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Executive Summary

Title: Making The Marine Corps Recruiting Process More Efficient

Author: Major Jason A. Paredes, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Marine Corps reforms are necessary to: 1) Improve efficiency in prospecting the growing recruiting-age population, 2). Reforming out-dated enlistment standards to reflect societies norms, and 3). Increase the retention of qualified active Marines.

Discussion: Since the establishment of the AVF in 1973, the recruiting-age population has continued to grow, posing a challenge for recruiters to communicate efficiently. The Marine Corps struggles to make contact with such a large community due to inefficient prospecting methods. The Marine Corps is also rejecting perfectly capable candidates because of antiquated guidelines regarding drug use. Finally, the Marine Corps elects to retain a very small number of active Marines each year, which directly affects the recruiting mission.

Conclusion: The expanded use of digital communications to prospect for applicants is essential to communicate effectively with the growing military age population. Service-level reforms are necessary to update out-dated enlistment standards to reflect society's norms more accurately. Finally, the Marine Corps needs to increase the retention of active Marines to reduce recruiting requirements and develop a more capable force. These reforms are essential to improve recruiting efficiencies and sustain the health of the AVF.

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Preface

This research was conducted and written for an audience unfamiliar with the history of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) and how the Marine Corps makes its challenging recruiting mission each year. The history of the AVF provides context and is the foundation to give an appreciation for modern-day recruiting. For many Marines, recruiting is often referred to as the most challenging assignment of their career. It is characterized by long hours and constant rejection while operating far away from the support structure of a military installation. Due to these challenges many Marines are not enthusiastic about and try to avoid this assignment. This needs to change and improved efficiencies can help. This research highlights the recruiting process to show the inefficiencies. It then recommends reforms to improve the inefficiencies and sustain the health of the AVF.

Introduction

The All-Volunteer Force (AVF) was established in 1973 when the United States ended a decades-long policy of conscription. This change occurred for several reasons; however, the expansion in size of the recruiting-age population was the main factor. The Marine Corps experiences difficulties communicating efficiently with the large recruiting-age population. This problem is further compounded by out-dated service entrance standards and restrictive retention goals. The problems above are creating an ever-increasing challenge for Marine Corps Recruiting Command (MCRC) and may reach a breaking point. Reforms are necessary to improve efficiencies and ensure the long-term health of the AVF.

Although the Marine Corps has generally experienced recruiting success, it has encountered difficulties meeting its recruiting goals.¹ Every month is challenging and often Recruiting Stations rely on each other by swapping quotas to make mission. This research will focus on three variables the Marine Corps can control to improve efficiencies: 1) How the Marine Corps communicates with the recruiting-age population, 2) The service-controlled standards for entry, and 3) Retention goals of the current force which directly impact the recruiting mission.

This research will provide a brief history of the AVF to set the foundation for why recruiting is important. It will then explain the Marine Corps recruiting process to highlight inefficiencies. Finally, challenges are explained and recommendations are provided to improve efficiencies and modernize processes.

History of the AVF

To appreciate the importance of military recruiting, it is essential to understand the history that created the modern-day AVF and how the United States formerly conscripted men

for service. In his classic book *Military Service in the United States*, Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft declares, “There is a deep sense of patriotic obligation when a Nation faces a clear threat, it drives men and women to serve their nation and fight for the freedom of their families, volunteers for military service during these periods are often abundant.”² Despite this pattern, The United States conducted drafts to support the American Revolution, the Civil War, and World War I. While these conflicts all generally had the popular support of the people, conscription was required due to the massive requirements for manpower compared to the limited size of the recruiting-age population. In each case, the draft ended shortly after the conclusion of the conflict.

In preparation for World War II, the United States passed the Service Act of 1940. Lasting until the AVF was established in 1973, this was the longest draft period in American history and the first peacetime conscription.

The security environment for the United States had changed, causing the need for a more significant standing military force. Following World War II, the United States broadened its concept of national security.³ With shrinking ocean barriers, improved technology, and a dependence on the global commons for trade, the world’s stability became part of the national interest. The United States had to focus externally to assure its internal security and uninterrupted flow of commerce, which the economy depends on so much. This continuation of conscription after World War II was necessary to establish and maintain a large military during peacetime.

The rapid expansion of the United States population expanded the recruiting pool for military age males. The 1950s represented the second highest decade of population increase during the century in both numerical (28.6 million) and percentage (19.0 percent) terms.⁴ The

increase in the population of 17-27-year-old males and the changing demands of the Defense Department for manpower lessened the need for a draft. In 1960, roughly forty-nine percent of the recruiting-age population needed to serve even though it was peacetime. In 1970, near the height of the Vietnam War, forty-one percent needed to serve. By 1979, in a time of relative peace, only twenty-one percent were needed. And in 2000, well after the Cold War and before the onset of the Global War on terror, the number was down to roughly one percent.⁵

Therefore, although the AVF is frequently viewed as an outgrowth of the Vietnam War, the move to end the draft had much deeper roots.⁶ The main factors were the social inequalities of conscription but more importantly the drastic change in demographics of the United States; the size of the recruiting-age population had become so large, and the needs of the military were becoming so small in comparison that in practice, the draft was no longer universal.⁷ Further supporting the growth of the population, the United States grew another 32.7 million in the 1990s and is the largest numerical increase in history.⁸ While the continued growth of the population enabled the establishment of the AVF, it presents many complex challenges.

