



The Approach to Recruiting and Retention in the Canadian Armed Forces

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Exercise Solo Flight

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THE APPROACH TO RECRUITING AND RETENTION IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

THE CHALLENGE OF RECRUITING AND RETENTION

Over the past few years, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) recruiting has suffered from numerous allegations of inappropriate behaviour by senior leaders, causing the replacement of half a dozen of the highest-ranking officers between 2021 and 2023.^{1,2,3,4} Strong competition for talent following the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the issue. CAF leadership is well aware that “the CAF’s heavy commitment to operations, the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a culture crisis”⁵ have led to “lagging recruitment rates and a shortage of experienced personnel to train new recruits and lead actual missions.”⁶ Consequently, “the majority of Canadians don’t see the military as an organization they would want to join, according to a new opinion poll delivered to the Department of National Defence.”⁷ And this is not just a Canadian issue. The United States (U.S.) is also facing a “dwindling interest in military service among America’s youth.”⁸ In 2022, the CAF was to add approximately “5,000 troops to the regular and reserve forces to meet a growing list of demands but is instead short more than 10,000 trained members.”⁹ The question is how best to address this issue.

Understanding why people seek or avoid military service is a key starting point. “People join the CAF for a variety of reasons,”¹⁰ which include:

- Financial stability and benefits, such as healthcare, housing, vacation, and pension plans;
- Adventure, challenge, and travel to experience different cultures;
- Career opportunities, including trades training and leadership skills;
- Personal growth and development to find purpose and gain experience and perspective;

¹ Wikipedia. “Chief of the Defence Staff (Canada)”, Accessed: 21 April 2024. [CDS \(Canada\) | Wikipedia](#)

² Burke, Ashley. “Senior officer faced with sexual misconduct allegations retiring from Canadian Forces”, *CBC News*, 01 June 2022. Accessed: 21 April 2024. [Senior officer faced with sexual misconduct allegations | CBC News](#)

³ Paas-Lang, Christian and Ashley Burke. “Special Forces commander put on leave as acting top soldier apologizes for handling of situation”, *CBC News*, 02 May 2021. [Special Forces commander put on leave | CBC News](#)

⁴ Raycraft, Richard and Ashley Burke. “Former senior military officer Trevor Cadieu charged with 2 counts of sexual assault”, *CBC News*, 15 June 2022. [Former senior military officer Trevor Cadieu charged | CBC News](#)

⁵ Berthiaume, Lee. “Canadian Armed Forces chief orders halt to non-essential activities amid personnel crisis.” *The Canadian Press*. 6 October 2022. CDS orders halt to non-essential activities amid personnel crisis (globalnews.ca)

⁶ Berthiaume, Lee.

⁷ Pugliese, David. “Majority of Canadians have no interest in joining the military, DND poll shows.” *Ottawa Citizen*. Published: 28 April 2022. Accessed: 21 April 2024. [Canadians have no interest in joining | Ottawa Citizen](#)

⁸ Cohen, Rachel S. “Air Force recruiting rebounds while Army, Navy still struggle.” *Air Force Times*. 16 February 2024. [Air Force recruiting rebounds while Army, Navy still struggle \(airforcetimes.com\)](#)

⁹ Berthiaume, Lee.

¹⁰ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”. *Department of National Defence*. 2022, 4. [CAF Retention Strategy \(canada.ca\)](#)

- Pride, self-esteem, honour, and respect;
- Patriotism and a desire to serve Canada by defending our nation and values;
- Physical fitness, discipline, and teamwork; and
- Family tradition or influence.¹¹

These motivations can vary greatly from person to person and individuals may be influenced by a combination of these factors when considering the military profession. The Department of National Defence's (DND's) current approach to recruitment and retention, the *CAF Offer*, "consists of an extensive set of monetary and non-monetary"¹² elements in four categories: career, compensation, benefits, and work/life. However, the *Offer* is not resonating with Canadians as planned. The Canadian Armed Forces cannot effectively address the current recruitment and retention challenges without a comprehensive understanding of civilian motivations and barriers to joining and member incentives and deterrents to remaining.

UNDERSTANDING CIVILIAN MOTIVATION

Factors and Messaging

Successful recruiting requires understanding civilian motivation for joining the military. Diverse factors influence individuals when considering enlistment, including the image of the CAF and its messaging. An online survey of 3,075 Canadians indicated that 79% were 'not very likely' or 'not at all likely' to join the Royal Canadian Airforce (RCAF) or the Canadian Army (CA), while 83% felt equally about the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN).¹³ For the CAF, such low interest means that "about one in 10 positions are currently vacant."¹⁴

Like the CAF, the U.S. military fell thousands short of its recruiting goal in what the Pentagon called "the toughest recruitment year for the military services since the inception of the all-volunteer force."¹⁵ In 2023, the U.S. Army missed its recruiting target by 10,000, while the U.S. Navy missed its target by 6,000 but has invested in initiatives such as quality housing, childcare, mental health care, and improved education.¹⁶ When asked what bonuses the U.S. Marine Corp (USMC) was offering to promote recruiting, the Chief of the Marines answered: "Your bonus is that you get to call yourself a Marine."¹⁷ While the response may appear smug, the recruiting numbers show that it has merit. The USMC exceeded its recruiting target by 5% without relaxing

¹¹ Indeed Editorial Team. "25 Most Common Reasons for Joining the Military." *Indeed*. Updated: 10 March 2023. Accessed: 24 April 2024. [25 Most Common Reasons for Joining the Military | Indeed](#)

¹² Canada. "The CAF Offer." *Department of National Defence*. Accessed: 24 April 2024. [The CAF Offer \(canada.ca\)](#)

¹³ Pugliese, David.

¹⁴ Berthiaume, Lee.

¹⁵ Cohen, Rachel S.

¹⁶ Garamone, Jim. "Vice Chiefs Talk Recruiting Shortfalls, Readiness Issues." *U.S. DOD News*. 20 April 2023. Accessed: 26 April 2024. [Vice Chiefs Talk Recruiting Shortfalls, Readiness Issues \(defense.gov\)](#)

¹⁷ Philipps, Dave. "U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force Struggle for Recruits. The Marines Have Plenty." *The New York Times*. 17 October 2023. [U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force Struggle for Recruits | The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

enlistment standards, raising the maximum age, or offering signing bonuses of up to \$75,000 with remedial school for failed entry tests.¹⁸ The marketing strategy of the USMC dismisses the perks for “the chance to be part of something intangible, timeless, and elite... The message is working.”¹⁹ By promoting intangibles, the USMC has connected with a segment of society that wants to serve.

General E. Smith, the Assistant Commandant of the USMC, said that the Corps is modernizing, especially regarding training and education, and that the result is “an even more lethal Marine.”²⁰ Combat readiness and lethality are foci of the USMC, not financial, residential, or childcare incentives. As witnessed by the U.S. Army and Navy, these incentives do not guarantee increased recruitment as the civilian sector usually offers better pay without the risk of unlimited liability. Intangibles work for the Marines. However, if incentives were the basis for joining, recruiting and retention will suffer as soon as the civilian sector provides a more attractive offer in this regard. Attrition within the Canadian Military Engineers (CME) supports this concept.

