



Independent Review of the Army Combat Fitness Test

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

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The U.S. Army is introducing a new fitness test for the first time in more than 40 years. The six-event Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) is designed to (1) ensure soldiers are ready to perform combat tasks, (2) reduce preventable injuries, and (3) promote a culture of fitness throughout the Army. In this report, the authors conduct a review of the ACFT and provide recommendations to support the Army’s implementation decisions.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What evidence does the Army have to support the use of the ACFT, and are there additional sources of evidence it should gather?
- Are there notable differences in performance by soldiers on the ACFT events that would affect personnel decisions for various subgroups (e.g., gender, age, military specialties, components), and, if so, what actions could mitigate such effects?
- What can the Army do to help prepare the workforce to succeed on the ACFT?



KEY FINDINGS

The evidence base to support the ACFT is incomplete

- The Army has conducted research and gathered a wealth of evidence on the ACFT that demonstrates support for some, but not all, of the ACFT fitness events, and it is important that the Army address these gaps in the evidence base.

ACFT scores collected by the Army during the diagnostic period show some groups failing at noticeably higher rates

- The biggest impacts are observed for women, but there also are differences in pass rates by age (with older soldiers passing at lower rates), across components (with the U.S. Army Reserve and the Army

National Guard lagging behind the Regular Army), and across military occupational specialties and areas of concentration.

- Although these differences do not necessarily mean the test is flawed, they need to be investigated. It is also important for the Army to consider potential implications for personnel management that would result from high failure rates.

Research in multiple military settings has shown that training can improve pass rates

- The Army rolled out equipment force-wide, started training soldiers to improve performance on the ACFT, and provided access to Holistic Health and Fitness personnel and master fitness trainers.
- Research has shown that training programs have generally had a positive impact on enhancing soldier fitness, but more research is needed to better understand how training should be tailored to help soldiers at varying levels of initial fitness pass the ACFT.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Army should address shortfalls in the ACFT evidence base. Efforts should include (1) collecting additional data to further explore validity findings by gender and to establish justifiable minimum standards on fitness events, (2) establishing proper justification for why all ACFT events and minimum standards apply equally to all soldiers, (3) continually examining and assessing personnel decision outcomes that are associated with minimum scores, and (4) defining and continually assessing organizational progress toward fitness transformation.
- The Army should consider ways to mitigate impacts on the workforce, which could include (1) changing how the ACFT is scored to align requirements with job-specific physical demands, (2) reviewing and updating fitness policies to ensure that a mechanism is available to address exceptional circumstances, (3) using data from all test-takers (not just those who pass) to establish the gender-normed fitness tier cut points, and (4) collecting and analyzing data on the impacts of the ACFT on talent management outcomes and unit readiness.
- The Army should take steps to further support training improvements over time. Such steps could include (1) phasing in the ACFT's implementation to allow time for individuals to improve performance on specific events, (2) continuing to support access to expert coaches, specialized training equipment, and training that is tailored to meet individual training needs, and (3) establishing specialized training programs for those who are not meeting minimums and tracking their improvement over time.
- The Army should institutionalize a formal senior-level management structure to guide and oversee ACFT implementation, use, and revision.

