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Research Report

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Considering U.S. Air Force Culture When Modifying Career Development Pathways for Longer Assignments

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About This Report

In May 2025, the U.S. Department of War tasked the military services with implementing targeted reductions to permanent change of station moves and modifying career development pathways in line with these reductions.[1] In this report, we consider the relationship between U.S. Air Force (USAF) assignments and career development. Drawing on policy analysis and incorporating discussions with subject-matter experts, we suggest that USAF culture incorporates policy, process, and norms—and that changes to assignment policy and career development processes should consider strategies for changing cultural expectations associated with these aspects. The report offers several recommendations for how the USAF can respond to this challenge.

The findings are intended to inform Air Force leaders, career field managers, and personnel policymakers as they adapt career trajectories to balance fiscal constraints with developmental needs, ensuring that both specialized expertise and broad leadership capacity are sustained under new assignment paradigms.

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[1] The Department of War is designated the Department of Defense under Public Law 81-216, National Security Act Amendments of 1949.

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Summary

In May 2025, the U.S. Department of War directed the military services to develop plans to modify career development pathways for service members, in line with reduced rates of permanent change of station moves resulting in longer assignment durations.[2] For this report, we evaluated the relationship between U.S. Air Force (USAF) assignments and career development, considering the role of USAF culture in these processes.

Issue

USAF assignments and career development timelines are closely linked, and extending assignment lengths will disrupt established career development practices.

Approach

We analyzed insights from subject-matter experts representing the perspectives of USAF offices involved in assignment processes and career development management. We also conducted a decomposition analysis of Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110, *Total Force Assignments*, to map the policy elements shaping USAF assignment and career development culture.[3]

Key Findings

- Historical assignment patterns have fostered institutional and workforce expectations that frequent moves are necessary for career development and promotion.
- Modifying career development pathways to reflect extended assignment durations would disrupt established practices and personnel expectations for career advancement.
- USAF assignment policy includes four categories of assignment action: directing a permanent change of station move, directing a member to stay in place, offering consideration factors for assignment calculations, or any combination of these actions.
- USAF assignment policy produces four categories of outcomes: mission fulfillment, career development, member consideration, and cost savings.
- Existing variation across personnel interpretation and application of USAF assignment policy introduces challenges to implementing policy changes.

[2] The Department of War is designated the Department of Defense under Public Law 81-216, National Security Act Amendments of 1949.

[3] Secretary of the Air Force, *Total Force Assignments*, Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110, August 9, 2024, incorporating change 1, September 17, 2025a.

- Culture—including unwritten norms and values—plays a critical role in shaping both the implementation of assignment policy and the viability of modifying career development pathways.
- Successfully modifying USAF assignment and career pathways would require integrating formal policy, local practices, and cultural expectations into a coherent, updated system responsive to emerging demands and long-term career development objectives.

Recommendations

- **Balance clarity and flexibility in policy revisions.** Assignment and career development policies should be clear yet adaptable in recognition of the need to balance mission fulfillment and individual service member preferences.
- **Account for variation in implementation.** Strategies for implementing policy changes should acknowledge the variation in interpretation and application across career fields, organizations, and individuals (e.g., senior leaders serving on promotion boards).
- **Deliberately address cultural context.** Successful reform will require deliberate consideration of the broader cultural environment, including how airmen and their leaders perceive career progression, assignment equity, and work–life balance.
- **Take immediate actions** to revise specific sections of Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110 to explicitly prioritize longer assignments as a career development tool, provide new guidance to promotion boards to reflect expectations for longer assignments, and develop senior leader communication templates that reframe extended assignments as strategic investments rather than career stagnation.
- **Leverage change management tools** to identify champions of the new approach and areas of resistance among stakeholders and in the workforce. To demonstrate success stories under new assignment processes, publish case studies of personnel who achieved career advancement through extended assignments, and establish formal feedback mechanisms to monitor implementation challenges and adjust strategies in real time.
- **Establish baseline cultural metrics and conduct longitudinal analysis** comparing career outcomes between traditional rotation-heavy careers and extended assignment pathways, providing empirical evidence to support or refine the cultural change initiative.

