



2025 MARINE CORPS

TALENT MANAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM



APRIL 2025

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To sustain effective Marine Corps talent management—the Service must continue to provide the right policies and programs that arm leaders across the Total Force with the tools necessary to invest in, develop, and retain its most talented Marines in the right roles to accomplish the mission.

In February 2025, Manpower Plans and Policy Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) hosted military and civilian representatives from across the Marine Corps—including the Fleet Marine Force, Supporting Establishment, Marine Forces Reserve, and HQMC, to discuss Service-level talent management. The purpose was to provide a forum for leadership to assess and discuss the trajectory of talent management across the Total Force—including informing participants on current efforts, gathering feedback regarding ongoing initiatives, and developing future expectations, including ways to improve the policies, programs, and tools available to all Marine Corps leaders.

Below are the most salient points and themes from those discussions:

Growing in an increasingly resource competitive and constrained environment. As a Service, we face the challenge of having to balance competing requirements in growing and sustaining our force within an increasingly resource constrained environment. Our talent management endeavors must continue operating at peak efficiency and efficacy as we mature the force to meet our future end strength goal of 177,500 by 2033. To this end, we have always prided ourselves as Marines in being able to do more with less, and we will continue to succeed and deliver the best value for our nation.

A commitment to delivering the right policies and programs. HQMC is committed to listening, caring, and acting as we establish the right policies and programs for leaders and Marines to accomplish their mission. This includes continuous assessment of what is working, what is not, and how to adjust as needed.

We all have a role and stake in the fight. HQMC will strive to provide the right policies and programs to set conditions for success, but effective execution of talent management relies on leaders across the Marine Corps using the available tools to identify, invest in, and develop Marines throughout the lifecycle of a career. Talent management is a human endeavor; leaders at all levels must continue to actively engage with their Marines, understand their needs, and what resources are available to maximize their potential as warfighters.

Bridging the awareness gap. While the Marine Corps has made strides in implementing innovative personnel policies and programs, it is incumbent on HQMC and all leaders to employ more modern, comprehensive means of communicating to Marines beyond MARADMINs alone. Program awareness must be communicated in a manner that is easy to understand and accessible to all—especially our most junior Marines. Program application processes must be streamlined and straightforward—enabled by fillable forms that are easy to access and complete. Key enablers including educators, career counselors, monitors, and command teams must also be appropriately resourced and informed to advise and support their Marines.

Retention remains a key metric of success. Our ability to meet future force requirements, in both quantity and capability, hinges on our ability to retain more high-quality Marines beyond their initial contract. Therefore, we will continue focusing on how we can best invest in and retain our most talented Marines to meet future force goals.

Maintaining access to talent. HQMC recognizes the necessity to maintain access to the talent we have—whether in the active or reserve component, as well as the benefit in giving our Marines more opportunities to serve. Increasing opportunities for Marines to “*Stay Marine*” such as Multi-year Retention Cohorts, the Direct Affiliation Program, lateral moves, and return-to-active-duty opportunities, as well as improving visibility of and access to the acquired skills Marines gain throughout their career is a priority.

Transparency and input. Marines continue to request better transparency and input in the processes that directly affect their careers—including assignments and selection boards. HQMC will continue to explore ways to balance Service requirements with the needs of each Marine, and how we can better leverage processes and technology including modern data-driven systems and platforms, to achieve this.

Maintaining our standards. Our Service’s warfighting requirements, including lethality and readiness, will continue to drive our approach to talent management. We will accomplish this by maintaining the high standards that distinguish us as Marines. Marines have always sought and risen to challenge, and when we set our bar high, we motivate our highest performing Marines to “*Stay Marine*”.

The importance of our Marine Corps culture. Our Marine Corps culture has significant near and lasting effects, including on a Marine’s decision regarding whether to continue or exit service, and the experiences they carry and share thereafter. Every Marine, including those currently serving and those who exit service, are our largest informal recruiting force, and their experiences in service have a profound impact on their willingness to positively influence the next generation of prospective Marines.

SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW

To sustain effective Marine Corps talent management—the Service must continue to provide the right policies and programs that arm leaders across the Total Force with the tools necessary to invest in, develop, and retain its most talented Marines in the right roles to accomplish the mission.

In February 2025, Manpower Plans and Policy Division, Manpower and Reserve Affairs (M&RA), Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps (HQMC) hosted a symposium at the Alfred M. Gray Research Center aboard Marine Corps University, Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA, to discuss the state of Marine Corps Talent Management.