Since 1973, the military services have led the efforts to recruit and sustain the AVF. During the initial years, many feared the military would not be able to attract enough enlistees, and that the quality of volunteer recruits would decrease. Those doubts have never been realized, and for more than forty-five years, the United States has maintained a professional AVF. The Department of Defense as a whole has generally been successful in meeting its recruiting targets; only twice has it fallen short of the mission. The first time was in 1998 during a period of unusually robust civilian employment and again in 2005 due to a confluence of external variables beyond the services' control.⁹

The AVF depends on volunteers to succeed and despite the expansion of the recruiting-aged population, the increasing number of ineligible Americans makes it challenging to achieve the mission.¹⁰ Thomas Spoehr, a leading researcher on this subject, notes, “Even more than on planes, ships, and tanks, the military depends on ready and willing American volunteers to protect this nation.”¹¹ The sustainment and health of the AVF is a topic every American must have an interest in to prevent the need for conscription again. Marine Corps reforms are necessary to improve efficiencies, retain more qualified Marines, and modify out-dated enlistment standards to expand the eligibility of the market and the long-term health of the AVF.

The Enlisted Recruiting Process

With an understanding of when and why the United States developed the AVF, it is essential to understand the process of how the Marine Corps finds qualified applicants. There are areas where the Marine Corps is very effective and simultaneously there are inefficiencies that must be reformed. Although the smallest military service, the Marine Corps must canvass the entire recruiting-age population just like the other services. Marine recruiters accomplish their mission with far fewer recruiters and resources while competing with all the other services for same pool of potential applicants. An explanation of this process will show the inefficiencies in how the Marine Corps currently locates qualified applicants for its enlisted force. The focus is specifically on enlisted recruiting because it comprises roughly 33,000 accessions compared to the 1,500 new officer accessions every fiscal year.¹² Officer accessions are also vastly different in that applicants apply and compete for a commission.

The process consists of eight steps: obtaining names, prospecting, screening, selling, processing, pool program, shipping, and command recruiting.¹³ Together all eight steps are known as *systematic recruiting*. According to *The Guidebook for Recruiters*, “The goal of

systematic recruiting is to organize the recruiter's efforts so that the required contacts, face-to-face meetings (appointments), interviews, and contracts are achieved.”¹⁴ It serves as a way for them to plan their actions and organize their efforts to produce the most efficient results. The three steps for analysis are the ones directly relating to finding applicants for entry and processing them for enlistment into the Marine Corps. The first two steps are discussed together and deal with finding applicants: obtaining names and prospecting. All of the components are important, but the first two – obtaining names and prospecting – require the most significant amount of the recruiter's time.¹⁵

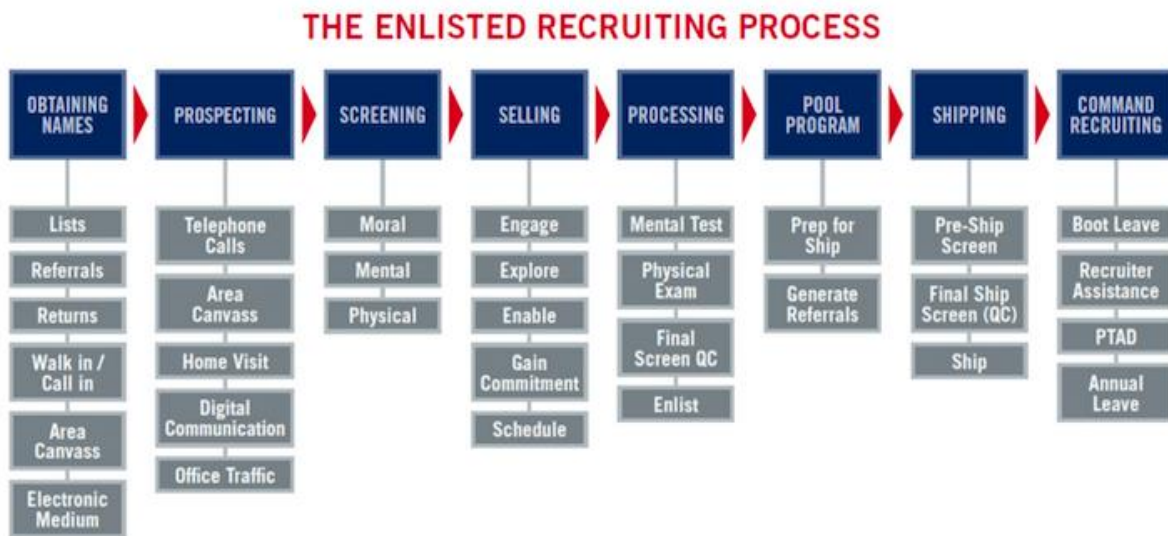


Figure 1. Headquarters US Marine Corps. *The Enlisted Processing Manual*, 2014.