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Chapter 1

Intersections Among Air Force Assignments, Career Development, and Culture

In May 2025, the U.S. Department of War (DOW) directed the military services to implement targeted reductions in permanent change of station (PCS) moves, including the modification of career development pathways.[4] Specifically, the memo tasks the services to develop plans to "modify officer and NCO [noncommissioned officer] career development models that increase focus on geographic stability and specialization over broader career experience or generalization."[5]

Assignment and career development models are deeply embedded in the institutional fabric of the U.S. Air Force (USAF). Historically, frequent PCS moves have been viewed as essential for career advancement and promotion, a view that has shaped both formal policies and informal expectations among service members. As a result, any change to assignment policy—such as DOW's directive to reduce the number of PCS moves—will necessitate corresponding adjustments to career development and promotion requirements. Implementing such changes within a large, bureaucratic institution, like the USAF, presents significant challenges, including the need to revise established policies and to address potential resistance from a workforce accustomed to existing norms of career progression.

Previous RAND research has touched on some aspects of updating career development pathways and has included recommendations for several approaches, such as modernizing and investing in agile career management flexibilities for officers and pursuing an advanced technical track for enlisted career fields.[6] Additionally, research has highlighted the close relationship between career development milestones—such as completing in-residence developmental education—and the PCS moves often required to achieve these milestones. For example, relocating developmental education schoolhouses has been suggested as a way to facilitate in-residence completion while reducing the disruptive effects of frequent PCS moves.[7]

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[4] Jules W. Hurst III, performing the duties of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, "Permanent Change of Station Targeted Reductions Review and Personnel Policy Changes," memorandum for the secretaries of the military departments, May 22, 2025.

[5] Hurst, 2025, p. 1.

[6] Miriam Matthews, John A. Ausink, Shirley M. Ross, Matthew Walsh, Albert A. Robbert, John S. Crown, David Schulker, Philip Armour, Irina A. Chindea, Emily Hoch, and Sean Robson, *Championing the Agile Air Force Officer Career: Examining the Potential Use of New Career Management Flexibilities*, RAND Corporation, RR-4439-AF, 2021; Maria C. Lytell, Sean Robson, John A. Ausink, Barbara Bicksler, Grace Falgoust, Chaitra M. Hardison, Devon Hill, Annie Yu Kleiman, and Mark Toukan, *Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Air Force Enlisted Skills Management System: Recommended Changes to Meet Future Demands*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2323-1, 2024.

[7] Lawrence M. Hanser, Jennifer J. Li, Carra S. Sims, Norah Griffin, and Spencer R. Case, *Air Force Professional Military Education: Considerations for Change*, RAND Corporation, RR-A401-1, 2021.

Despite these recommendations, efforts to reform officer management across DOW have generally been conservative, with **organizational culture** often constraining the pace and scope of implementing changes to USAF career management processes and practices.[8] Both DOW and the military services have historically been cautious about implementing changes when the outcomes are uncertain, particularly given the difficulty of predicting how peacetime personnel policies might affect future warfighting effectiveness.[9]

Adhering to DOW's guidance to reduce PCS moves will likely require rapid transformations to assignment policy and career development pathways. These changes must be considered within the broader context of USAF culture, which encompasses not only formal policies but also unwritten norms, values, and expectations regarding career progression and mobility.

To support the USAF in implementing these directives, we examined the intersections among assignments, career development (including promotion considerations), and organizational culture.[10] Through insights gleaned from semistructured discussions with subject-matter experts (SMEs),[11] summarized in Chapter 2, we traced the interconnected nature of these factors and identified opportunities and potential outcomes for changing these aspects of USAF service culture. In Chapter 3, we describe our decomposition analysis of existing USAF assignment guidance—Department of the Air Force (DAF) Instruction (DAFI) 36-2110, *Total Force Assignments*—to break the complex guidance document into manageable components;[12] this analysis allowed us to map the elements comprising USAF assignment policy and conceptualize the assignment and career development components shaping USAF culture. With the results of this assessment, we introduce, in Chapter 4, new approaches for how the USAF can consider culture when implementing PCS reductions and modifying career development pathways.

[8] RAND Corporation, "Modernizing Officer Career Management: Analyzing Eleven Issues," RB-A416-1, 2021.

[9] Albert A. Robbert, Caitlin Lee, William H. Waggy II, Katherine L. Kidder, Natasha Lander, and Agnes Gereben Schaefer, *Officer Career Management: Additional Steps Toward Modernization*, RAND Corporation, RR-4337-OSD, 2021.