Symposium participants consisted of military and civilian leaders and representatives from across the Marine Corps—including from the Fleet Marine Force, Supporting Establishment, Marine Forces Reserve, and HQMC.

The symposium provided a forum for a comprehensive talent management dialogue and enabled senior Marine Corps leadership to inform and update participants on current and forthcoming talent management initiatives, as well as gather feedback to shape future efforts—including ways to improve the policies, programs, and tools available to all Marine Corps leaders.

During the symposium's two-day schedule, participants heard from several senior leaders including the Deputy Commandant for M&RA, the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, and other leaders from HQMC and the Fleet Marine Force. Among these engagements was a senior leader panel, giving participants the opportunity to directly engage with General Officer and Senior Enlisted Leadership on personnel and talent management issues of their choosing.



Deputy Commandant for Manpower & Reserve Affairs, LtGen Michael Borgschulte addresses the Talent Management Symposium. Photo by Cpl Anthony Ramsey

Participants received Service-updates from HQMC representatives on recent and forthcoming talent management efforts such as recent changes to the enlisted retention campaign and associated retention programs, The Marine Corps Total Fitness Program, the Barracks 2030 initiative, civilian workforce leader development, MOS-specific physical standards, changes to enlisted PME, the assignments marketplace, and the Blended Retirement System.

Participants took part in discussion groups, during which they engaged with one another and subject matter experts on key topics, including retention, flexible service options, quality of life (QOL), and other personnel and talent management initiatives.

Sharing information and gathering feedback were central objectives of the symposium. Throughout the event participants were encouraged to provide direct feedback via multiple means, including a pre-symposium survey, topic-specific online feedback forms aligned to structured discussions, and by indirect collection methods enabled by symposium facilitators.

Throughout the symposium there were clear themes and messages that became prevalent in both the senior leader engagements and the participant discussions. As stated by the Deputy Commandant for M&RA and echoed throughout the symposium—retention is the key metric that we will use to measure success in our talent management efforts. Our ability to meet future force requirements, in both quantity and capability, hinges on our ability to retain more high-quality Marines beyond their initial contract. Therefore, we will continue focusing on how we can best invest in and retain our most talented Marines to meet future force goals.

A hard reality conveyed by our leadership at the symposium was that even though significant gains in retention over the past years are notable and were not easy, the future will be even more challenging, as force requirements would require higher retention in a more resource-constrained environment. Thus, our talent management endeavors must continue operating at peak efficiency and efficacy as we mature the force to meet our future end strength goal of 177,500 by 2033. To this end, we have always prided ourselves as Marines in overcoming the challenges we face as well as being able to do more with less, and we will continue to succeed and deliver the best value for our nation. This said, we all have a role in achieving these future force goals.

HQMC will continue striving to provide the right policies and programs to set conditions for success, but effective execution of talent management relies on leaders across the Marine Corps using the available tools to identify, invest in, and develop Marines throughout the lifecycle of a career. Talent management is a human endeavor, and talent management is most impactful and realized where and when leaders directly interact with Marines daily.

Therefore, leaders at all levels must actively engage with their Marines to understand their needs, motivations, and career aspirations to maximize their potential as warfighters.

A leader’s impact is felt beyond retention numbers, and our culture has significant near and lasting effects on our Marines’ career decisions. A Marine’s experience can directly affect their decision to continue or exit service as well as their willingness to advocate for the Service thereafter. Every Marine, including those currently serving and those who exit service, are our largest informal recruiting force, and their experiences have a profound impact on their willingness to positively influence the next generation of prospective Marines.

The constant remains—our Corps’ warfighting requirements, including lethality and readiness, will continue to drive our approach to talent management. We will accomplish this by maintaining the high standards that distinguish us as Marines. We have always sought out and risen to the challenge, and when we set our bar high, we motivate our highest performers to “Stay Marine”. We will always strive to improve and to that end, this symposium sought to gather feedback, of which some of the major sentiments and points from the symposium participants are consolidated in the sections that follow.



Left to Right: MajGen Ryan Rideout, MajGen Jason Woodworth, SgtMaj Jacob Reiff, SgtMaj Peter Siaw Participate in a Senior Leader Panel at the Talent Management Symposium. Photo by Cpl Anthony Ramsey

TOTAL FORCE FEEDBACK

The feedback collected from the 2025 Talent Management Symposium provided a critical look at the alignment between service member expectations and the initiatives outlined in the Talent Management Update (2024). The survey, which gathered input from 84 service members across various ranks and military occupational specialties (MOSs), revealed a mix of support and concerns regarding current talent management efforts.