Obtaining names is the first and most essential step to the enlisted recruiting process and is the foundation for the remaining steps. It establishes the scope of potential applicants within the recruiter's assigned sector. The goal is to identify *all* potential applicants by age, regardless of any qualification at this point. Once identified, recruiters then must make positive contact with all applicants on their lists to gauge interest and screen them to ensure they meet the moral, mental, and physical requirements to be a Marine. With the continued expansion of the

population introduced above, the number of names obtained has grown exponentially and is projected to continue to increase. (Figure 4).

Figures 2 and 3 below are excerpts from the Activity Analysis for Enlisted Recruiting. They will be used to analyse data and highlight trends over the past two years. This report is generated at the end of each month by MCRC and provides valuable information regarding contracting sources, effectiveness, prospecting, and processing ratios.

PROSPECTING:	Telephone Call	Office Traffic	Area Canvas	Home Visit	Digital Communication											
STD OF EFFECT	206:1	2:1	7:1	63:1	155:1											
BUSINESS PCT	34	3	52	1	12											
PCT ANALYSIS																
% MON OBJ ACH	90	101	99	53	94											
CONTRACTS(MON)	1355	145	1703	32	421											
CONTRACTS(FYTD)	16726	2094	21875	356	4,879											
EFFECT RATIO:																
ACTY TO CONT	16:1			10:1	19:1											
CONT TO APPT	5:1		3:1	1:1	4:1											
APPT TO INTV	2:1		2:1	6:1	2:1											
INTV TO CONR	4:1	3:1	5:1	3:1	5:1											
NEW CONTRACTS BY SOURCE:																
	CAN	LIS	WKI	CDR	DEP	MCR	REF	PPC	REC	LOC	CAL	RRA	OTH	EM	SN	DCR
MON(NO/%)	1,005/27	617/17	77/2	381/10	916/25	12/0	91/2	516/14	2/0	0/0	69/2	18/0	18/0	93/3	0/0	190/5
FYTD %	26	15	2	13	26	1	2	17	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	8

Figure 2. Activity Analysis for Enlisted Recruiting, September 2018.

PROSPECTING:	Telephone Call	Office Traffic	Area Canvas	Home Visit	Digital Communication											
STD OF EFFECT	230:1	1:1	7:1	54:1	194:1											
BUSINESS PCT	34	2	51	1	12											
PCT ANALYSIS																
% MON OBJ ACH	92	104	108	73	83											
CONTRACTS(MON)	1253	137	1550	32	373											
CONTRACTS(FYTD)	17023	1921	22340	347	5,200											
EFFECT RATIO:																
ACTY TO CONT	16:1			8:1	20:1											
CONT TO APPT	6:1		3:1	4:1	5:1											
APPT TO INTV	2:1		2:1	2:1	2:1											
INTV TO CONR	4:1	2:1	5:1	3:1	5:1											
NEW CONTRACTS BY SOURCE:																
	CAN	LIS	WKI	CDR	DEP	MCR	REF	PPC	REC	LOC	CAL	RRA	OTH	EM	SN	DCR
MON(NO/%)	880/26	567/17	59/2	347/10	879/26	7/0	52/2	493/15	0/0	0/0	61/2	10/0	8/0	88/3	0/0	108/3
FYTD %	25	14	2	13	26	1	2	16	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	5

Figure 3. Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Activity Analysis for Enlisted Recruiting, September 2019.

The recruiting process begins with recruiters obtaining very broad list with only names, phone numbers, and addresses derived from a variety of sources, including high schools, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the states' Department of Motor Vehicles, newspapers, employment agencies, local organizations, and businesses.¹⁶ By far the most important are those from high schools and the ASVAB. ASVAB lists are usually obtained in mass from the school district and provided to recruiters. Once a recruiter establishes all the potential applicants in their sector, they begin to contact each one through one of the prospecting activities: telephone call, area canvass, home visit, digital communication, or an office visit.

With all names obtained, the process of prospecting begins to contact all potential applicants. Referrals is one of the sources of contracts and is the most efficient source of contracts for the Marine Corps. Referrals from the various programs represented forty-two

percent of all contracts written in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 (Figures 2 and 3). This is generally the most efficient and reliable source for recruiters and requires the least amount of prospecting effort. Referrals include all names given to recruiters by Poolees, Command Recruiters, local Selected Marine Corps Reserve units, contacts in the local community, and especially former Marines. “Poolee” is the term used for an applicant who already enlisted in the Marine Corps, is usually still a student, and is waiting to ship to recruit training. Command Recruiters are Marines from the area who have recently graduated boot camp and return for a short period to assist Recruiters. They serve as proof sources from the community and as examples and inspiration for their peers. Referrals also include “Legacy Marines,” the children of active, retired, or former Marines.