[10] Our research effort on this topic originated when the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) tasked our RAND team to model assignment durations and assess outcomes related to cost, readiness, and retention. For the report resulting from this project tasking, see Kelly Atkinson, Lisa M. Harrington, Anna White Hewitt, R. Gordon Rinderknecht, Albert A. Robbert, Kelly Piazza, James Fan, Anthony Lawrence, Jessica Lu, Nathan Thompson, Sankalp Kumar, and Anton Wu, *Air Force Assignment Durations: Modeling Policy Changes and Their Effects on Cost, Readiness, and Retention*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3735-1, 2026.

[11] We engaged with 25 SMEs in 15 discussion sessions and convened a four-hour virtual workshop that brought together 47 participants. Discussants represented perspectives from the RAND project team, Headquarters Air Force, AFPC, and USAF career field manager teams. For additional details on these conversations, see Atkinson et al., 2026.

[12] Secretary of the Air Force, *Total Force Assignments*, DAFI 36-2110, August 9, 2024, incorporating change 1, September 17, 2025a.

Chapter 2

Considerations for Air Force Assignments, Career Development, and Culture

USAF career development falls under doctrinal directives for force development, which "develops foundational and occupational competencies in all airmen through education, training, and experience opportunities to satisfy current and future Air Force mission requirements."[13] The AFPC Directorate of Assignments is one element of the broader force development enterprise, contributing to active duty force development by managing assignment actions that both meet mission requirements and support career development objectives.[14] In coordination with AFPC and other stakeholders, career development pathways incorporate career field–specific development plans, career field management–developed talent management frameworks, and career milestones, such as promotion timelines and developmental education completion. In the rest of this chapter, we review lessons learned on these topics by presenting insights and information provided during our conversations with SMEs.

Subject-Matter Experts' Perspectives on Air Force Career Development and Culture

Although career development expectations do not explicitly require an airman to complete a PCS move, they require an airman to show progression in their career field—and often, this expectation drives frequent moves. For officers, the USAF maintains a regimented set of expectations requiring personnel to "check boxes" to achieve preestablished career objectives, reflecting expectations for officers to have an extensive breadth of experience to lead and operate in a variety of job duties. The assignment system becomes a key driver of officer career progression, with multiple duty titles often reflecting forward momentum, which can positively affect promotion consideration.

Both officers and enlisted members are generally expected to demonstrate career progression to remain in service. This expectation is often referred to as *up-or-out*, a system codified through such policies as mandatory separation dates for officers and high year tenure limits for enlisted personnel.[15]

[13] Secretary of the Air Force, *Total Force Development*, DAFI 36-2670, June 25, 2020, incorporating change 10, December 2, 2025b, paragraph 1.1.

[14] In response to reviewing a draft version of this report, personnel at AFPC provided the following insight: AFPC, as the execution arm for USAF human resources, has the responsibility to inform and influence the Air Staff, Space Staff, and DAF Secretariat who have the authority to take certain actions tied to DAF instructions, promotion board guidance, and overall policy.

[15] Secretary of the Air Force, *Military Separations*, DAFI 36-3211, June 24, 2022, incorporating change 1, current November 20, 2023.

Frequent relocations can pose challenges for service members and their families, particularly for partners and children. For example, rising costs have increasingly required households to have multiple incomes, which makes frequent moves even more disruptive.[16] The tension between career progression—often signaled by frequent moves—and a growing desire for stability has led many service members to reconsider traditional USAF career ambitions.[17]

Service members face cultural challenges if they pursue assignment stability and stray from established career development pathways that prioritize "moving for development." Some SMEs said that the assignment system maintains a one-size-fits-all expectation that all officers should be developed as if they could become the next chief of staff of the USAF and that all enlisted should be developed so that they could reach the rank of chief master sergeant (E-9)—that is, the career development system assumes that every airman aspires to achieve the highest rank possible.

Cultural challenges impede changes to assignment practices and related career development outcomes. For example, senior leaders often reinforce expectations for career development based on their experiences of USAF culture. Although some personnel might pursue longer assignments, the senior leaders running promotion boards reinforce the cultural expectation that promotion eligibility is tied to frequent moves—because they themselves experienced frequent moves and achieved career success through the process.

According to SMEs, one way to change the minds of senior leaders is to leverage data to present cost and readiness outcome assessments from alternative career development requirements. Additionally, incorporating more joint perspectives and lessons learned from other services can bolster cultural change within the USAF.

