

# Racial Disparity Root Cause Analysis for the Department of the Air Force

## Refining the Way Forward

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### ISSUE

In December 2020 and September 2021, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) released reports discussing the disparities it identified for minority groups and women.<sup>1</sup> Eliminating documented, persistent, and unwanted disparities requires sustained commitment at all DAF organizational levels, rigorous and regular analysis, well-coordinated comprehensive implementation of well-crafted solutions, and dedicated and consistent resourcing. The DAF is taking many actions to address the disparities; however, this project was designed to assist the Air Force's Force Management Policy Directorate in refining its way forward.



### APPROACH

The RAND team developed a framework to assess how DAF policies drive leaders' actions at strategic, operational, and tactical levels and to help identify policy gaps at each level. The team explored exemplar practices in other organizations to identify those that could help address the DAF Inspector General's findings regarding human capital management (HCM). The team conducted seven workshops with representatives from various communities that have roles in the DAF's human capital cycle and conducted additional analyses to address gaps identified during the earlier tasks. Next, the team developed dashboards that the DAF could use to routinely execute barrier analysis to analyze and improve patterns of representation and promotion within the different career fields. This project culminated with recommendations targeted at three distinct groups: HCM policymakers, wing/squadron leaders, and senior DAF leadership.



### KEY FINDINGS

The project team derived these key findings:

<sup>1</sup> Inspector General, Department of the Air Force, *Report of Inquiry (S8918P): Independent Racial Disparity Review*, December 2020; Inspector General, Department of the Air Force, *Assessment Report (S8918P): Independent Racial Disparity Review—Six-Month Assessment*, September 2021a; Inspector General, Department of the Air Force, *Report of Inquiry (S8918P): Disparity Review*, September 2021b.

- The DAF is implementing innovative diversity initiatives in multiple HCM pipeline segments; however, it is critical to monitor the initiatives for effectiveness and return on investment.
- The RAND assessment of disparity countermeasures and initiatives revealed gaps across root causes, governance, resourcing, and implementation accountability.
- The DAF barrier analysis methodology could be improved if it is grounded in deductive reasoning to determine the extent to which observed disparities in a career field can be attributed to the root causes for disparities identified in the 2020 and 2021 reports.
- A dashboard would help organize the data inputs and enable development teams (DTs) and career field managers to make side-by-side comparisons of talent development and promotion analysis to determine reasons for disparities.