The CME is comprised of Combat Engineers in the CA and Construction Engineers in the RCAF. In fiscal year 2022/2023 (FY 22/23), Defence Research and Development Canada²¹ reported the annual attrition of the Combat Engineer non-commissioned members (NCMs) was 11.8%, which aligns closely with the CA average for NCMs at 11.5%. For the past six years, the attrition rate of the Combat Engineers has mirrored that of the CA, even matching a drop in FY 20/21 during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Combat Engineers are responsible for expedient bridging and obstacles such as minefields, wire entanglements, and anti-tank ditches, no comparable civilian trade exists. Therefore, the private sector cannot easily persuade Combat Engineers with a direct transfer into a civilian position offering the same work for better pay with fewer ancillary responsibilities. Ancillary responsibilities include conforming to dress regulations, performing secondary duties, and maintaining a second official language profile, a physical fitness standard, and weapons, First Aid, and CBRN²² qualifications. The Construction Engineer trades, however, include firefighters, electricians and electrical generation technicians, plumbing and heating technicians, carpenters, and water treatment and environmental technicians, all of which have commensurate civilian occupations. In FY 22/23, the annual attrition for NCMs in the RCAF was 8.1% while the attrition for NCMs in the Construction Engineer trades ranged from 9.1% up to 16.2%. Other than a few anomalies over the past six years, the construction trades have had annual attritions rates from equal to double that of the RCAF. Most notable is the jump in attrition following the pandemic when the demand and compensation for these trades soared. The conclusion for the Construction Engineer trades appears to be that incentives, like trades training,

¹⁸ Philipps, Dave.

¹⁹ Philipps, Dave.

²⁰ Garamone, Jim.

²¹ Straver, Michelle and Meagan Boileau. “Attrition by occupation, designated group, and years of service group.” Report: DRDC-RDDC-2023-L9999. *Defence Research and Development Canada*. November 2023. Accessed: 28 April 2024. [Defence Research Reports \(drdc-rddc.gc.ca\)](https://drdc-rddc.gc.ca)

²² Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN)

were the basis for joining. Consequently, retention suffered as soon as the civilian sector offered more following the completion of training.

A study by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) provides further confirmation in that youth aged 16 to 21 with high academic results are about half as likely to see themselves in the U.S. military in the next few years.²³ These youth have greater employment opportunities and therefore, are less likely to serve in the military for reasons that can be satisfied by the civilian sector. Successful messaging for CAF recruitment must target the correct audience and resonate strongly with their desires and even more so with those who succeed academically, like potential officers. Consequently, CAF recruiting policy must either offer more incentives with less ancillary responsibilities than the private sector, which is usually difficult given Canadians traditional aversion to defence spending, or offer something the private sector cannot, the intangibles of pride, honour, and adventure associated with military service. Otherwise, the private sector will retain the ability to poach trained members of the CAF at will.

Target Populations for Recruiting

The *CAF Retention Strategy* acknowledges that “current evidence related to retention and attrition is limited”²⁴. Since U.S. studies are more readily available, assume that Western nations and specifically within North America, that American and Canadian societies are relatively homogeneous in terms of cultural trends. A study by the U.S. DoD asked youth, aged 17 to 24 years old, to rate their desire to occupy a list of occupations when 35 years old, if they were complete free to choose; see Figure 1. Although the youth population is evenly split by gender, none of the most-desired occupations were. Some were close, such as small business owner, manager, lawyer, and actor/entertainer. Caring professions, like doctor, nurse, and teacher that are more commonly associated with compassion and empathy, were predominately preferred by women.

²³ USA. “The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver.” Joint Advertising, Market Research & Studies. *Department of Defense*. 1 September 2016, 14. [The Target Population for Military Recruitment \(jamrs.defense.gov\)](https://jamrs.defense.gov)

²⁴ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”. *Department of National Defence*. 2022, 26. [CAF Retention Strategy \(canada.ca\)](https://canada.ca)

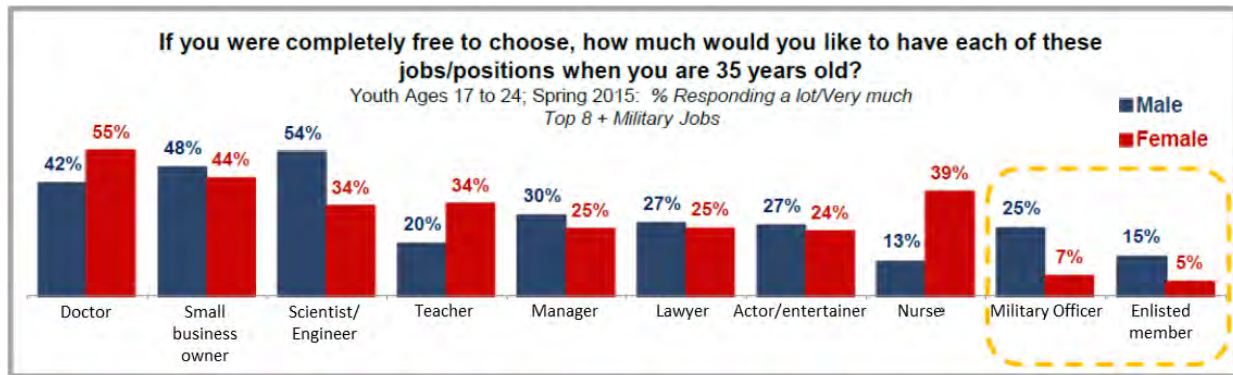


Figure 1: Eligible Youth Career Goals²⁵

The *Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Racism and Discrimination*²⁶ reports that women and visible minorities are vastly underrepresented in the CAF. Through new initiatives in *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*, the CAF will “place a new focus on recruiting and retaining underrepresented populations...[and]...aspire to be a leader in gender balance in the military.”²⁷ A case study in Canada's *Guide to Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and Inclusive Open Government*²⁸ also promotes gender equity but in sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs. The ‘ultimate’ program outcome is presented as having eliminated the gender gap with 50% of all STEM positions occupied by women. Returning to Figure 1, STEM programs were chosen by 54% of male respondents but only 34% of female respondents. The result for ‘military officer’ was far more unbalanced at 25% male and only 7% female, while ‘enlisted member’ was split 15% male and 5% female. In both cases, only one of four military recruits would be female, respecting their preferred choice. Another study by the U.S. DoD asked youth, aged 16 to 21 years old, whether they would be serving in the military in the next few years. From 2001 to 2023, an average of 17.0% of men and 7.5% of women responded ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’.²⁹ Assuming that the youth follow through on their assertion, the military would be comprised of 30.7% women, which coincides well with the ratio for military occupations in Figure 1. Therefore, recruiting policies that enforce gender equity would actively reject to about two-thirds of males entering the recruiting office when the CAF is short 15,000 members.

Certainly, occupational preferences could be seen as the result of societal programming and that uneven gender preferences reflect inherent problems with Western culture. The male preference for military service could be attributed to the “behaviours deemed to be appropriate or required are

²⁵ USA. “The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver.”