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE & LEADERSHIP

Leadership continues to be the cornerstone of morale, effectiveness, and mission accomplishment, with many Marines acknowledging the positive impact of strong, engaged leaders who foster growth and innovation. One respondent noted, "When leadership listens, the difference in morale is night and day." Mentorship and sponsorship are critical to guiding career progression and awareness of career opportunities—no program from HQMC or related MARADMIN will ever replace leadership that understands the value of their Marines and works with them to understand their goals and realize their full potential.

"I want to develop skills that will make me more effective in my field and beyond, but right now, the path isn't always clear."

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Participants expressed enthusiasm for available training and education opportunities throughout their career but cited operational tempo as a significant barrier to accessing professional development programs. The need for training that aligns with evolving mission needs, particularly in emerging, technical areas like data analytics, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity, was frequently emphasized. One Marine shared, "I want to develop skills that will make me more effective in my field and beyond, but right now, the path isn't always clear." Participants recommended modernizing training programs, including course availability, curriculum, and flexible virtual delivery methods. Providing customized academic plans and schedules to better support the operational realities of today's Force. Additionally, feedback highlighted that current career development roadmaps, developed by occupational field managers and managed by Training and Education Command, while comprehensive, are often unknown and largely underutilized.

ASSIGNMENTS

Participants generally understood that Service requirements come first but continued to express a desire for increased geo-stability. Though, the Service has made strides in increasing PCAs, HQMC cannot guarantee geo-stability due to Service and career development requirements, stability can be provided by improving transparency, agency, and predictability of future assignments—including



Symposium participants discuss current talent management efforts to develop recommendations for program improvements. Photo by Cpl Anthony Ramsey

location and timing, or expansion of opt-out and deferment of selection boards. Ongoing efforts to institute an assignments marketplace and modernize other manpower systems such as our retention system will facilitate increased career stability and reduce disruptions in which foreseeable career milestones, like promotions, could cut short a Marine's orders.

Participants appreciate programs like the Strategic Location Incentive Program (SLIP) and Special Duty Assignment (SDA) volunteerism program that acknowledge hard assignments—both CONUS and OCONUS—providing greater predictability in future duty station, and recommended opportunities for potential expansion. Participants also provided positive feedback on policy improvements that increased co-location in assignments of dual-military families.

CAREER FLEXIBILITY

When asked about Active and Reserve Component (AC/RC) permeability pathways some participants noted improvements in programs like the Direct Affiliation Program (DAP), return to active duty programs, and the Career Intermission Program (CIP), while others indicated that awareness of these continuing service opportunities remained low. Participants also expressed a desire for expanded use of existing career flexibility programs, specifically citing promotion opt-out options for both officer and enlisted Marines. Regarding lateral moves, participants reported limited information and engagement about available opportunities and how to pursue them. Marines emphasized the importance of understanding how decisions to opt-out of promotion or make a lateral move might affect their future career progression and opportunities. These concerns, though valid, highlighted potential detractors from utilizing programs meant to increase the ways Marines

can continue service beyond traditional career tracks.

QUALITY OF LIFE

While acknowledging the positive impact of recent quality-of-life programs, such as ongoing barracks improvements and the Marine Corps Total Fitness initiative, participants consistently emphasized the ongoing challenge of navigating other quality of life programs. While recognizing the value of existing support services and programs such as multiple counseling services and the new parent support program, participants highlighted the persistent stigma associated with seeking help, emphasizing the need for leaders at all levels to foster a climate that encourages help-seeking behavior. While all agreed that programs executed at the unit level are beneficial, there was a consistent concern levied regarding the quantity of programs that require collateral duties and unit inspection requirements. Finally, participants advocated for greater consistency in program implementation across the Marine Corps, suggesting that standardized practices and improved communication regardless of location could enhance access to resources and continuity of support through a PCS.



Figure 1: Continued service options: Following active service there are many options to continue service and "Stay Marine"

"I want to stay in, but I need to know what my options are. Without that clarity, it's hard to commit."