Overall, throughout our conversations with SMEs in discussion sessions and during our virtual workshop, SMEs argued against the persistence of the "move for the sake of moving" mentality that they said undergirds current USAF culture. They called instead for a middle ground between implementing a one-size-fits-all career development model that prioritizes frequent moves to achieve career development and building a system that is too responsive to individual desires. They proposed assessing what airmen value and creating career development experiences around those value categories. Such categories could include separating traditional leadership trajectories from technical specialists—incorporating lessons learned from the new USAF warrant officer track[18]—or allowing airmen to seek assignment and career development stability to achieve work–life balance.

Understanding Culture to Consider Career Development Modifications

We identified USAF organizational culture as a significant barrier to altering the current assignment system and associated career development pathways. Organizational culture is

[16] Blue Star Families, "Balancing Act: Military Families Struggle to Juggle It All," blog post, June 14, 2021.

[17] Atkinson et al., 2026.

[18] Kelly Atkinson and Angela K. Clague, *Should U.S. Air Force Warrant Officers Attend Professional Military Education? An Assessment of Programmatic Objectives and Options*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2997-4, 2025.

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solve[s] its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.[19]

Organizational culture contributes to a sense of group identity, shaping long-term institutional dynamics: "Culture is something that survives even when some members of the organization depart [and] is hard to change because group members value stability in that it provides meaning and predictability."[20] The USAF as an institution maintains a "strong" culture in which shared values and norms define group identity and provide structural stability.[21]

As the USAF seeks to change assignment and career development expectations, it will face challenges because such changes can conflict with these cultural norms and practices. To address this challenge, it is useful to deconstruct the elements that comprise USAF culture, thereby targeting opportunities for change within what can otherwise appear to be an opaque and monolithic concept. We conceptualized USAF culture as consisting of three interrelated components: **policy** (e.g., DOW instructions, DAFIs), **processes and practices** used to implement policy (e.g., AFPC assignment actions), and **cultural norms** (e.g., promotion board considerations and established personnel expectations). Together, these elements shape USAF identity and provide institutional stability. By framing USAF culture in this way, we were able to systematically review existing policies and practices to identify specific opportunities for modifying the processes, practices, and cultural norms that shape career development within the broader context of the assignment system.

[19] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, John Wiley and Sons, 4th ed., 2010, p. 18. In the quoted material, *external adaptation* refers to how the organization copes with the outside world as it seeks to achieve its primary tasks. *Internal integration* refers to the management of the organization's internal relationships to ensure that members work together effectively.

[20] Schein, 2010, p. 16.

[21] Schein, 2010.

Chapter 3

Analyzing Assignment Policy to Understand Culture

Before the USAF can modify career development pathways to align with targeted PCS reductions, stakeholders must understand how current policy, process, and practice produce outcomes that shape career development and inform USAF culture. Leveraging our research team's operational expertise in USAF personnel policy, we conducted a decomposition analysis of DAFI 36-2110, *Total Force Assignments*, to identify the constituent parts of this complex policy. By reviewing, assessing, and categorizing the guidance document's considerable contents (which exceed 500 pages), outcomes, and connections, we were able to identify how various elements of this policy are reflected in USAF culture.

DAFI 36-2110 outlines "authority, guidance, and procedures to select personnel and directs their temporary or permanent assignment or reassignment to satisfy national security requirements."[22] We categorized the instruction's components into four types of assignment action. The instruction

- dictates that a member complete a **PCS move**
- dictates that a member **stay in place** and *not* complete a PCS move
- serves as a source of **consideration factors** in assignment calculations
- combines **multiple categories** of the previous three assignment actions.

The results of our decomposition analysis, summarized in the box titled "Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110 Assignment Actions," illustrate the varied and nuanced assignment actions contained in the instruction. Notably, the instruction does not include any prioritization of components across categories of assignment actions. Instead, it integrates reasons for both moving and not moving personnel, with consideration factors distributed throughout all categories of assignment action. This structure can result in situations in which local units, force support units, or AFPC assignment teams execute personnel assignment actions that do not fully align with the USAF's overarching strategic objectives.

[22] Secretary of the Air Force, 2025a, paragraph 1.1.

Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110 Assignment Actions

Dictates PCS	Dictates Staying in Place	Consideration Factor	Multiple Categories
• 100% fill for OCONUS assignments • 365 deployment tasking from current assignment • USAF Force Generation assignments • Base closure or unit move • Completion of CONUS maximum stabilized tour • Completion of or elimination from training • Contingency deployment assignment consideration • Expedited transfer from current assignment • Hired for special duty • Key developmental assignment • Medical reassignment • Officer crossflow needs • Professional military education assignment • Return from OCONUS or DEROS • Short tour assignment • Threatened person assignment • Unaccompanied tour • Unit has surplus • Utilization of rated officers requiring move	• Contingency deployment home station assignment deferment • Controlled duty assignment • Critical acquisition position tenure • Dependent care adoption • DEROS extension • Educational deferment • First sergeant assignment • First term tour length • High school seniors' assignment deferment • Investigation, control roster, or command hold • Key billet tour length • Medical deferment • Military operational deferment • Overseas tour extension program (enlisted only) • Pregnant airman or spouse • Separation or retirement • Stabilized tour • Vulnerable to move list deferment • Voluntary Stabilized Base Assignment Program	• Family member assignments • Join spouse status • Joint qualification system requirement • Personal preference • Prisoner of war • Promotion • Relieved commander • Sole surviving son or daughter	• Advanced academic degree • Base of preference • Dependent medical care requirements • Exceptional Family Member Program • Enlisted aide special duty • Enlisted to officer commission • Grade or skill level consideration • Home basing or follow-on assignment • Humanitarian move • Joint duty assignment • Time-on-station requirements

SOURCE: Authors' analysis of Secretary of the Air Force, 2025a.
NOTE: CONUS = continental United States; DEROS = date eligible for return from overseas; OCONUS = outside the continental United States. The assignment actions are listed alphabetically; there is no prioritized list of assignment actions in DAFI 36-2110, and many assignment actions appear multiple times in different parts of the instruction.

To further clarify these dynamics, we evaluated the assignment actions identified through our decomposition analysis and developed categories based on their potential outcomes: mission-focused,

development-focused, member consideration, and cost savings. The box titled "Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110 Assignment Action Potential Outcomes" presents this categorization, providing a framework for understanding how assignment policy both reflects and shapes USAF culture.

Department of the Air Force Instruction 36-2110 Assignment Action Potential Outcomes

Mission Outcome	Development Outcome	Member Consideration	Cost Savings
• Ensure a 100% OCONUS fill rate. • Fill a critical job (i.e., command). • Fill critical skills (i.e., acquisitions). • Fill a joint billet. • Meet USAF Force Generation requirements. • Provide support to senior leaders (i.e., aide). • Result in unit fully mission capable.	• Career progression • Institutional support (i.e., instructor) • Mitigate discipline issues (i.e., return to force from special duty assignments as part of an Article 15 nonjudicial punishment). • Professional military education • Set up timing for promotion. • Training (i.e., technical school)	• Assignment prioritization after hardship or remote tour • Base of preference • Exceptional Family Member Program • Expedited transfer • Humanitarian assignment • Join spouse • Medical consideration • Sole surviving son or daughter	• Time-on-station minimums

SOURCE: Authors' decomposition analysis of Secretary of the Air Force, 2025a.

Just as DAFI 36-2110 does not prioritize among types of assignment actions, it does not explicitly specify the intended outcomes of those actions. Although many PCS moves are likely designed to achieve mission outcomes (e.g., backfilling OCONUS assignments to ensure 100 percent fill rates at overseas bases), other competing priorities (e.g., sending personnel to professional military education or specialized training) could result in development outcomes taking precedence over mission needs. This dynamic reveals the interconnected nature of assignment processes with career development outcomes—all within the broader context of institutional efforts to retain skilled personnel through such programs as join spouse or humanitarian assignments.

Despite the existence of formal policy codified in guidance documents (an important aspect of USAF culture as defined in Chapter 2), a multitude of embedded factors continue to shape the assignment system and associated career development pathways. DAFI 36-2110 represents the culmination of decades of iterative changes to assignment policy and career development goals, reflecting historical practices and evolving priorities. The complexity of this guidance, exacerbated by the numerous factors involved, creates opportunities for subjectivity in its implementation. This subjectivity, in turn, leads to variation in practice and process, which are themselves significant aspects of USAF culture.

Overall, this analysis illuminates the gaps among policy, implementation, and intent. Existing subjectivity in policy implementation, as just discussed, can complicate efforts to make policy changes to the assignment system—particularly when those changes address some culturally embedded

dynamics but not others. Overall, these dynamics can complicate efforts to modify career development pathways in line with targeted PCS reductions. We conclude in the next chapter with several considerations and recommendations for the USAF when engaging these complex challenges.