²⁶ Canada. Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination – Final Report.

²⁷ Canada. “Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy.” *Department of National Defence*. Ottawa: MND, 2017, 23. Accessed: 01 May 2024. [Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/department-of-national-defence/2017/05/strong-secure-engaged-canada-s-defence-policy.html)

²⁸ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. “Guide to Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and Inclusive Open Government.” *Women and Gender Equality Canada, the International Development Research Centre, and the Open Government Partnership (2021)*, 37. Accessed: 29 April 2024. [GBA+ Guide \(opengovpartnership.org\)](https://www.opengovpartnership.org/guide-to-gender-based-analysis-plus/)

²⁹ USA. “General Military Propensity: Youth Poll Study Findings.” *Joint Advertising, Market Research & Studies. Department of Defense*. 1 February 2024, 2. Accessed: 22 May 2024. [Gen Mil Propensity \(jamrs.defense.gov\)](https://www.jamrs.defense.gov/GenMilPropensity/)

those associated with being masculine³⁰ and because “masculine traits are accentuated in the military given the increased emphasis on physical performance and endurance under highly stressful conditions.”³¹ The assumption is that with a culture correction, gender preferences would be even. However, psychobiological differences between males and females affect personality characteristics like the propensity for accepting risk and initiating violence³², leading to different occupational preferences. Whether or not changes to Canadian culture could completely eliminate the gender gap in STEM or military occupations should be irrelevant where CAF recruiting policy is concerned. The CAF is neither responsible for Canadian culture nor its evolution. Despite that, the CAF periodically “closes some of its approximately 100 occupations or trades to any applicants but women.”³³ While understanding that society needs to see itself reflected in its institutions³⁴, forcing gender equity into the CAF ignores the occupational preferences of society. Although, the CAF has established representation goals for women at 25.1% for 2026³⁵, the CAF must avoid chasing idealistic gender ratios and instead, adopt recruiting and retention policies blind to gender. To recruit more women, the diversity of occupations available within the CAF must be promoted, including caring, administrative, and logistical occupations preferred by women. As of 2020, logistical occupations in the CAF were “comprised of an estimated 42% women.”³⁶ The *CAF Retention Strategy* fails to mention whether these occupations would close to women should they exceed gender equity at some point. Therefore, initiatives and gender policies like GBA+ should not be used to force gender targets which limit potential recruits, but solely to remove barriers to preferred trades thereby maximizing the number of potential recruits.

The argument against forcing gender targets also applies to forcing diversity targets as some segments of society will never have an interest in serving. For example, individuals who immigrate to North America to avoid mandatory military service will likely never enlist. Similarly, those who left their country of origin with an inherent mistrust of oppressive government or military institutions will likely distance themselves from such organizations. Regardless of whether their mistrust is justified in Canada, they will be extremely difficult to recruit. Further, Canadian demographics constantly change with immigration, creating a moving target for CAF diversity policies and programs that attempt to match them. The U.S. DoD survey³⁷ on the likelihood of youth, aged 16 to 21 years old, serving in the military over the next few years also

³⁰ Okros, Alan. “Submission to House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN): Review of Diversity within the Canadian Armed Forces” 11 February 2019. Accessed: 14 May 2024. [Okros - Submission to House of Commons Standing Committee on Natl Def \(ourcommons.ca\)](#)

³¹ Okros, Alan.

³² Coid, J.W, S. Ullrich, C. Kallis, et al. “Improving Risk Management for Violence in Mental Health Services: A Multi-Methods Approach.” *NIHR Journals Library*. Southampton, U.K. November 2016, Chapter 2. Accessed: 29 April 2024. [Demography and typology of violence | NCBI \(nih.gov\)](#)

³³ Blatchford, Christie. “The Canadian Forces Jobs Where Only Women Need Apply,” *The National Post*. Published: 19 April 2019. Accessed: 14 May 2024. [The Canadian Forces jobs where only women need apply | National Post](#)

³⁴ Canada. *Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination - Final Report - January 2022*. Accessed: 30 April 2024. [MND Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism & Discrimination | Canada.ca](#)

³⁵ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 7.

³⁶ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 7.

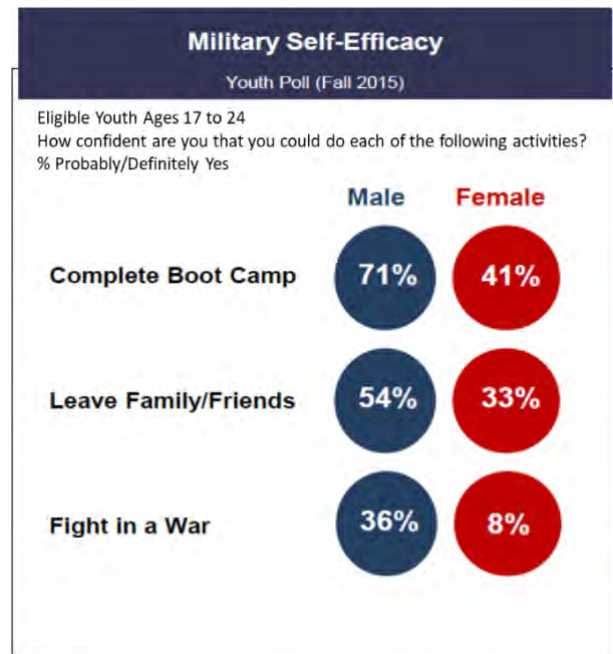
³⁷ USA. “General Military Propensity: Youth Poll Study Findings.”, 5.

reveals differences between ethnicities. Based on answering ‘*probably*’ or ‘*definitely*’, the U.S. military would be comprised of 16.8% Asian, 18.6% White, 32.2% Black, and 32.4% Hispanic, when limited to those four broad ethnic categories. The CAF has set a goal of 11% for visible minorities.³⁸ While the ethnic composition of the U.S. is different from that of Canada, the CAF goal is likely inappropriate. Consequently, the CAF must stop setting specific gender and ethnic targets and instead recruit across all segments of society to find those open to a career in the military, while understanding that not all demographics will be proportionally represented in the CAF.

Barriers to Enrolment

“The common perception that Army service is an interruption in a young person’s life”³⁹ has persisted for decades. Successful recruiting depends on replacing this perception with the message that the CAF represents an opportunity to make something of yourself on your own. To resonate with youth, a theme of the CAF needs to be learning. Apart from purely military skills, the CAF helps members “become more confident and self-reliant, more aware of the value of teamwork and self-discipline, more conscious of the importance of personal responsibility.”⁴⁰ Further, youth seek mechanical, technical, administrative, and leadership skills applicable throughout their lives.⁴¹ These aspects of self-development have been important for the past fifty years and need to be actively promoted by the CAF in recruiting efforts.

In reference to military service, society typically recalls movies like ‘*Saving Private Ryan*’.⁴² The overwhelming majority of the time, this stereotype is inaccurate but is reflected in the top reasons youth aged 17 to 24 cite for not joining the military. More than half would not enlist due to the possibility of injury or death, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or having to leave family and friends. Further, many youth lack confidence in their ability to ‘*definitely*’ or even ‘*probably*’ complete basic military training, leave family and friends, or fight in a war. In fact, only 36% of men and 8% of women thought they could fight in a war.