Referrals generally provide better leads for Recruiters, as the person who referred them knows the applicant has an interest in the Marine Corps. They also are likely to possess the necessary mental, moral, and physical requirements to be a Marine. The former Marine has conducted an initial screening. They are not a cold lead that will take more time to screen, may be disqualified, and may not even have an interest in the Marine Corps. The bottom line is the Marine Corps does an excellent job at utilizing the strength of relationships and their reputation to generate future business.

The most effective prospecting activity, responsible for twenty-five percent of all contracts for fiscal years 2018 through 2019 (Figures 2 and 3), is area canvassing—anyone a recruiter meets in public or talks to in person. While not terribly efficient, taking up fifty-two percent of a recruiter’s working hours (Figures 2 and 3), this activity leverages the strengths of the Marine Corps reputation for professionalism and appearance. Recruiters depend on their presence, image, and relations in the local community to be successful. Because of its

effectiveness, recruiters spend a lot of time in uniform at schools, malls, stores, athletic events, or anywhere where potential applicants may congregate to increase chance interactions.

By contrast, walk-ins and telephone calls are very inefficient forms of prospecting. Walk-ins only accounted for two percent of all contracts written in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 (Figures 2 and 3) and two percent of the overall business percentage. As the name implies, it accounts for any applicants who enter a recruiting sub-station and is interested in the information. Over the last decade, many efforts have enhanced the visibility and accessibility of recruiters to the recruiting-aged population. One such attempt was the consolidation of all services into one office and placing them inside a highly trafficked area. Most sub-stations now represent all services and are located in malls. Despite the investments over the last decade consolidating the services into one office, walk-ins are not effective. Although this activity is not effective, it is a passive recruiting practice. The recruiters do not invest any time into this effort since they are inside the station conducting regular business. Due to this, while it is an ineffective activity, it is not an inefficient source of time and does not merit reforms.

The most inefficient prospecting activity is list prospecting or telephone calls. List prospecting is a very time-consuming and out-dated method. Once recruiters have obtained all lists, they begin the process of cold calling every potential applicant to determine if they have any interest in the Marine Corps. The last two years of recruiting reports highlight the continued use and lack of results. While telephone calls comprised thirty-four percent of the business percentage or time spent by the recruiter, they only resulted in fourteen percent and fifteen percent of all contracts written in fiscal years 2018 and 2019 (Figures 2 and 3). The standard of effectiveness for the calls averaged 225:1, meaning 225 phone calls to achieve one contract.

The increased size of the recruiting-age population and change in how potential applicants communicate compounds this problem. Each Marine Corps Recruiter has an average of 5,000 high school seniors they must communicate with. Their objectives generally average out to 500 phone calls a week and they try to make contact as early as possible in the school year to compete against all services. As an estimate, recruiters generally spend at least two to three hours of each day placing cold calls. This activity is out-dated because landline telephones are no longer the main form for communication. Calls are often screened, unanswered, phone numbers are inaccurate, or the phone numbers listed are for the parents.

The final prospecting activity presents the most opportunity but is currently under-utilized. Digital communication, the use of popular social media platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok, Xbox, YouTube, and Facebook to contact a potential applicant, was only established by policy in fiscal year 2016. The Marine Corps recruiting began to track the results of this activity in 2018. As a sample, the effectiveness for digital communications in fiscal years 2018 and 2019, was twelve percent of contracts and comprised two percent of the recruiters' business percentage (time and effort). (Figures 2 and 3) This data highlights that this activity has tremendous potential, producing twelve percent of the contracts with only a two percent time investment. However, it also highlights that the Marine Corps is not dedicating enough effort to this method. They continue to spend more time on other out-dated and less efficient prospecting activities, most notably telephone calls (Figures 2 and 3).

Challenges

Recruiting health is shaped by many variables. The Marine Corps has little control over external factors such as economic conditions, whether the nation is engaged in sustained conflicts, or a growing segment of the population is pursuing college.¹⁷ This research therefore

focuses on three internal variables the Marine Corps can control: how it communicates with the population; its standards for entry, and its retention goals for the current force.

The first challenge is the most complex and has several factors explained below. The growth of the military-age population that made the AVF successful has also made communicating with all potential applicants much more difficult. The military-age population has become so large that it is very time consuming and difficult for recruiters to reach all potential applicants. The future recruiting mission will only get more robust as the trend of population growth will continue. Figure 4 below from the United States Census Bureau shows the population of 17-24-year-olds increasing from 34.7 million in 2009 to 45.1 million by 2050.¹⁸ This challenge is further compounded by the use of outdated prospecting methods. The recruiters operate in a daily environment of repetitive and endless outdated prospecting methods. The recruiting force does not possess the capacity to reach all potential applicants. The Marine Corps needs to be able to communicate more effectively with the growing military-age population on a grand scale.