RETENTION

While participants praised programs like the Commandant's Retention Program (CRP) and Multi-Year Reenlistment Cohorts for offering streamlined pathways for long-term service, as seen in the below chart outlining the perceived effectiveness of retention programs by symposium participants (Figure 2), they also highlighted critical areas for improvement. A consistent concern was the challenge of navigating bureaucratic hurdles and administrative inefficiencies that hinder career decisions. Delays in processes like Reenlistment Extension Lateral Move (RELM) were cited as creating uncertainty and frustration, with one Marine pointedly noting, *"We can execute missions with precision and speed, but when it comes to reenlistments and career decisions, it feels like we're operating in slow motion."* This sentiment underscores a crucial need: to empower Marines to make



Marine from 2D Marine Aircraft Wing reenlists in Setermoen, Troms, Norway. Photo by Lance Cpl. Orlanys Diaz

informed retention decisions by ensuring timely, efficient processes and providing clear, accessible information about available programs and career opportunities. As one Marine aptly summarized, *"I want to stay in, but I need to know what my options are. Without that clarity, it's hard to commit."* This sentiment complements the consistent feedback to increase the accessibility of information, as well as the transparency of all options for continued service whether in the active or reserve component.

RETENTION PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

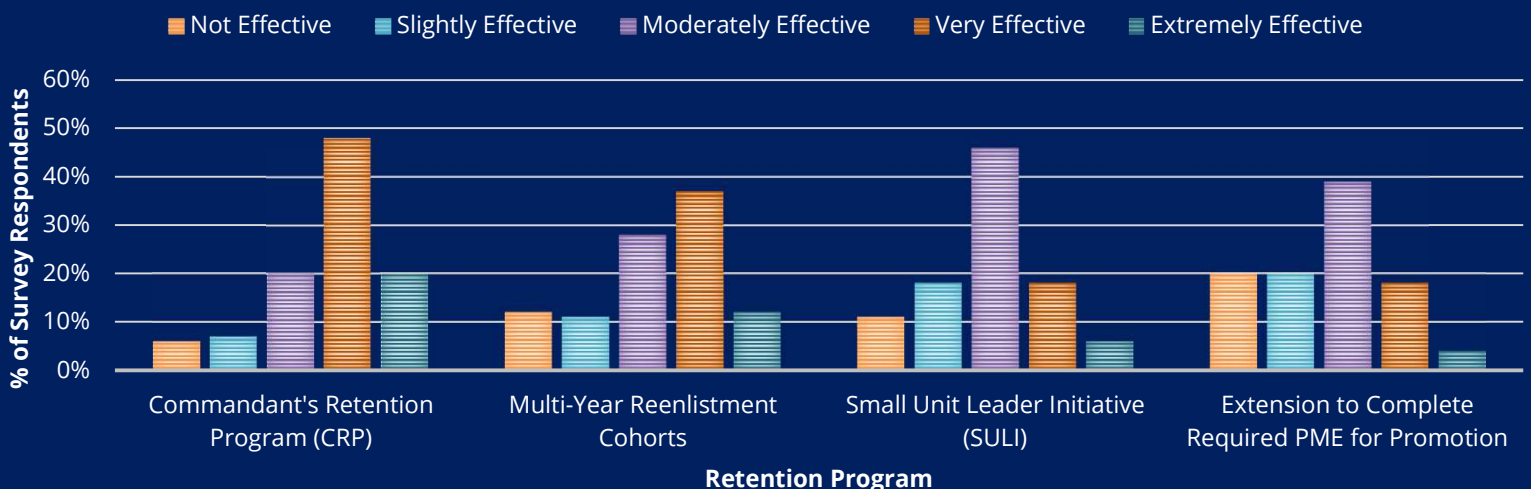


Figure 2: This chart displays the perceived program effectiveness of four retention programs implemented following the publication of Talent Management 2030 in November 2021. This data was gathered by a survey of the symposium participants of the 2025 Marine Corps Talent Management Symposium in February 2025.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The symposium provided an opportunity to gather feedback on talent management policies and programs and help HQMC representatives identify potential areas for improvement. Here are some of the points that resonated consistently and throughout.



Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps SgtMaj Carlos Ruiz addresses the Talent Management Symposium. Photo by Cpl Anthony Ramsey

A knowledge gap persists in what tools are available and how to use them. The best policies and programs will fail if they are not effectively delivered or known to their intended audience. It is incumbent on HQMC and all leaders to employ more modern, comprehensive means of communicating to our Marines beyond MARADMINS alone. Program awareness must be communicated in a manner that is easy to understand and accessible to all—especially our most junior Marines. Processes should be streamlined and straightforward, and key enablers including educators, career counselors, monitors, and command teams must be appropriately resourced and informed to advise and support their Marines.