³⁸ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 7.

³⁹ Callaway, Howard H. “Why Join the Army?” *The New York Times*. 17 July 1974, 37. [Why Join the Army? | The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](http://www.nytimes.com)

⁴⁰ Callaway, Howard H.

⁴¹ Callaway, Howard H.

⁴² Spielberg, Steven, John Williams, and John Neufeld. *Saving Private Ryan*. USA: DreamWorks Distribution, 1998.

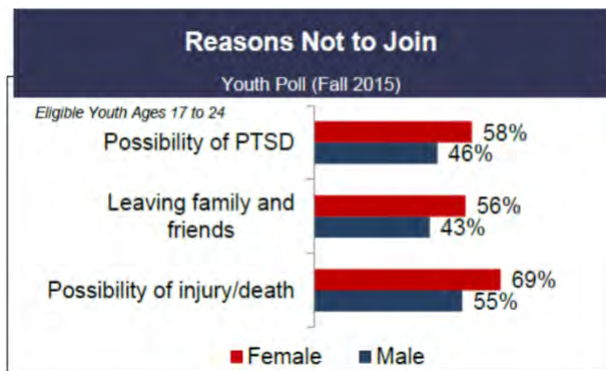


Figure 2: Reasons Not to Join⁴³

Figure 3: Military Self-Efficacy⁴⁴

The CAF's current recruiting strategy based on monetary and non-monetary elements within the *CAF Offer* is creating an identity crisis within the CAF. The USMC has demonstrated that recruits are not interested in joining a civilian organization and those that do join for incentives are not interested in belonging to a "combat-ready military"⁴⁵ for the reasons in Figure 2. However, to reduce the reasons not to join as much as is possible when considering employment in the military, the CAF must overcome Hollywood's portrayal of military service by demonstrating the breadth of occupations available. Five of the top eight most favoured occupations in the U.S. DoD's youth survey are offered in the CAF, namely doctor, engineer, manager, lawyer, and nurse. Recruiting efforts must highlight these occupations, and to better recruit women, specifically the medical occupations which they most favour. Ultimately, however, the reality of the CAF's mandate means not actively seeking to recruit those who will not leave family and friends, fight in a war, or accept undesirable postings and geographic instability.⁴⁶ In short, the CAF needs to accept that military service may not be for everyone.

The biggest difficulty with attracting recruits may be the CAF itself. With the protection of three oceans and the U.S., Canadians have become ambivalent to global insecurity. Failing to recognize the threat has meant low prioritization of defence and an aversion to military spending. Years of neglect and chronic under-funding have contributed to the deterioration of equipment and infrastructure, which degrade operational capability and capacity. A 'death spiral' "is how Minister of National Defence Bill Blair described the state of Canada's military at last month's Ottawa Conference on Security and Defense."⁴⁷ The result is not just a tarnished image but calls into question the legitimacy of the CAF. This situation, well known in NATO circles and now in Canada following the Minister's comments, needs to change for any hope of successful recruiting.

⁴³ USA. "The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver."

⁴⁴ USA. "The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver."

⁴⁵ Canada. "Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy." *Department of National Defence* Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy - Canada.ca](https://www.crest.ca/strong-secure-engaged)

⁴⁶ Canada. "Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy", 6.

⁴⁷ Lagassé, Philippe and Justin Massie. "Don't Count On Us: Canada's Military Unreadiness." *Texas National Security Review*. 11 April 2024. [Don't Count on Us: Canada's Military Unreadiness | War on the Rocks](https://www.tnssr.com/dont-count-on-us-canadas-military-unreadiness-war-on-the-rocks)

To restore its legitimacy, the CAF must be adept at the core capabilities of the CA, RCN, and RCAF, meaning a reduction in current mandates to match the personnel and financial resources available. A positive image within Canadian society will restore pride in service, the intangible upon which USMC recruiting relies, and attract recruits to the CAF. Pride to be in the CAF is suggested as a main aspect which, if improved, can support the retention of Defence Team members most broadly.⁴⁸

The CAF's image issue is exacerbated by problems with the recruiting process itself. A review of the recruiting system found that the "area most in need of improvement is the level and quality of service that is provided by recruiters to applicants."⁴⁹ For almost all applicants, the recruiting centre is their first experience with the CAF. "If this experience is unsatisfactory for any reason, there is a strong possibility that an applicant will discontinue the process."⁵⁰ This conclusion is supported by examining CAF attrition by years of service. From FY 17/18 to FY 22/23, the attrition rate for members with less than one year of service was 16.7%, double the CAF average attrition rate of 7.8%.⁵¹ The recruiting system may not be wholly responsible as other factors like failing basic training, security screenings, and medical exams certainly contribute to the high rate. However, discouraged applicants are likely to convey their negative experience to family, friends, and acquaintances, resulting in the further loss of potential recruits and a negative view of the CAF and the Government overall. Lengthy delays were found in the security screening process, reliability checks, the medical review process, and when transferring from the Reserves to the Regular Force. New policies and procedures were implemented to correct some of these concerns but the Government's commitment to dramatically increase CAF numbers will test these changes and the recruiting system.⁵² The U.S. military is rectifying a similar issue following "the introduction of an electronic health records system that has slowed in-processing to a crawl."⁵³ Finding qualified candidates has also become increasingly difficult. In the U.S. DoD survey of youth aged 17 to 24, candidates were disqualified from military service within seven overarching categories: 1) medical/physical, 2) overweight, 3) mental health, 4) drug use, 5) unacceptable conduct, 6) dependents, and 7) insufficient aptitude. In 2013, 29% of youth were eligible to serve.⁵⁴ By 2020, that number had fallen to 23%, however 11% of those had already enrolled in

⁴⁸ Skomorovsky, Alla, Joelle Laplante, Justin Chamberland, and Irina Goldenberg. "2022 Your Say Matters: Defence Team Well-Being Survey." Report: DRDC-RDDC-2023-L189. Defence Research and Development Canada. September 2023, 11.

⁴⁹ Canada. "The Canadian Face Behind the Recruiting Targets - A Review of the Canadian Forces Recruiting System: From Attraction to Enrolment." *National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman*. 19 July 2006. Accessed: 06 May 2024. [DND/CAF Ombudsman Reports: Faces Behind Recruiting \(forces.gc.ca\)](https://www.forces.gc.ca/dnd-caf-ombudsman-reports-faces-behind-recruiting)

⁵⁰ Canada. "The Canadian Face Behind the Recruiting Targets - A Review of the Canadian Forces Recruiting System: From Attraction to Enrolment."

⁵¹ Straver, Michelle and Meagan Boileau. "Attrition by occupation, designated group, and years of service group." Report: DRDC-RDDC-2023-L9999. *Defence Research and Development Canada*. November 2023. Accessed: 28 April 2024. [Defence Research Reports \(drdc-rddc.gc.ca\)](https://www.drdc-rddc.gc.ca)

⁵² Canada. "The Canadian Face Behind the Recruiting Targets - A Review of the Canadian Forces Recruiting System: From Attraction to Enrolment."