Figure 4. U.S. Census Bureau. *Actual and Projected Population of 17-24-Year-Olds*.

The Marine Corps further narrows the military-age population by hyper-focusing on high school seniors. The Marine Corps divides its minimum accessions mission to a sixty-to-forty ratio of high school seniors to graduates. Recruiters have to meet the objective of at least sixty percent of their contracts coming from high school seniors. Often times, the number of enlistees is even higher and just shy of seventy-percent for the fiscal year. This service restriction makes the high school senior the primary mission for recruiters. The reasoning is that high school seniors are seen as generally more qualified. Their academics are more recent; they have not entered the job market or incurred substantial debt, and usually are not married and do not have children. Drug use and criminal history are also generally minimal. These constraints further narrow the market for recruiters. This practice also feeds a challenge discussed later, the desire of the Marine Corps to be the youngest force.

The Marine Corps has not adapted and continues to require a minimum of sixty-percent of new contracts to come from current high school seniors. In a follow-on update to their

previous study, Bicksler and Nolan concluded the youth market had drastically changed, stating “Since the inception of the AVF, the share of high school graduates who enrolled in college within a year of leaving high school rose from forty-nine percent in 1980 to sixty-seven percent in 2007—an increase of more than thirty-five percent. A 2008 poll of youth aged 16 to 27 found that eighty-six percent plan to pursue higher education.”¹⁹

The final challenge posed by the growth of the population is a much smaller percentage of the current population currently serves, served, or knows a service member. This has caused a natural separation and a lack of understanding of the military from the civilian population. This disconnection can lead to dissension in the propensity to enlist due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about the services.²⁰ It may also indicate that the Marine Corps most efficient means of prospecting, referrals, may diminish in the future.

The second challenge is that despite the military-age population growth, the corresponding percentage of qualified applicants for service has decreased. Thomas Spoher, a leading researcher on the AVF, highlights, “Seventy-one percent of young Americans between the ages of 17-24, are ineligible to serve in the military – that is 24 million of the 34 million people of that age group.”²¹ Mark Perry, another researcher, similarly notes and expands that one in three applicants is disqualified for being overweight, one in four cannot meet minimum educational requirements, and one in ten has a criminal history.²² This is not a new problem; Barbara Bickslers' research a decade ago concluded, “The number of youth eligible for military service substantially reduces the size of the available pool, with seventy-five percent of the youth population currently ineligible to serve.”²³ More than half of that number is ineligible because of medical or physical conditions, such as obesity, asthma, or diabetes.”²⁴ So while the military-age population has grown, counter to intuition the eligible market has contracted. The Marine Corps

struggles to communicate with such a large population and this is further compounded by a seventy-five percent disqualification. Several of these disqualifications remain valid, however some are out-dated and modification would immediately expand the eligibility of the military-age population.

The reason for strict enlistment standards can be traced to the United States experience in Vietnam. After Vietnam, the United States realized the importance of a quality force and revised minimum standards for entrance into the military. The changes included increased standards for education, aptitude, drug history, and moral background screenings. Specifically, a high school diploma and satisfactory scores were now required for enlistment. Drug and moral screening became stricter and the services implemented standards and waiver criteria. Many of the established standards remain valid and necessary, but some such as drug use remain rigid and relatively unchanged. Mark Perry argues, "There are several solutions to the military recruiting crisis, they can lower eligibility requirements, assign more recruiters, or lower the number of armed forces needed – but lowering standards is not an option."²⁵ The services control many of these disqualifiers and the drastic level of the military-age population disqualified for service is an immediate indication for reform.

Many disqualifying factors can be discussed and arguably require review by the services. However, the danger is that some areas pose a risk and potential liability for the government, who must ensure the well-being and safety of applicants at recruit training. Example of these areas includes obesity and fitness requirements, which disqualify roughly fifty-nine percent of the military-age population. (Figure 5). There are many other moral and social factors that disqualify roughly ten percent of applicants; they are captured under Education and Criminality

within figure 5. Reforms of some of these restrictions pose much less risk to the service and merit consideration.