"...our ability to track, maintain visibility of, and access to the acquired skills Marines gain throughout their career is a priority."

Retention remains key to success. Our ability to maintain access to talent is critical to meet future force requirements. Increasing flexibility and access to opportunities for our force to "Stay Marine" must continue to be prioritized. Options such as Multi-year Retention Cohorts, lateral moves, and permeability pathways, must continue to be leveraged, and our ability to track, maintain visibility of, and access to the acquired skills Marines gain throughout their career is a priority, and must continue to improve.

Marines desire transparency and input in their careers. HQMC's ongoing efforts to modernize its personnel systems seek to improve critical manpower functions such as the assignments and retention. By leveraging technology, data-informed processes, and modern platforms, we will facilitate more transparent and efficient interactions between Marines and their talent management enablers leading to better experiences and outcomes.

Leadership and climate have the greatest impact on retention. While tangible factors like housing and resources impact quality of life, intangible factors like morale, unit cohesion, and quality of leadership directly affect retention decisions. Leaders at all levels play a critical role in fostering a positive environment where Marines feel valued, supported, and empowered—a key factor in maintaining a proficient and ready force.

RECOMMENDED AREAS TO EXPLORE

Considering the feedback and insights gained from the many perspectives present at this symposium, it is important to look ahead and explore areas that can assist in pushing Marine Corps Talent Management forward. Developing the right tools and policies for our leaders at all echelons to execute talent management is a key responsibility of HQMC—the following areas to explore can provide impactful forward progress in achieving Marine Corps Talent Management objectives.

- 1 Bridging the awareness gap:** Make information on all options to serve—including talent management programs, policies, and resources accessible to all Marines and talent managers.
 - a Enhancing communication and transparency:** Compliment current practice of communication by MARADMIN to include a multi-channel approach leveraging digital platforms, mobile apps, and interactive tools. Prioritize user-friendly designs, search functionality, and accessibility for all.
 - b Enable talent managers including educators, career counselors, monitors, and command teams:** Expand the mission and resources of talent managers across the force to provide personalized guidance and support to Marines throughout their careers. Invest in training and professional development opportunities for these key enablers to deliver a clear and unified message to all Marines.
- 2 Enhance training and education flexibility and relevance:** Offer personalized, targeted education plans, virtual and asynchronous learning options, and refresher training for Marines returning to their PMOS from B-billet assignments.
- 3 Leveraging data-driven insights:** Enable future assignments platforms with data-informed tools to show the implications of career decisions to include “non-standard” career opportunities.
- 4 Expanding career flexibility:** Expand opportunities to “*Stay Marine*” through increased availability of programs for both enlisted and officers such as selection board opt-out or deferment and duty station incentives for SLIP and the SDA Volunteerism. Provide clear information and guidance on lateral move opportunities and permeability pathways.

SPEAKERS PANELISTS & BRIEFERS

OPENING COMMENTS

LTGEN MICHAEL BORGSCHULTE
*Deputy Commandant
Manpower and Reserve Affairs*

TALENT MANAGEMENT REMARKS

SGTMAJ CARLOS RUIZ
Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps

SENIOR LEADER PANEL

COL MEGHAN KENNERLY (Moderator)
*Head, Manpower Military Policy Branch
Manpower and Reserve Affairs*

MAJGEN RYAN RIDEOUT (Panelist)
*Director, Manpower Management Division
Manpower and Reserve Affairs*

MAJGEN JASON WOODWORTH (Panelist)
*Commander, Marine Corps Installations
Command | Assistant Deputy Commandant for
Installations and Logistics Command (Facilities)*

SGTMAJ JACOB REIFF (Panelist)
*Command Senior Enlisted Leader
Manpower and Reserve Affairs*

SGTMAJ PETER SIAW (Panelist)
*Command Senior Enlisted Leader
I Marine Expeditionary Force*

CLOSING COMMENTS

MAJGEN RYAN RIDEOUT
*Director, Manpower Management Division
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ENLISTED CAREER FORCE MANAGEMENT

MGYSGT BRYANT LODGE
*Enlisted Retention
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MARINE CORPS TOTAL FITNESS PROGRAM

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BARRACKS 2030 UPDATE

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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
TALENT MANAGEMENT