⁵³ Cohen, Rachel S.

⁵⁴ USA. "The Target Population for Military Recruitment: Youth Eligible to Enlist Without a Waiver."

college, leaving only 12% qualified *and* available.⁵⁵ The U.S. services have “addressed the problem through policy changes that have gradually broadened the pool of eligible applicants”⁵⁶ with less stringent rules for non-citizens, THC, tattoos, obesity, and medical conditions like diabetes, endometriosis, and depression.⁵⁷ Similarly, the CAF has amended dress regulations and opened service to permanent residents.⁵⁸ However, the approval of complex security clearances, taking from 18 to 24 months, caused many applicants to lose interest in serving with the CAF during that time. Despite receiving more than 21,000 applications from permanent residents, “less than one percent were accepted into the regular forces – just 77 people.”⁵⁹ Clearly, the recruiting system requires further changes when processing security clearances to prevent the loss of potential recruits.

FACTORS INFLUENCING RETENTION

Expectations versus the Reality of CAF Employment

Previously, recruiting centers have directed recruits “according to the needs of the organization”⁶⁰ into specific trades falling noticeably below their preferred manning level (PML). These practices often involve persuasive tactics or misinformation during the recruiting process. One notable consequence of such practices is a potential mismatch between the demands of the assigned trade or specialty and the recruit's “skills, knowledge, interests, and education.”⁶¹ This can lead to job dissatisfaction, decreased morale, and reduced effectiveness. In fact, occupation dissatisfaction is the fifth cited complaint of currently serving members.⁶² Consequently, higher attrition rates may result as recruits seek more suitable occupations, possibly leaving the CAF altogether. In the *CAF Exit Survey*, job dissatisfaction is the most frequent reason, cited by 35.4% of members who voluntarily release.⁶³ While there may not be specific studies that comprehensively analyze persuasive recruiting practices and their consequences, anecdotal evidence often highlights the need for transparency, fairness, and accountability in military recruitment practices. If dissatisfaction among these recruits ultimately causes them to leave the CAF after reaching their operationally functional point (OFP), the resources expended to train these recruits are lost. Furthermore, the finite capacity of CAF trades schools, like the Canadian Forces School of

⁵⁵ USA. “2020 Qualified Military Available (QMA) Study.” Personnel and Readiness. *Department of Defense*. 2020. Accessed: 07 May 2024. [Qualified Military Available.pdf \(asvabprogram.com\)](#)

⁵⁶ Cohen, Rachel S.

⁵⁷ Cohen, Rachel S.

⁵⁸ Canada. “Minister of National Defence announces that permanent residents are welcome to apply now to join the Canadian Armed Forces.” *National Defence News Release*. Published: 05 December 2022. Accessed: 10 May 2024. [MND announces that permanent residents are welcome to apply now to join the CAF | Canada.ca](#)

⁵⁹ Burke, Ashley. “Vast majority of permanent residents applying to join military not accepted in 1st year of eligibility: data”. *CBC News*. Posted: 19 February 2024. Accessed: 10 May 2024. [Vast majority of permanent residents applying to join military not accepted | CBC News](#)

⁶⁰ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 33.

⁶¹ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 33.

⁶² Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, Figure 5, 69.

⁶³ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, Figure 4, 69.

Military Engineering (CFSME), means that the possibility of training an appropriate recruit who would have remained in trade was also lost, effectively doubling the adverse consequences. Therefore, the *CAF Retention Strategy* must further promote “transparency related to CAF life and occupation training requirements...to set appropriate expectation for members.”⁶⁴

Canada initially deployed CAF members to Afghanistan in December 2001 with the combat mission ending in July 2011.⁶⁵ The difference between the CAF’s trained effective establishment (TEE) and trained effective strength (TES) was decreasing until June 2012. At that time, the TES of 58,394 was only 1,421 below the TEE of 59,815. From June 2012, the delta began increasing, reaching 7,527 by August 2021; see Figure 4. While the increasing delta could be attributed to the CAF’s cultural turmoil, the change does coincide closely with the end of this well-known combat mission. Ostensibly, recruiting benefitted from the Afghan conflict and has suffered in the absence of a large combat mission. If civilians join militaries for intangibles, being resigned to administrative work that can be found in the private sector would be a source of dissatisfaction.

The fact that so many CAF members perform exactly this type of work could be driving the results of the *CAF Exit Survey*, where 35.4% cite job dissatisfaction and 15.9% cite a lack of meaningful work.⁶⁶ However, the transition to administrative work is necessary as a result of the CAF’s structure. Within a Brigade like 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group (1 CMBG) for example, there are approximately 200 Captains, fifty Majors, ten Lieutenant Colonels, and one Colonel. Of the 200 Captains, only fifty will continue in a command role following promotion to Major. Progression is necessary to make room for subsequent officers, but the CAF’s hierarchical nature means there are fewer and fewer positions at subsequently higher ranks. Administrative positions are necessary for promoted officers for whom no position is available within the Brigade. Furthermore, CAF senior officers are embedded within the DND hierarchy to advise DND civilian leadership on CAF issues but also for officer leadership development. The change from military duties within a brigade to administrative work within the DND could create stark differences between the expectations and the reality of employment within the CAF, leading to dissatisfaction and attrition. Again, transparency related to the realities of employment within the CAF is necessary to set appropriate expectations for members.

⁶⁴ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 33.

⁶⁵ Canada. “Canada and the War in Afghanistan.” *Canadian War Museum*. Accessed: 24 April 2024. [Canada and the War in Afghanistan | Learn | Canadian War Museum](#)

⁶⁶ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, Figure 4, 69.