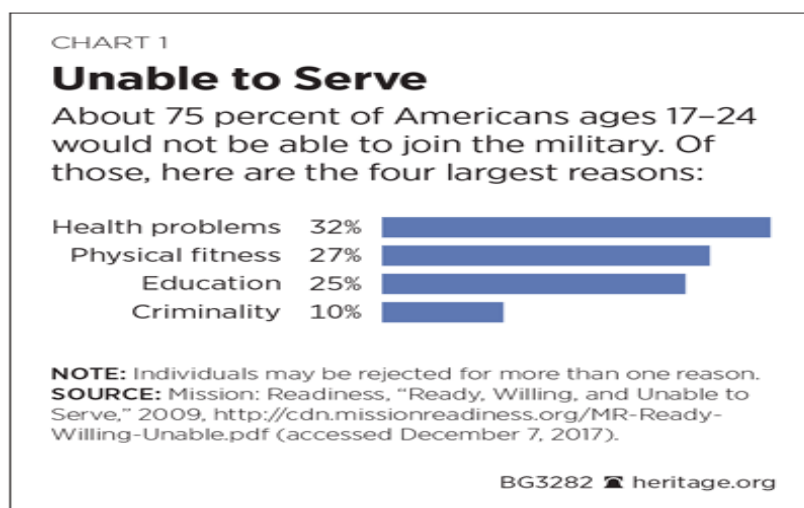


Figure 5. The Heritage Foundation. *Eligibility for Military Service*, 2017.

The third and final challenge is that the Marine Corps chooses to be the youngest service within the Department of Defense. The Marine Corps achieves this by retaining a very low percentage of first-term active-duty Marines every year. The Marine Corps sets their annual goal of retention at twenty-four percent of first-term Marines departing the service that year.²⁶ These low retention rates directly feed the mission of recruiting to replace those losses. The Marine Corps is the youngest of all the services in terms of the average age of enlistees and has the highest turnover rate. An estimated sixty percent of enlisted Marines, 110,000 of 180,000, only serve one four-year enlistment term. This means that more than half the Marine Corps is under the age of 22 years old, and each year an estimated 27,000 first term Marines leave the service. The Marine Corps each year has several Fast Filling Military Occupational Specialities.²⁷ These are fields where there are more Marines who desire to remain in the service, but are either forced out or have to change jobs. This significant departure of Marines is the primary driver of the annual recruiting mission of generally 36,000 new accessions each year.

The low retention rates are self-imposed by the Marine Corps' desire for a young force. The desire for a young force is driven by the fact that the Marine Corps is roughly fifty percent combat arms. The enlistment of a younger population serves the needs of those communities' best in terms of fitness, discipline, and the Marine Corps mission at the time. For fiscal year 2020, the first term Marines scheduled to separate from the Marine Corps was 25,218. The Marine Corps only set a retention mission of 6,052 or twenty-four percent.²⁸

Recommendations

This research highlights three main challenges then aligns recommendations for each regarding how the Marine Corps can improve the effectiveness of recruiting. With the growing population and stable size of the recruiting force, reforms are necessary to enhance prospecting processes to reach all potential applicants more efficiently. The three recommendations include: 1). Refinement of how the Marine Corps communicates with the population, 2). Updating out-dated service-controlled standards for entry, and 3) Increasing retention goals of the current force which directly impacts the recruiting mission.

The most important recommendation is the first one. The Marine Corps needs to address the communication challenges with reaching the military-age population more efficiently. As shown throughout the research of the problems and the recruiting process, current methods are out-dated and inefficient. Services have experimented with call centers in the past and currently still use mail outs. A lot of time and resources continue to be wasted trying to locate the twenty-five percent of applicants that are qualified for enlistment. Digital prospecting has shown its potential for effectiveness and provides a means to communicate more efficiently with the large military-age population.

Generation Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, has been the primary recruiting-age market since 2015. Generation Z is fully immersed in technology and considered “digital natives” growing up continuously connected to social media and digital devices.²⁹ MCRC authorized recruiters to establish social media pages and conduct electronic prospecting in fiscal year 2016 but the guidance is vague.³⁰ As evident from figures 2 and 3 showing the sources of contracts in fiscal years 2018 and 2019, the efforts thus far are not sufficient. Recruiters are dedicating a lot more time to placing telephone calls than using digital prospecting. The Marine Corps needs to be more directive and can achieve this through a few ways discussed below.

First, MCRC needs to truly embrace digital prospecting with a formal campaign that directs actions and establishes a standard. Considering how the current market, specifically Generation Z, communicates, aggressive use of social media platforms is essential to reach all potential applicants. This begins with the development of social media campaigns that establishes profiles for all recruiters on production. Similar to the High School / Community College Program, milestones need to be set and plans developed within each recruiter's area to connect on social media with students, school pages, businesses, law enforcement, and key influencers. Instead of making phone calls each day, recruiters should be posting items of interest on sites where the target audience already congregate.

MCRC needs to lead the effort to assist recruiters. They should distribute daily images or informational posts to recruiters who can, in turn, then post it to their social media pages so the information comes from someone known within the community. Daily posts should also include information on benefits of service and answers to frequently asked questions. Finally, posts should also include general events the recruiters engage in to highlight to the community what the Marine Corps is doing locally. Often times recruiters participate in parades, ceremonies,

funerals, and many school events. Each of these are opportunities to reach out and reinforce their image and relationships in the community.

