justify. As manpower cuts have reduced the authorized officer manning for the career field by more than 10% over the last 10 years, ultimately manning remains a much bigger factor with the assigned force at just 46% of authorizations. This low manning level across the career field impacts not only the number of people available to each office to execute mission requirements but also places an increasing training burden on those who remain. Although the level of effort each PAQ trainee requires decreases with the amount of time he/she spends in the program, considering the three other methods of force renewal produce qualified GS-1035-11 employees, the program should be discontinued in the Air Force Public Affairs career field.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Secretary of the Air Force. 2010. "AIR FORCE INSTRUCTION 35-101, Public Affairs: PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESPONSIBILITIES AND MANAGEMENT." *Air Force e-Publishing*. August 18. Accessed January 28, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf\\_pa/publication/afi35-101/afi35-101.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf_pa/publication/afi35-101/afi35-101.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Personnel Management. 1981. "POSITION CLASSIFICATION STANDARD FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS SERIES, GS-1035." *Position Classification Standards for White Collar Work*. July. Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/standards/1000/gsl035.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Air Force. 2016. "Authorized vs. Assigned for Years 2005 through 2015." *AFPC Secure RAW*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, January 15.

<sup>4</sup> Air Force. 2015. "Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide." *Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, February.

<sup>5</sup> Air Force (AF/A1PF). 2012. "Air Force e-Publishing." *AIR FORCE POLICY DIRECTIVE 36-6, CIVILIAN CAREER FIELD MANAGEMENT*. March 7. Accessed January 27, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a1/publication/afpd36-6/afpd\\_36-6.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afpd36-6/afpd_36-6.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, Personnel. 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Air Force. 2016. "Authorized vs. Assigned for Years 2005 through 2015." *AFPC Secure RAW*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, January 15. "Air Force e-Publishing." *CIVILIAN CAREER FIELD MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT*. May 3. Accessed February 28, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a1/publication/afman36-606/afman36-606.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afman36-606/afman36-606.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, Public Affairs. 2011. "Air Force e-Publishing." *PUBLIC AFFAIRS AFSC 35P, CAREER FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLAN*. October 1. Accessed January 16, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf\\_pa/publication/cfftp35p/cfftp35p.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf_pa/publication/cfftp35p/cfftp35p.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Air Force. 2015. *Business Objects Report, Public Affairs RPA Tracker*. Database, Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center.

<sup>10</sup> Air Force. 2015. *Business Objects Report, Public Affairs RPA Tracker*. Database, Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center.

<sup>11</sup> Air Force. 2015. *Business Objects Report, Public Affairs RPA Tracker*. Database, Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center.

<sup>12</sup> Air Force Public Affairs SharePoint Site. Career Management. Accessed 22 February, 2016. <https://cs3.eis.af.mil/sites/OO-SC-AF-82/Resources/Career/Civilian/Career/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

<sup>13</sup> Air Force Public Affairs SharePoint Site. Career Management. Accessed 22 February, 2016. <https://cs3.eis.af.mil/sites/OO-SC-AF-82/Resources/Career/Civilian/Career/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup> Air Force Civilian Service. n.d. *PALACE Acquire*. Accessed January 17, 2016. <http://afciviliancareers.com/careers/find-your-fit/pathways/students/palace-acquire/>

<sup>15</sup> Carr, Cook, Durham, Jackson, Rush, Et. Al., interview by Sonja S. Coderre. 2016. *PALACE Acquire Training Program Evaluation* (January 25).

<sup>16</sup> Air Force. 2015. "Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide." *Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, February.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense. 2009. "Training Program of Instruction for DINFOS PAQC Public Affairs Qualifications Course." *Defense Information School Course Catalog*. December 13. Accessed February 7, 2016. <http://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Portals/66/Documents/Academics/PALD/PAQC%20TPI%20FEB%2014.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense. 2009. "TRAINING PROGRAM OF INSTRUCTION (TPI) FOR DINFOS - VIM VISUAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT COURSE." *Defense Information School Course Catalog*. July. Accessed February 7, 2016. <http://www.dinfos.dma.mil/Portals/66/Documents/Academics/PALD/VIM.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Ragan Communications. 2014. *Ragan.com Training*. Accessed February 7, 2016. <http://www.ragan.com/Main/Home.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> Carr, Cook, Durham, Jackson, Rush, Et. Al., interview by Sonja S. Coderre. 2016. *PALACE Acquire Training Program Evaluation* (January 25).

<sup>21</sup> Carr, Cook, Durham, Jackson, Rush, Et. Al., interview by Sonja S. Coderre. 2016. *PALACE Acquire Training Program Evaluation* (January 25).

<sup>22</sup> Office of Personnel Management. 1981. "POSITION CLASSIFICATION STANDARD FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS SERIES, GS-1035." *Position Classification Standards for White Collar Work*. July. Accessed January 6, 2015. <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/classifying-general-schedule-positions/standards/1000/gsl035.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> GSA. 2015. *Per Diem Rates*. October 1. Accessed February 6, 2016. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/104711>.

<sup>24</sup> GSA. 2015. *Per Diem Rates*. October 1. Accessed February 6, 2016. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/104711>.

<sup>25</sup> GSA. 2015. *Per Diem Rates*. October 1. Accessed February 6, 2016. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/104711>.

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, Public Affairs. 2011. "Air Force e-Publishing." *PUBLIC AFFAIRS AFSC 35P, CAREER FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLAN*. October 1. Accessed January 16, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf\\_pa/publication/cfep35p/cfep35p.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf_pa/publication/cfep35p/cfep35p.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Air Force. 2015. "Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide." *Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, February.

<sup>28</sup> Air Force. 2015. *Business Objects Report, Career Brief Analysis by SSN*. Database, Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center.

<sup>29</sup> Air Force. 2015. *Business Objects Report, Career Brief Analysis by SSN*. Database, Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center.

<sup>30</sup> Air Force. 2015. "Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide." *Civilian Force Renewal PALACE Acquire and COPPER Cap Guide*. Joint Base San Antonio: Air Force Personnel Center, February.

<sup>31</sup> Secretary of the Air Force, Public Affairs. 2011. "Air Force e-Publishing." *PUBLIC AFFAIRS AFSC 35P, CAREER FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING PLAN*. October 1. Accessed January 16, 2016. [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf\\_pa/publication/cfep35p/cfep35p.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/saf_pa/publication/cfep35p/cfep35p.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Knutson, Simas, Simmons, Turner, Zuch, Et. Al., interview by Sonja S. Coderre. 2013 - 2015. *PALACE Acquire Training Program Evaluation*.

<sup>33</sup> Carr, Cook, Durham, Jackson, Rush, Et. Al., interview by Sonja S. Coderre. 2016. *PALACE Acquire Training Program Evaluation* (January 25).

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