Chapter 4

Considerations and Recommendations

Successfully modifying assignment and career pathways in the USAF requires a holistic approach—one that integrates formal policy, local practices, and cultural expectations into a coherent system that is responsive to emerging demands and long-term career development objectives. Although organizational culture can appear to be an impenetrable force, it is possible to shift cultural expectations for career development through careful consideration of how these norms have evolved and what sustains them. This report serves as a first step toward this goal.

Informed by our analysis, we offer several considerations for the USAF as it develops options for modifying career development pathways:

- **Balance clarity and flexibility in policy revisions.** Assignment and career development policies should be clear yet adaptable in recognition of the need to balance mission fulfillment and individual service member preferences.
- **Account for variation in implementation.** Strategies for implementing policy changes should acknowledge the variation in interpretation and application across career fields, organizations, and individuals (e.g., senior leaders serving on promotion boards).
- **Deliberately address cultural context.** Successful reform will require deliberate consideration of the broader cultural environment, including how airmen and their leaders perceive career progression, assignment equity, and work–life balance.

Tackling these complex challenges will demand a comprehensive approach that integrates policy, practice, and culture to support both operational effectiveness and the retention of airmen over time. To develop this comprehensive approach, we outline several recommendations in the next section. We suggest that AFPC take immediate actions first and integrate change management and measurement approaches next, accounting for the anticipated time and manpower costs required to implement these recommendations.

Recommendations

Immediate Actions

AFPC should begin by revising specific sections of DAFI 36-2110 to explicitly prioritize assignment stability as a career development tool. This includes adding language that defines *developmental value* to encompass deep specialization and local expertise, not just breadth of

experience.[23] Concurrently, AFPC must provide new guidance to promotion boards that explicitly states that longer assignments will be viewed favorably when coupled with demonstrated technical growth, mentorship activities, or community engagement. The center should also develop communication templates for senior leaders that reframe extended assignments as strategic investments rather than as career stagnation. Finally, AFPC should launch pilot programs in three to five career fields in which extended assignments are most feasible (such as cyber, acquisitions, or medical specialties), creating controlled experiments that can demonstrate success and provide lessons learned for broader implementation.[24]

Change Management Tools

Successful cultural transformation requires support from key stakeholders in the institution. To achieve this, AFPC should consider which senior leaders, career field managers, and key influencers must be converted to champions of the new approach. AFPC should assess potential resistance to assignment changes throughout the workforce using focus groups and surveys to understand specific concerns about extended assignments, then develop targeted mitigation strategies for each stakeholder group. The center should plan to identify and amplify early success stories (i.e., through publishing case studies of personnel who achieved career advancement through extended assignments and technical specialization). Additionally, AFPC should establish formal feedback mechanisms—such as quarterly forums with career field managers and semiannual surveys of affected personnel—to monitor implementation challenges and adjust strategies in real time.

Measurement Approach

AFPC needs to establish baseline cultural metrics before implementing changes, including surveys that measure attitudes toward assignment frequency, perceptions of career progression requirements, and satisfaction with current career development pathways. The center should track concrete assignment patterns by career field, measuring average assignment length, voluntary extension rates, and retention patterns for personnel in extended assignments versus traditional rotation cycles.[25] Success metrics must include promotion rates for personnel with longer assignments, skill proficiency improvements in technical fields, and unit effectiveness measures for organizations with more stable personnel. Finally, AFPC should conduct longitudinal analysis comparing career outcomes between traditional rotation-heavy careers and extended assignment pathways, providing empirical evidence to support or refine the cultural change initiative.

[23] Atkinson et al., 2026.

[24] Atkinson et al., 2026.

[25] Although such measurement efforts can leverage existing AFPC data (e.g., exit surveys and midpoint career satisfaction surveys), effectively executing these recommendations might necessitate making new investments in data collection and analysis, which might require additional funding and personnel resources.

Abbreviations

AFPC	Air Force Personnel Center
CONUS	continental United States
DAF	Department of the Air Force
DAFI	Department of the Air Force Instruction
DEROS	date expected to return from overseas
DOW	U.S. Department of War
OCONUS	outside the continental United States
PCS	permanent change of station
SME	subject-matter expert
USAF	U.S. Air Force

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