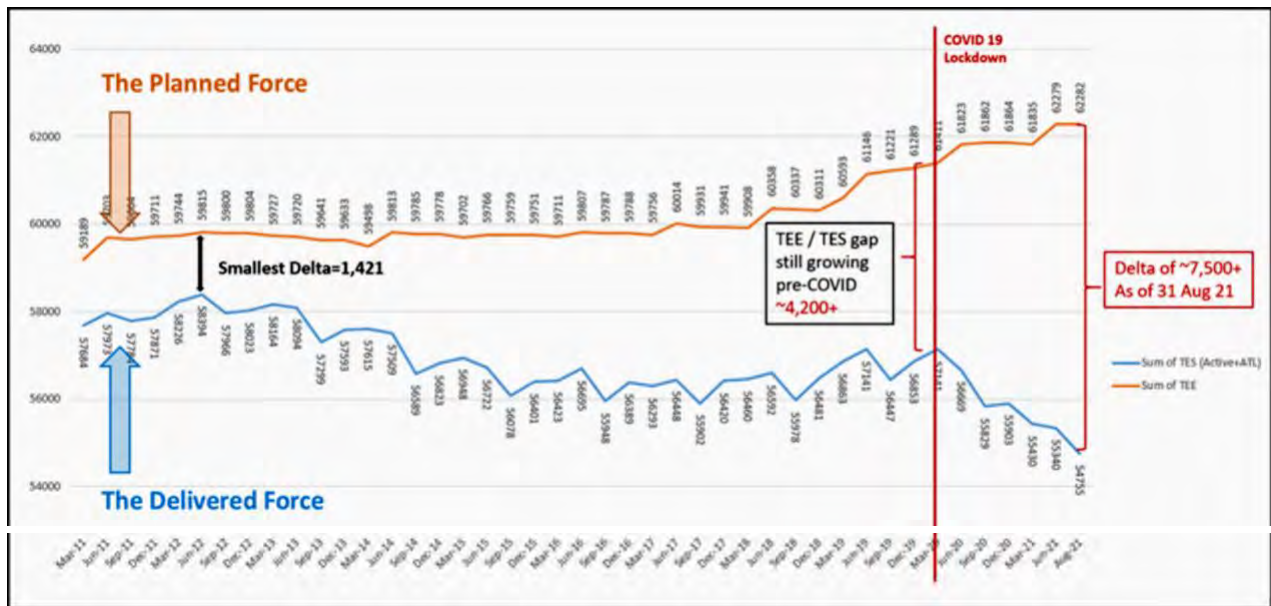


Figure 4: CAF TEE versus TES for the Regular Force⁶⁷

Operation RECONSTITUTION

With Operation RECONSTITUTION, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) ordered “an immediate halt to all non-essential activities”⁶⁸ following “a period of unprecedented activity by the military”⁶⁹ that included “large-scale deployments to Iraq, Mali, Ukraine and Latvia as well as helping with the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in Canada.”⁷⁰ Reducing the workload by removing all non-essential tasks was intended to give CAF members respite from unpleasant administrative tasks that are the cause of daily frustration and discontentment. However, the non-essential activities cut included those providing the reasons for enrolment in the absence of a large-scale combat mission. For example, Canada has participated in the Nijmegen March since 1952 to commemorate the liberation of the Netherlands by Allied forces during the Second World War. Under Operation RECONSTITUTION, CAF participation in the March was cancelled in January 2022⁷¹ and was further extended until 2026⁷². Many CAF units as well as the Royal Military College of Canada take great pride in sending teams to represent Canada and the CAF at this prestigious international event. In the Canadian Forces Small Arms Concentration (CFSAC), “participants shoot for their best scores, and they receive additional training on skills such as

⁶⁷ Carson, Neil. “Canadian Armed Forces Trained Effective Establishment versus Trained Effective Strength for the Regular Force.” Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Chief of Military Personnel. *Department of National Defence*. Accessed: 13 May 2024. [CMP-DGMFRA FY23/24 All Docs \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

⁶⁸ Berthiaume, Lee.

⁶⁹ Berthiaume, Lee.

⁷⁰ Berthiaume, Lee.

⁷¹ Canada. “Postponement of Ex NIJMEGEN until 2024 due to prioritization of support to CAF reconstitution.” CANFORGEN 010/22 CMP 007/22 251500Z JAN 22. *Department of National Defence*. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [CANFORGENS \(mil.ca\)](#)

⁷² Canada. “Extension of postponement of Ex NIJMEGEN until 2026.” CANFORGEN 135/23 CMP 067/23 181658Z AUG 23. *Department of National Defence*. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [CANFORGENS \(mil.ca\)](#)

maintaining marksmanship fundamentals in combat when stress may be high.”⁷³ Such knowledge and skills are shared with colleagues, benefiting the unit, but also improving the operational readiness of the CAF. Adventure training “provides necessary training and development to support the CAF mission”⁷⁴ and “is an integral part of operational training”⁷⁵ that contains “an element of challenge and risk”⁷⁶ and requires participants to have “the qualities of fitness, physical and moral courage, initiative and endurance.”⁷⁷ Exercise Nijmegen, CFSAC, and adventure training have been cut to “reduce staffing processes, and cease activities and tasks that do not directly contribute to the growth of the CAF, operations, and modernization.”⁷⁸ However, such cuts remove aspects of service that were integral to joining and are contrary to ensuring that “CAF members are satisfied in their career with the CAF.”⁷⁹

Career Progression and Promotions

According to the *CAF Retention Strategy*, the “average rate of attrition from the CAF (Reg Force and P Res) is generally between 8% and 9%. This rate compares favourably with the Canadian labour market, including both the private (10.2%) and public sectors (4.7%)”⁸⁰ CAF attrition being almost twice that of the public sector cannot be considered a favourable comparison and the attrition in the private sector is only a couple of percent higher. Promotions in the CAF are predicated on merit. However, career progression and promotion dissatisfaction are cited among voluntarily releasing and currently serving CAF members.⁸¹ Advancing in the private sector is possible within a company *and* by moving to a higher position at a new company as a result of skill portability. The CAF does not have this option as all recruits begin with basic military training before progressing through the ranks. Even NCMs who enter with recognized trades qualifications, such as a Red Seal, only bypass trades courses, not ranks. Similarly for officers, only licensed doctors, dentists, and lawyers begin at the rank of Captain following basic training. The CAF cannot recruit directly into positions above the entry level. So, while the attrition rate at private companies may be higher than the CAF, the attrition from any given economic sector is likely lower. For example, a construction manager could easily move from one construction company to another but is unlikely to move into an electronics company, meaning that the talent and experience remain within the construction sector. When members leave the CAF, the training and experience are lost, and the CAF starts over with a new recruit in basic training. Therefore, the CAF must focus heavily on retention due to the investment required to produce members,

⁷³ Myers, Lt(N) Crystal. “CFSAC puts marksmanship to the test.” *The Maple Leaf*, October 2012, Vol 15, No. 9, 5. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [CFSAC Puts Marksmanship to the Test | The Maple Leaf \(mil.ca\)](#)

⁷⁴ Canada. “Adventure Training.” DAOD 5031-10. *Department of National Defence*. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [DAOD 5031-10, Adventure Training - Canada.ca](#)

⁷⁵ Canada. “Adventure Training.”

⁷⁶ Canada. “Adventure Training.”

⁷⁷ Canada. “Adventure Training.”

⁷⁸ Canada. “CDS/DM Directive For CAF Reconstitution.” *Department of National Defence*. 6 October 2022. Accessed: 20 May 2024. [CDS/DM Directive for CAF Reconstitution \(canada.ca\)](#)

⁷⁹ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 31.

⁸⁰ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 15.

⁸¹ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, Figure 5, 69.

especially those at the higher ranks. Conversely, the CAF could evaluate the possibility of recruiting directly into the higher ranks with some military training for trades with commensurate civilian occupations like the Construction Engineers.

Potential Issues with the Current Retention Strategy

The *CAF Retention Strategy* states that “targeted retention will incentivize members”⁸² and address a “lack of diversity and representation or stressed occupations within the CAF.”⁸³ In most cases, however, “targeted retention efforts...will address retention related concerns that affect underrepresented groups (i.e. women, Indigenous Peoples, visible minorities, LGBTQ2+ members, and PWD).”⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the practical application of incentives for under-represented groups is never explained. Were one or more groups within the prohibited grounds of discrimination⁸⁵ to receive incentives for, say, continued service, the remaining groups would certainly feel unappreciated, unvalued, and alienated. The incentive itself is irrelevant as differential treatment creates resentment. At the very least, job dissatisfaction would increase but likely so would voluntary releases within the non-incentivised groups. Essentially, the CAF would trade ‘over-represented’ members for under-represented groups. While this assists with statistics for under-represented groups, the CAF can hardly afford to alienate its traditional recruiting base while short 15,000 members.