In contrast to previous advertising campaigns, particular emphasis should be on areas the Marine Corps does besides combat arms, especially common interest areas such as Cyber, Intelligence, Data, Logistics, and Law Enforcement. Additionally, each time someone from the community enlists, returns home on leave, or has any significant life event, recruiters need to post about it. Embracement and an active presence on social media will enable the Marine Corps to reach the military-age population quicker, more effectively, and on a medium they prefer to communicate on.

An active presence on social media will continue to do what the Marine Corps does best: project a sharp, professional, and positive image in the community. The Marine Corps needs to find a way to establish and communicate with Generation Z on the internet. The same successes achieved by area canvassing needs to be transcribed into the digital world. This can be achieved with social media by rapidly expanding the audience they communicate with. Furthermore, these efforts target a much wider audience than just high school seniors. Efficiencies are gained by communicating with the full military-age market simultaneously rather than individually. Finally, these efforts will not only help bridge the growing divide with civilians and the military, but it will also make recruiters more approachable and reach out to a broader audience faster and more efficiently. Most importantly, it speaks directly to how Generation Z, the primary market for recruiting, prefers to communicate.

The next level is the Marine Corps needs to explore partnering with social media agencies to conduct targeted digital prospecting in much the same way commercial companies already do. The partnership should focus to expand on another area where the Marine Corps is

extremely effective, referrals. As previously discussed, referrals are potential applicants recommended to the Marine Corps based on their interest, behaviours, or otherwise fitting the profile of a Marine. Partnerships with social media organizations would similarly enable targeted prospecting based on a users' digital fingerprint.

Based on a pattern of likes and other online behavior, filtered by age, MCRC could receive a targeted list of anyone age 17-27 that has displayed an interest in the Marine Corps or the military. Recruiters could then use these generated leads to conduct targeted prospecting on social media. This partnership would generate better leads for recruiters to contact potential applicants that have already shown an interest in the Marine Corps, reducing the burden of how many applicants they need to contact.

Finally, with an established presence on social media and partnerships with organizations for providing leads, the final improvement can use artificial intelligence to further refine results. Social media organizations can use the digital fingerprint left by potential applicants to produce valuable information and further narrow the military-age population. A recent University of Vermont study indicated: Interactions and communication to include views, likes, and behaviors with as few as fifteen posts create a digital fingerprint for an individual.³¹ Furthermore, one's friends on social media also provide information that makes it possible to predict how they will behave.³²

Artificial intelligence should be developed to refine the targeted prospecting efforts. Beyond focusing on generating leads due to age and interest, the military-age population can be further narrowed based on the user's profile data. Artificial Intelligence can quickly apply filters to screen out some of the seventy-five percent of disqualified applicants. If applicants have posts referencing illegal activity, hard drug use, arrests, extremist images, or the like they should be

filtered out. Privacy would not be violated as the Marine Corps would not be informed about the activities, rather the prospect would not be referred by the social media organization who maintains control of the information.

This partnership and leveraging of social media will assist with easing the burden of contacting so many potential applicants and result in improved efficiencies. It communicates more effectively with Generation Z and will help them relate to the Marine Corps more. It is a tool to build relations in the community and initially screen an applicant. A directive campaign from MCRC forces recruiters to be more engaged in the local community, creating relationships, and expanding the potential for referrals. Finally, digital prospecting can improve the speed at which lists are prospected and potential applicants are removed. These efforts also remain in line with the enlisted recruiting process and would greatly improve the recruiting efficiencies.

The second recommendation is the refinement of out-dated service-controlled standards. Over time, the norms of society have changed as expected with different generations. Yet a handful has not adapted and continue to disqualify potential applicants. Naturally, with an abundant population, the military imposed many internal service constraints to ensure a quality force after the experiences in Vietnam. Due to the broadness of disqualifiers and to minimize risk assumed by the Marine Corps, this recommendation focuses on only one aspect within criminality: the disqualification for marijuana use and possession prior to enlistment.

Marijuana use is in a heated battle with the federal government for legalization over the past several years. As indicated in figure 5, roughly ten percent of American youth is ineligible for criminality. These figures include marijuana use and simple possession charges. Eighteen states have already legalized its use for medicinal and recreational purposes. However, at the federal level, marijuana remains a schedule one controlled substance. A 2017 national survey

showed that sixty-four percent of Americans favor the idea of the legalization of marijuana.³³ This public support is further supported by the eighteen states that have already voted to legalize its use. Furthermore, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicated in their 2016 high school survey that thirty-eight percent of high school students nationwide reported using marijuana.³⁴ While an exact number is undetermined, even the increase of one percent eligibility for the Marine Corps would be huge.

