

BULLET BACKGROUND PAPER  
ON  
THE AIR FORCE TRACK SYSTEM

PURPOSE

- Provide a viable and enduring plan to increase Air Force lethality by addressing airman retention across the total force while maintaining technical expertise to provide continuity and stability.

BACKGROUND

- The Air Force is facing multiple critical retention issues. Specifically within the rated community, a growing deficit of nearly 2,000 pilots has formed in just five years. Without a viable solution, the Air Force can expect this deficit to continue and potentially extend into additional AFSCs to include Cyber, Intelligence, and Logistics, etc.
  - Several solutions presented to senior leaders addressing this issue have included retention bonuses, increased accessions, and even the creation of a Chief Warrant Officer program.
    - The current efforts and proposals have either proven not to be viable, only helped in a limited capacity, or have not addressed the root cause of decreased retention.
- Promotion within the officer and enlisted ranks requires individual airmen to remain competitive against their peers. To do this, airmen must shift focus to non-technical duties outside their core AFSC. This “up or out” promotion construct creates conflicting priorities in individual airmen who desire to be technical experts rather than seeking command roles.
  - Secretary Ash Carter acknowledged this dilemma in the 2015 “Force of the Future” publication, stating the current system provides “little incentive for officers to focus or specialize, even when doing so would enhance military readiness.”

DISCUSSION

- The Air Force can hone both technical experts as well as command-minded leaders in the officer and enlisted ranks through the validation of the existing unofficial command track and the creation of an equally valid technical track in select, highly technical AFSCs.
  - Adopting this track model will allow airmen to focus on their specific career track by concentrating their efforts into command/leadership or technical capabilities, which in turn strengthens the force, improves lethality, and retains airmen.
- Officers will be divided into a command track as a “Command Duty Officer” and a technical track as a “Line Duty Officer”. Officers will have the initial opportunity to apply for track

selection as soon as senior captains (7+ years commissioned service). Boards will be held yearly and applications will be accepted for O-3T, O-4T and O-5T. O-6 and above will not be considered for LDO flow.

- Enlisted airmen will be divided into a leadership track as a “Senior NCO”, the current naming construct, and a technical track as a “Technical NCO”. Airmen will have the initial opportunity to apply for track selection at E-6. Boards will be held yearly and applications will be accepted for E-6T and E-7T. E-8 and above will not be considered for TNCO flow.
- The addition of a technical track will avoid creation of additional officer billets by re-allocating existing requirements to the technical track to keep officer levels within DOPMA regulations.
- The command track will mirror the existing career progression through advanced professional military education, staff experience, and leadership positions.
- Entrance to the technical track will occur through a board process managed by AFPC.
  - The technical track will consist of additional technical opportunities including upgrades, advanced exercises, and advanced technical military education (TME) to ensure increased lethality by providing continuity and development of tactics, techniques, and procedures.
- Promotion within the technical track will be based on a promotion validation board and then a member’s ability to be hired into a technical position of a higher rank, similar to the construct employed by the Air National Guard.
- Exit from the LDO field back to the CDO field may be accomplished through a supplemental CDO promotion board if open requirements remain within their prospective grade and AFSC.
- Force Composition: Each career field will determine the appropriate percentage of CDOs and LDOs based on mission requirements. Total force percentage of LDO will be approximately 11%.
- Technical Track Compensation: Requires no changes to existing base pay or career specific bonuses. Additional “tech supplemental pay” will be utilized and adjustable by AFSC.
- Program implementation can occur in five phases over a three year period
  - Phase 0 - approval of track system; Phase 1 - career-specific guidance; Phase 2 - solicit & board applicants; Phase 3 - match initial assignments; Phase 4 - ongoing assessment

## RECOMMENDATION

- Codify the existing command track and create an equally valid technical track in both officer and enlisted ranks in select technical AFSCs in order to answer the retention crisis facing the Air Force as well as strengthen combat lethality for the future.