

Innovative Approaches to Enhancing **Workforce Resilience** in U.S. Space Command



A resilient workforce is essential to the U.S. military's readiness and effectiveness. *Resilience* includes the ability to adapt to challenging circumstances.

USSPACECOM approached RAND to better understand the evidence for various programs designed to address resiliency challenges, specifically those that reduce the prevalence of individual harmful behaviors that can arise in the workplace—such as discrimination, sexual assault and harassment, hostile work environment, and self-directed harm and suicide—and adversely affect the resilience of its personnel.

U.S. Space Command (USSPACECOM) was reestablished in 2019 to defend U.S. national interests and security in space. The command has grown quickly, and its workforce includes uniformed personnel from across the services, federal civilian employees, and contractors. As the command reaches full operational capability and finalizes plans to establish a permanent headquarters, it faces multiple challenges to

fostering workforce resilience and mitigating harmful workplace behaviors. However, it can learn from the resilience-building efforts of other U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) organizations and implement innovative approaches to strengthening the resilience of its diverse and growing workforce. How USSPACECOM organizes to promote resilience might, in turn, serve as a model for the other combatant commands.

To support USSPACECOM’s workforce management, RAND researchers identified best practices for enhancing resilience and conducted workshops with USSPACECOM personnel to assess the challenges, barriers, responsibilities, and solutions to enhancing resilience with the goal of helping the combatant command develop approaches to preventing and responding to harmful workplace behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS

- As a reestablished combatant command, USSPACECOM needs a strategy to enhance the resilience of its diverse and geographically dispersed workforce, which includes military personnel, civilian employees, and contractors.
- This workforce mix poses challenges to developing and implementing policies and programs to prevent and respond to harmful workplace behaviors that adversely affect resilience, such as discrimination, sexual harassment and assault, hostile work environment, and self-directed harm and suicide.
- USSPACECOM is unique among combatant commands in that it has resilience professionals on its staff. In adopting best practices for prevention and response—and investing in a one-stop shop for resilience support—it can serve as a model for other combatant commands as they work to strengthen the resilience of their own workforces.



Best Practices for Cultivating Resilience in a Diverse Workforce

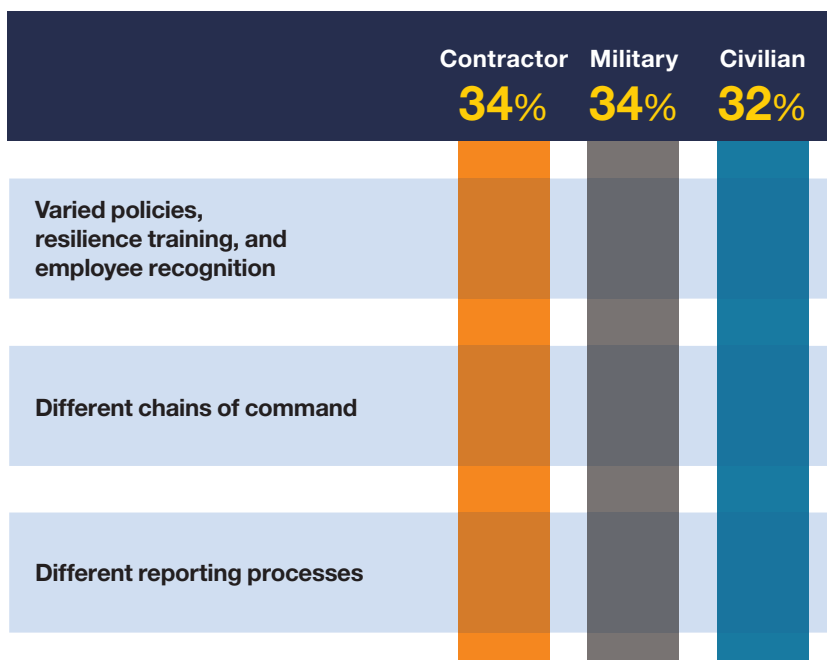
Unlike the other U.S. combatant commands, USSPACECOM has in-house staff dedicated to strengthening workforce resilience. The Organizational Culture Team consists of an equal opportunity coordinator, a DoD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response program manager, and a resilience program manager. Information about these in-

house professionals is easily available to employees online, which signals USSPACECOM's commitment to offering these services. However, because USSPACECOM's workforce is geographically dispersed across multiple installations, it can be difficult to promote engagement with these available resources within USSPACECOM or across DoD and the federal government.