The prevalent use of marijuana and the majority of support nationwide is an indication for immediate change. The Marine Corps is representative of the people and has experienced many reforms due to societal changes over the past decade. These include the ability to enlist and serve regardless of sexual orientation and the more recent movement towards gender-neutral job assignments. The sources below indicate that marijuana use is a behaviour accepted by the majority of Americans. Its acceptance by the Marine Corps, regardless of the number of times used by an applicant, is reflective of society and expands the eligible market. It is common for minors to experiment with marijuana, just like cigarettes and alcohol. The Marine Corps does not need to advocate to reform federal laws, that battle will continue. The Marine Corps just needs to update service policies and remove the disqualification and subsequent waiver requirements for marijuana use before enlistment. Previous marijuana use or possession is low risk. These past behaviors would also not pose any threat to health or safety. Enlistment with prior marijuana use or possession should not require any waiver. This minor reform would immediately expand the eligible market and improve processing times.

The third and final recommendation is the Marine Corps needs to improve retention rates, which directly affect the annual recruiting mission. Retention is the single and most responsive way to reduce the recruiting mission. Improved retention will relieve pressure off recruiters and

assist in sustaining the AVF.³⁵ Considering the challenges of finding quality applicants, the Marine Corps is letting too many Marines who are already qualified, successful, and highly trained, depart the service. Understandably, we cannot and should not try to retain all first-term Marines. However, increasing retention goals by merely ten percent, from 6,052 to 8,574 a year would reduce the annual recruiting mission from roughly 36,000 to 33,000, a nine percent reduction each year.

There are many additional benefits of increased retention. First, it would result in a slightly older and more mature force. The immediate past Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Robert Neller, expressed desires for an older force, declaring, "We need a Marine Corps that's a bit older, a little more experienced, because it takes longer to learn some unique skills."³⁶ With the challenging market and the costs associated with recruiting and training Marines, a seventy five percent turnover of the force every four years is unacceptable and not cost-effective. Although one can argue manpower costs would rise slightly, the reduction in recruit training, recruiting, and entry-level training would far outweigh the costs. Increased retention will result in a more competent force with better work performance and less turnover rates. Finally, increased retention better supports our future operating environment of distributed operations, where we will have to depend more on mature smaller unit leaders to operate independently with limited communications.

Conclusion

This research provides three recommendations: 1.) Full embracement of digital prospecting by MCRC, partnering with social media organizations, and conducted targeted prospecting 2.) The review and adjustment of out-dated service restrictions, specifically for marijuana use and possession prior to enlistment, and 3.) Improved retention by the Marine

Corps to reduce the recruiting mission and develop an older and mature force better prepared to operate in distributed environments. These recommendations are most relevant to anyone within MCRC and especially future or current Recruiting Station Commanders. These changes would improve key inefficiencies and have exponential results on the sustainability and health of the All-Volunteer. Further research is required regarding how much to rely on digital communications going forward. Furthermore, analysis of the impact of increased retention needs financial assessment for justification. All three recommendations have the ability for immediate implementation as they are controlled and regulated by Marine Corps service level policies. These reforms highlight what the nation needs to sustain the health of the AVF and improve efficiencies within Marine Corps recruiting.

Notes

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² Brent Scowcroft, *Military Service in the United States*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1982), pg 1.

³ Brent Scowcroft, *Military Service in the United States*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1982), pg 3.

⁴ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century, Census 2000 Special Reports*, pg 7.

⁵ Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You!; The Evolution of the AVF*. (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2006), pg 4.

⁶ Richard V.L. Cooper, *Military Manpower and the AVF*. (Testimony, February 15, 1978), pg 2.

⁷ Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You!; The Evolution of the AVF*. (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2006), pg 4.

⁸ Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century, Census 2000 Special Reports*, pg 12.

⁹ Barbara A. Bicksler, *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*. (Strategic Analysis, 2009), pg 1.

¹⁰ Thomas, Spoeher, *The Looming National Security Crisis*. 13 Feb 2018, pg 2.

¹¹ Thomas, Spoeher, *The Looming National Security Crisis*. 13 Feb 2018, pg 2.

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¹⁶ Headquarters US Marine Corps. *Volume I, Guidebook for Recruiters, 2014 Edition*. (Washington,

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¹⁷ Barbara A. Bicksler, *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*. (Strategic Analysis, 2009), pg 3.

¹⁸ Barbara A. Bicksler, *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*. (Strategic Analysis, 2009), pg 9.

¹⁹ Bicksler, Barbara A, and Lisa G. Nolan. *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*, pg 7.

²⁰ Barbara A. Bicksler, *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*. (Strategic Analysis, 2009), pg 11-13.

²¹ Thomas, Spoeher, *The Looming National Security Crisis*. 13 Feb 2018, pg 1.

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- ²³ Bicksler, Barbara A, and Lisa G. Nolan. *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*, pg 7.
- ²⁴ Barbara A. Bicksler, *Recruiting an AVF: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources – An Update*. (Strategic Analysis, 2009), pg 6.
- ²⁵ Mark Perry, *The Recruitment Problem the Military Doesn't Want to Talk About*, The American Conservative.
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