Additionally, the *CAF Retention Strategy* seeks to improve talent management with the short-term outcome to “support members through job selection and placement during their careers.”⁸⁶ Again, the practical application of talent management is never fully articulated. Certain job placements are necessary for advancement. Holding these positions earns points for promotion within the merit-based system, without which a competitive ranking is practically impossible. The awarding of these coveted positions is not merit-based and consequently, talent management is often seen as special treatment for those members favoured by senior trade advisors and career managers.

Members who are not talent-managed or incentivized will perceive challenges to advancement beyond their control. “Confidence in CAF/DND leadership, career management, and procedural fairness were highly related to morale.”⁸⁷ As the third-leading reason for voluntary releases, 24.7% of members cite career progression during the *CAF Exit Survey*.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the stigma

⁸² Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 26.

⁸³ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 3.

⁸⁴ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 4.

⁸⁵ Canada. *Canadian Human Rights Act*. R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6, Part 1, 3(1). Accessed: 12 May 2024. [Canadian Human Rights Act \(justice.gc.ca\)](https://www.justice.gc.ca/3-1) “3 (1) For all purposes of this Act, the prohibited grounds of discrimination are race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.”

⁸⁶ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 33.

⁸⁷ Skomorovsky, Alla, Joelle Laplante, Justin Chamberland, and Irina Goldenberg, 7.

⁸⁸ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, Figure 4, 69.

associated with receiving special treatment may negate the intended advantages, making such treatment contentious among the recipients.⁸⁹ Not surprisingly then, the *Retention and Exit Surveys* allow identification “as a member of underrepresented populations, however, the rate of self-identification of underrepresented populations in the surveys is quite low.”⁹⁰ Targeting any group for differential treatment does not create unity within the CAF, but is divisive by its nature. Given that these programs target small groups, the reaction of a far larger group of non-recipients must be considered. As such, the possible negative stigma of such programs needs to be far more carefully assessed to determine whether these programs actually benefit the CAF from a retention and unity perspective.

PROPOSALS FOR RECRUITING AND RETENTION

A Canadian Armed Forces’ Slogan

The U.S. Army motto of ‘*This we’ll defend*’ has not changed since its first used by the War Office of the Continental Army during the American Revolution in 1778. The USMC has not changed its motto ‘*Semper Fidelis*’, meaning Always Faithful, since its establishment in 1883. The USAF motto ‘*Aim High...Fly-Fight-Win*’ was adopted in 2010.⁹¹ With slogans however, the branches “have frequently rebranded themselves, trying to find something”⁹² that would resonate. The U.S. Army has been “through at least four recruiting slogans over the past 20 years”⁹³ until last year when they returned to the 1980’s era slogan of ‘*Be all that you can be*’. The USAF has found better success by just shortening their motto into the well-known slogan of ‘*Aim High*’. However, the indelible slogan of the USMC ‘*The few, the proud*’ “has changed little in 50 years.”⁹⁴ With publicity, enduring consistency is crucial for immediate recognition. With the CAF, even active members would be hard-pressed to recite the motto of the CA, RCN, or RCAF.

A poll by the Ottawa Citizen during the 100th anniversary of the RCAF indicates that “Canadians have limited knowledge of the RCAF.”⁹⁵ Only 22% of respondents were able to correctly identify the RCAF logo. The RCAF motto, ‘*Sic Itur ad Astra*’, Latin for ‘Such is the pathway to the stars’ would likely fare even worse. The RCN motto, ‘*Parati vero parati*’, ‘Ready aye ready’ and the Army motto, ‘*Vigilamus pro te*’, ‘We stand on guard for thee’ are equally forgettable. The CAF needs a notable but familiar slogan to create an identity that resonates with Canadians. A CAF slogan, like ‘*Small Force, Mighty Team*’ would be appropriate with one caveat: For the slogan to

⁸⁹ Okros, Alan.

⁹⁰ Canada. “Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy”, 17.

⁹¹ United Service Organizations. “What are the Mottos of the 6 Branches of the U.S. Military?” Washington, DC. 10 February 2021. Accessed: 27 April 2024. [What are the Mottos of the 6 Branches of the US Military? | USO \(uso.org\)](https://www.uso.org/what-are-the-mottos-of-the-6-branches-of-the-us-military/)

⁹² Philipps, Dave. “U.S. Army, Navy and Air Force Struggle for Recruits. The Marines Have Plenty.” *The New York Times*. 17 October 2023. [U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force Struggle for Recruits | The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/17/us-military-struggle-for-recruits.html)

⁹³ Philipps, Dave.

⁹⁴ Philipps, Dave.

⁹⁵ Pugliese, David.

remain valid in the eyes of Canadians, the CAF must be perceived as a legitimate military force, which is currently in question according to Minister Blair.

A Commander's Contingency Fund

In Afghanistan, commanders had a contingency fund, the spending of which was restricted by very few rules. Within the CME, governance meetings have heard that restrictive CAF policies may be hampering innovation and the engagement of CME members. In a subsequent survey on retention within the CME⁹⁶, nineteen Commanding Officers of units across Canada, were asked on what their unit would spend \$20,000, given no procurement rules, administration, or oversight. The intent was to provide a way of remedying local problems, thereby increasing retention. Responses could be separated into morale and well-being (adventure training, social and sports events, improved amenities), professional development and equipment (training aids, courses and certifications, and tool and equipment upgrades), and infrastructure improvements. These items were suggested as they rank low in priority when scored against safety or operational requirements. With limited funding, the likelihood of such projects ever being realized is essentially non-existent, despite their significant impact on morale and job satisfaction.

Providing this contingency fund to 362 commanders within the CAF⁹⁷ would cost \$7,240,000, a fraction of a percent of the current defence budget of \$33.8 billion. In practical terms, the ease of using the fund would need to be balanced with minimal accountability requirements. The only restriction on its use would be to ensure an ongoing benefit to the unit, as opposed to an individual or individuals. The purchase of tools and equipment is a clear example of an ongoing benefit to a unit unrelated to an individual. However, morale and welfare events, like sports days, enhance esprit-de-corps and unit cohesion, benefiting the unit. Adventure training develops individuals' skills and promotes teamwork, providing ongoing benefits to the CAF. While further concept development is required, a review of Treasury Board (TB) policies, the Financial Administration Act (FAA), and Department Administrative Orders and Directives (DAODs) regarding the implementation of such an initiative would be an appropriate starting point.

Professional and Institutional Streams for Officers

In the Canadian Forces Temporary Duty Travel Instructions, a senior officer is a "Colonel or above, or a Lieutenant Colonel who is a legal officer or a licensed medical or dental officer."⁹⁸ The assumption for this distinction is that only lawyers, doctors, and dentists actually use their degree as an officer in the CAF. All others do not directly employ their degree, which may account for the stark differences between the expectation and the reality of employment within the CAF. A

⁹⁶ Kelley, LCol Travis. "Survey of CME Commanding Officers." *Department of National Defence*. March 2024, 5.