As a baseline, federal agencies are required to provide basic information about workplace policies (e.g., nontolerance of sexual harassment and discrimination) and standards of conduct to all members of their workforces, but their specific policies and requirements can vary by employee type. USSPACECOM's workforce has roughly even percentages of military personnel, civilian employees, and contractors, each with a different chain of command, training requirements, and processes for reporting harmful workplace behaviors, as illustrated in the figure below.

USSPACECOM's workforce is roughly divided among military personnel, civilian employees, and contractors, each with a different chain of command, training requirements, and processes for reporting harmful workplace behaviors, as illustrated in this figure.

USSPACECOM's Diverse Workforce's Key Differences



SOURCE: Features workforce data from USSPACECOM.

NOTE: For federal civilians and military personnel, some reporting channels and processes are administered by their service component chain of command while others are administered by the combatant command.

USSPACECOM’s military personnel are from five DoD branches—the U.S. Space Force, Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps—each of which has its own culture, policies, and procedures. Service members are governed by DoD- and service-specific policies, as well as Military Equal Opportunity regulations. Federal civilian employees are subject to separate policies and programs when it comes to reporting and responding to harmful workplace behaviors, except for sexual assault, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. In general, military law does not apply to those civilian employees. Instead, they are covered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and civilian Equal Employment Opportunity regulations, which have separate reporting mechanisms.

Contractors are often subject to different rules and reporting channels, and they have access to different resources, apart from those required by Equal Employment Opportunity laws.

Common Themes in Preventing and Responding to Harmful Workplace Behaviors

A literature review revealed common themes in national security organizations’ approaches to workforce resilience, including preventing and responding to harmful behaviors; improving access to services, training, and reporting channels; and enhancing leadership communication and workplace culture. In all cases, leadership is central to building a climate that promotes prevention, accountability, transparency, and trust that reporting

Common Prevention and Response Themes, by Harmful Behavior	
Harmful Behavior	Related Findings
Discrimination	Training and instructions should emphasize the full range of potential discriminatory behaviors, including those related to race, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and use of parental leave. Prevention efforts should target high-risk units and commander awareness.
Sexual assault and harassment	Responding to low-level unprofessional behavior can prevent future escalation. The literature recommends interactive training approaches that are inclusive of racial or ethnic and sexual minorities and that break down misunderstandings about what constitutes assault and harassment.
Hostile work environment	Best practices include screening out high-risk recruits, targeting training to high-risk individuals and units, and building skills to identify and report hostile behaviors. It is also important for leadership to openly communicate policies on hazing, along with example scenarios.
Self-directed harm and suicide	It is difficult to evaluate the risk of suicide across USSPACECOM’s diverse workforce, but incorporating best practices for suicide prevention can benefit all employees. Policies, training, and resources should promote positive coping behaviors, combat the stigma of seeking help, and target toxic stress from deployments, finances, and other factors. Ensuring confidentiality, strengthening peer support, providing resources quickly after a traumatic event, and following up consistently are other important steps to limit the risk of self-harm.

will not lead to negative perceptions or retaliation. Training should be engaging, interactive, and build not only knowledge and awareness but also skills to identify and respond to harmful behaviors. Finally, increased access to multiple confidential reporting channels can demonstrate support for victims and address barriers to reporting.

Because of the links among these behaviors and response approaches, the literature advocates for a holistic prevention strategy that features systematic standards and reporting protocols. DoD has been rolling out an integrated prevention plan and is establishing an enterprise-wide sexual assault prevention and response workforce to promote coordination and collaboration across combatant commands and the services. USSPACECOM's organizational structure facilitates the adoption of

best practices for prevention and response while these changes take effect.

USSPACECOM Views on Prevention and Response Approaches

RAND researchers held a series of workshops with USSPACECOM personnel to learn more about resilience-related challenges, experiences, and perspectives. Feedback from these workshop participants could help inform future messaging from the command's leadership and shape resilience policies and programs.

Many of the themes were common to other military contexts, but some reflected the logistical, career, and social and cultural challenges of a growing command.

Key Quotes from USSPACECOM Personnel



According to one civilian employee,

For new employees, there is lack of guidance or feedback. . . . I need feedback along the way.