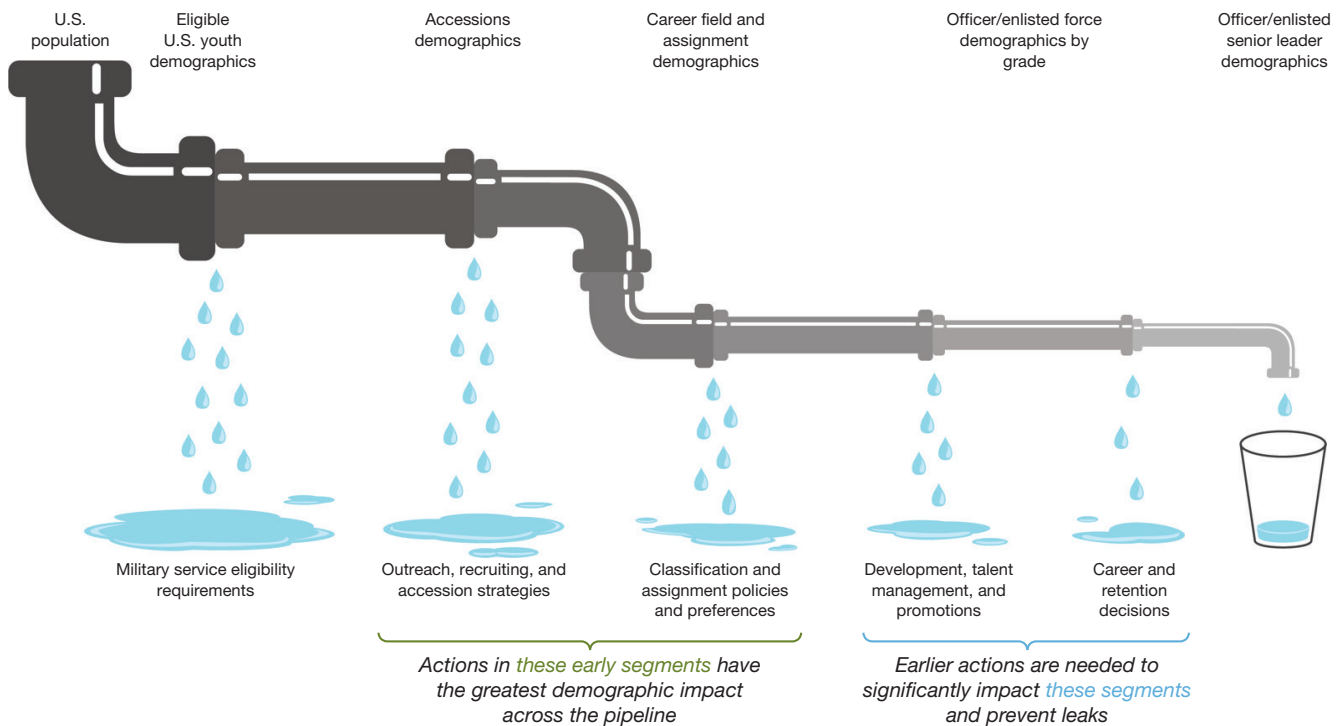


## RECOMMENDATIONS

RAND’s project team employed a *leaky pipeline metaphor* to conduct our data analyses, assess current strategies and policies, and develop recommendations.<sup>2</sup> The figure illustrates this framework.

The project team offers the following recommendations (see the table on the next page).

### KEY OBSERVATIONS: THE HUMAN CAPITAL PIPELINE



SOURCE: Adapted from the Military Leadership Diversity Commission’s (MLDC’s) personnel life cycle framework affecting military demographic composition. (See MLDC, *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century Military*, Final Report, March 15, 2011, p. 45.)

<sup>2</sup> See Jason M. Sheltzer and Joan C. Smith, “Elite Male Faculty in the Life Sciences Employ Fewer Women,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, Vol. 111, No. 28, July 15, 2014.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

Force Inflow	<b>Officer and Enlisted Recruiting</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 1.</b> Expand use of published racial, ethnicity, and gender stretch goals for officer and enlisted recruitment, accessions, and career field classification	<b>Recommendation 2.</b> Bolster the Air Force recruiting enterprise to enable wider reach and earlier engagement
	<b>Officer Accessions</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 3.</b> Increase Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) minority-serving institution (MSI) commissioning rates by addressing fiscal, educational, and other barriers to entry	<b>Recommendation 4.</b> Provide competitive tools to recruit high-performing racial and ethnic minority officer candidates at selective, upper-tier science, technology, engineering, and mathematics colleges and universities
	<b>Officer Classification (Operations Career Field Assignment)</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 5.</b> Ensure that multiple rated diversity improvement countermeasures are coordinated, resourced, and measured for their effectiveness	<b>Recommendation 7.</b> Place successful minority officers with ops backgrounds as AFROTC MSI detachment cadre to engage with prospective recruits to ops career fields, and boost participation in You Can Fly programs
Force Management	<b>Institutional Implementation</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 8.</b> Expand use of published racial and ethnic minority promotion and retention outcomes	<b>Recommendation 9.</b> Build predictive success models to enable active management decisions by year group based on current, standardized data sets to enable pre-board analysis
	<b>Base/Wing Implementation</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 10.</b> Implement wing-level processes to actively manage development opportunities by year group	<b>Recommendation 13.</b> Support base-level acculturation and socialization for racial, ethnic, and gender minorities
	<b>Recommendation 11.</b> Inculcate deliberate, active mentoring by local wing leadership	<b>Recommendation 14.</b> Develop and proliferate comprehensive, recurring unconscious bias training
	<b>Recommendation 12.</b> Add wing-level checks and balances to increase trust and confidence	<b>Recommendation 15.</b> Hold commanders accountable for the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) climate in their units
End to End	<b>Institutional Barrier Analysis</b>	
	<b>Recommendation 16.</b> Standardize data feeds/data sets, focus analytical approach and methodology	<b>Recommendation 18.</b> Resource dedicated core staff to routinize DT barrier analysis
	<b>Recommendation 17.</b> Publish barrier analyses outcomes and resulting diversity initiatives to an “All-Air Force” Common Access Card accessible portal	<b>Recommendation 19.</b> Institute an annual DT Barrier Analyses Summit co-chaired by the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force
	<b>Strategic Narrative/Transparency/Trust, Resource Investments, and Enterprise Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Recommendation 20.</b> Communicate an action-oriented strategic narrative, and increase data transparency	<b>Recommendation 22.</b> Assign clear lines of authority, responsibility, and accountability to conduct racial, ethnic, or gender disparity/barrier analyses, implement diversity improvement initiatives/barrier countermeasures, and assess effectiveness	
<b>Recommendation 21.</b> Commit to dedicated, consistent DEI resource investments		



### PROJECT AIR FORCE

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