⁹⁷ Canada. "Units, Squadrons and Ships of the Canadian Forces." *Canadian Armed Forces*. Modified: 19 October 2023. Accessed: 21 May 2024. [Units, squadrons, and ships of the CF | Canada.ca](https://www.cfmilitary.ca/units-squadrons-and-ships-of-the-cf)

⁹⁸ Canada. "Canadian Forces Temporary Duty Travel Instructions." Chief of Military Personnel, *Department of National Defence*. Revised: 01 April 2024. Accessed: 21 May 2024. [CF TDTI | Canada.ca](https://www.cfmilitary.ca/cf-tdti)

possible solution to reduce dissatisfaction and attrition among officers would be two streams; one that specializes in a professional occupation, usually distinguished by a license, such as a doctor, dentist, lawyer, or engineer; and another that generalizes in institutional administration. The streams would split by virtue of the positions occupied after attaining TES with the understanding that most executive positions above the rank of Colonel would be occupied by those generalizing in institutional administration. In the case of Engineers, for example, the top specialists would command 1 Engineering Support Unit (1 ESU) or Real Property Operations Group (RP Ops Gp).

Civilianization of Administrative Functions

The Canadian Forces Special Operations Command (CANSOFCOM) is comprised of operational positions with administrative support from DND civilians. The rest of the CAF could adopt this approach instead of having many CAF members performing administrative tasks daily. Job dissatisfaction and a lack of meaningful work are the third and sixth reasons cited by voluntarily releasing members. For currently serving members, job dissatisfaction and a lack of meaningful, satisfying, or challenging work are the second and third most frequent complaints.⁹⁹ Such discontent may not be due solely to performing administrative work, but recruits are unlikely to join with this employment in mind, leading to differences in the expectations and the reality of employment within the CAF. A policy to return military members to performing tasks directly related to their chosen occupation and which promote operational readiness and combat effectiveness could support retention efforts. DND public servants would then be responsible for CAF administration.

SUMMARIZING THE IDENTIFIED CONCEPTS AND PROPOSALS

As a result of allegations of inappropriate behaviour and a cultural crisis, the CAF is suffering from a tarnished image within Canadian society. This image and strong competition for talent from the civilian sector has left little interest in joining the CAF. Individuals enlist in the military for a variety of reasons, both tangible and intangible. Unfortunately, the monetary and non-monetary elements in the *CAF Offer* are not resolving the current shortfall of approximately 15,000 members. Successfully addressing the CAF's difficulties in recruiting and retention requires understanding the motivations and barriers to joining and the incentives and deterrents to remaining.

Like the CAF, the U.S. military is having difficulty meeting recruiting targets, except for the USMC. Attempts by the U.S. Army and Navy have shown that tangible incentives, like financial bonuses, housing, childcare, and remedial training, do not guarantee success in recruiting. In 2023, the USMC met 105% of its recruiting target without such incentives or relaxing admission standards, clearly having found a segment of society that wants to serve.

⁹⁹ Canada. "Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy", Figures 4 and 5, 69.

When the CAF attracts recruits with tangible incentives, like trades training, the private sector retains the ability to steal members of the CAF at will by offering more incentives without the risk of unlimited liability and the burden of numerous ancillary responsibilities. This is particularly true of military occupations that have commensurate civilian occupations, like the Construction Engineer trades. Instead, the CAF must offer something the private sector cannot, the intangibles of pride, honour, and adventure associated with military service.

Current recruiting policies within the CAF place a focus on gender balance and under-represented populations, while acknowledging a lack of current evidence concerning recruitment and retention. Under the assumption that American and Canadian societies share similar cultural trends, this approach seems to ignore the preferred occupation choices of youth at the ideal age for service. Enforcing gender equity would reject almost two-thirds of males entering the recruiting office. Similarly, CAF diversity programs have a moving target in attempting to match Canadian demographics that constantly change with immigration. The CAF's target for visible minorities appears low in comparison to U.S. studies on the likelihood of serving across four broad ethnic categories. Consequently, the CAF should abandon gender and ethnicity targets and welcome all those seeking a career in the military, while understanding that not all demographics will be proportionally represented.

Canadian's chronic aversion to defence spending now calls into question the legitimacy of the CAF, making recruiting and retention exceptionally difficult. To restore pride in service, the CAF must fully support the chosen capabilities of the CA, RCN, and RCAF with sufficient personnel and financial resources. Additionally, the recruiting system must effectively process recruits to prevent a further loss of potential members from a negative view of the CAF following an unsatisfactory experience in the recruiting system.

Current CAF recruiting policies are creating an identity crisis. The CAF's TES was closest to the TEE just after the Afghan conflict. Since the end of this mission, many members have been resigned to administrative work that can be found in the civilian sector, resulting in job dissatisfaction and complaints of a lack of meaningful work. Conversely, members who were attracted through tangible incentives are not interested in belonging to a combat-ready military, and cite the military lifestyle, geographic instability, and family impacts as issues. The difference in expectations and the reality of CAF employment is leading to higher attrition rates in the absence of sufficient transparency concerning appropriate expectations and CAF life.

Op RECONSTITUTION was intended to reduce the CAF's workload by removing all non-essential activities. However, the cuts have included many of the activities like the Nijmegen March, adventure training, and shooting competitions. In the absence of missions, these activities supported the reasons for which many members joined, and their cuts are contrary to ensuring career satisfaction within the CAF.

The CAF's current retention strategy has potential issues, like using targeted retention to incentivize under-represented groups. Such treatment is contentious among recipients due to the stigma of receiving special treatment, leading to a low rate of self-identification among under-represented groups. The incentives are irrelevant as differential treatment will create resentment in the non-incentivized groups, possibly negating the intended advantages. Additionally, the awarding of positions necessary for promotion through talent management is often viewed as preferential treatment that bypasses the purported merit-based system of advancement and creates doubts concerning competence. Members who are not incentivized or talent-managed will likely perceive challenges to advancement beyond their control, creating a lack of confidence in CAF leadership, career management, and procedural fairness. Consequently, the use of such programs needs careful assessment from a retention and unity perspective.

To address the identified issues, the CAF would benefit from a slogan, like those of the U.S. military, that creates a familiar identity within Canadian society. The validity of the slogan would rest on Canadian society's perception of the CAF as a legitimate military force. A commander's contingency fund could be used to fund low-priority projects that otherwise, would never score high enough to receive funding. By addressing complaints at the local level, morale and job satisfaction would be improved supporting retention. For officers, two streams could be used to separate those who are interested in employing their degree from those who generalize in institutional administration, thereby better matching employment expectation and improving job satisfaction.

Finally, the civilianization of administrative functions could reduce the frequently cited complaints of job dissatisfaction and a lack of meaningful, satisfying, or challenging work. Removing the administrative tasks performed by many CAF members would allow a return to their chosen occupation, promote operational readiness and combat effectiveness, and support retention efforts.

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