A service member commented on how the workforce mix affects the command climate:

We need to make several efforts to make change, and contractors are a part of that, but they can't be part of training. We are having those conflicts—of not being able to include everyone in the team.

This division between personnel also served as a barrier to reporting harmful behaviors for contractors. According to a workshop participant,

For us, the biggest barrier . . . [is] the rules and law with regards to contracting individuals. They are welcome to raise the issues with government leadership, but they are supposed to file complaints through the contract.

Another participant described a lack of shared understanding about resilience training:

On Resilience Day, we would all be in the room to act on and learn what we shared. To me, [calling it] resilience was off. It was more of a team-building thing than resilience.

Other participants suggested that the use of online training was outdated. They emphasized a need for a mix of participants to promote the cross-pollination of experiences and ideas from across USSPACECOM, with one noting that “innovative small-group training is needed for it to be taken seriously.”

Workshop participants generally agreed that there is a shared responsibility for strengthening

USSPACECOM’s workforce resilience. Participants described different reporting channels for civilian and military personnel, and service members noted that they often felt more comfortable going to their own branch for support. However, building a culture of intolerance to harmful behaviors “should be command-driven,” according to two participants. Another participant stated, “It would be chaos if it was dispersed. We are a joint command.”



Recommendations

USSPACECOM has experienced growing pains because it is a geographically dispersed organization with a roughly even mix of military personnel, federal civilian employees, and contractors. When it comes to building resilience, the division of responsibilities is not always clear. However, it is notable that USSPACECOM has its own resilience-focused staff that has the potential to offer a one-stop shop for resilience, which could serve as a model for other combatant commands. This model will be most effective if it avoids duplication of effort and maximizes collaboration on DoD-wide goals of reducing risk and boosting protective factors. The following recommendations will help USSPACECOM build on the progress that it has made in prioritizing resilience as an integral part of its organizational structure.

Streamline, target, and formalize communications and invest in a one-stop shop for resilience.

Workshop participants had positive views on resilience-related messaging from command leadership, but there is room to streamline and simplify. USSPACECOM would benefit from a transparent plan for resilience that draws on best practices, including a process to continually solicit feedback. Tools, such as a webpage that serves as a hub for USSPACECOM and DoD resources, regular newsletters, and physical signage where permitted, can ensure that resilience stories are featured prominently. While plans are finalized for USSPACECOM's permanent headquarters, it will be important to ensure that the command's workforce has ready access to resiliency staff and high-quality training opportunities. USSPACECOM leadership should also provide personnel with multiple channels to share their concerns.

Clarify the resources available to contractors.

It is important that messaging is both inclusive and relevant, but contractors are not included in most resilience-related activities, team-building opportunities, training, and professional recognition programs. USSPACECOM contract language should be evaluated to clarify or expand contractors' eligibility for various resilience resources where possible. For example, USSPACECOM instruction on personnel recognition could be amended to extend eligibility for certain awards to contractors.

Provide high-quality training opportunities.

As the number of personnel in this reestablished command increases, USSPACECOM's resilience-focused staff will be central to maintaining awareness of challenges that are unique to this command and connecting personnel to the available services that strengthen workforce resilience. USSPACECOM can leverage its in-house expertise to develop effective training approaches that adhere to best practices: Trainings should be varied, engaging, interactive; administered by well-trained prevention specialists; and focused on building both skills and knowledge. The command should also consider covering contractor training time to ensure that the entire workforce can benefit from these opportunities.

Photo credits: Katie Damon/U.S. Space Force (cover inset), Dennis Rogers/U.S. Space Force (cover background), U.S. Space Force/Tech. Sgt. Luke Kitterman (p. 2), U.S. Air Force (p. 6), NicoElNino/Adobe Stock (p. 7 background).

This brief describes work done in the RAND National Security Research Division and documented in *Strengthening Workforce Resilience in U.S. Space Command*, by Kayla M. Williams, Marek N. Posard, Ryan Haberman, Samantha Matthews, Hilary Reininger, and Samantha Ryan, RR-A2566-1, 2024 (available at www.rand.org/t/RR-A2566-1). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RBA2566-1. RAND is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights: This publication and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited; linking directly to its webpage on rand.org is encouraged. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research products for commercial purposes. For information on reprint and reuse permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.

© 2024 RAND Corporation

www.rand.org

RB-A2566-1