United States Government Accountability Office

Report to Congressional Committees

April 2023

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2022, the command made about $79.6 million available for program activities and maintained over 800 service providers across 32 locations worldwide to care for special operations forces and their families. However, since January 2016, the command has not completed a program evaluation demonstrating program performance and effectiveness.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes a provision for GAO to review the program. GAO evaluated the extent to which the command has 1) identified program performance goals and measures and 2) collected and analyzed data to determine how well the program is achieving desired outcomes.

GAO reviewed command policies and guidance and compared processes for data collection and analysis against recommended practices. GAO also interviewed officials managing the program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that the command establish specific and measurable performance goals, establish performance measures that are linked to strategic goals and are clearly stated, and develop a detailed program evaluation plan to support annual program reports. DOD concurred with all three recommendations.

What GAO Found

U.S. Special Operations Command established the Preservation of the Force and Family program about a decade ago to address strains that special operations forces and their families can face. The program is designed to provide a holistic system of care that focuses on physical, psychological, spiritual, cognitive, and social areas of well-being. The program offers services including physical therapy, injury care, psychological treatment, family counseling, and peer mentoring.

The command established a program evaluation framework for the program in January 2023. However, it has not fully defined specific and measurable performance goals and clear performance measures (see figure). Specifically, performance goals do not clearly state what is to be achieved, time periods for achievement, nor who is responsible for achieving each goal. Performance measures are not clear and not fully linked to strategic goals. For example, one performance measure is listed as "neurocognitive assessments." However, the framework does not provide any information about which assessment, what specifically is to be measured, or what methodology will be used to collect and analyze the data. Without fully defining performance goals and measures, the command will have difficulty demonstrating that program activities are achieving their desired goals.

Key Elements of Program Performance Assessment Systems
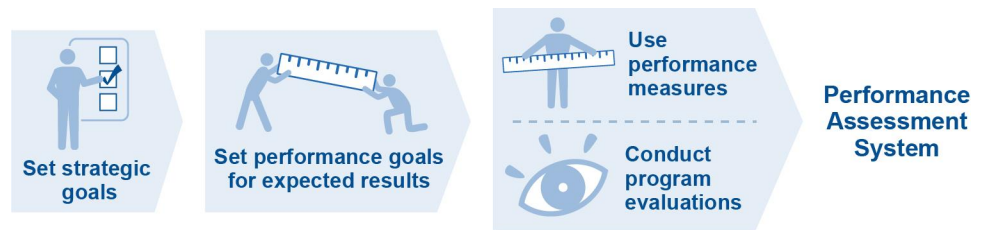
Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105644

The command has made progress implementing a new data system for the program and establishing minimum data requirements. However, it faces challenges in data collection and analysis, inhibiting its ability to evaluate program effectiveness. For example, the command experienced significant delays in implementing the data system and is in the process of reevaluating its requirements. In addition, some special operations forces' service components are in the initial stages of collecting required program data, but their data-collection practices vary.

The command established an annual reporting requirement, but has not developed a detailed program evaluation plan to help ensure standardized data collection and analysis. A program evaluation plan that identifies relevant data sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis procedures could help the command align data with performance measures to support its evaluative annual program report. Such a plan could also better position the command to demonstrate the effectiveness of program activities,

United States Government Accountability Office

provide external accountability for the use of public resources, and identify any areas to improve program performance.

Contents

Abbreviations

ASD-SO/LIC	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict
DOD	Department of Defense
POTFF	Preservation of the Force and Family
SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TSOC	Theater Special Operations Command

April 27, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

U.S. Special Operation Command (SOCOM) established the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program about a decade ago to address the strains placed on U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF). However, since January 2016, the command has not completed a program evaluation demonstrating program performance and effectiveness. SOCOM is working to show that POTFF is effectively meeting its aim to improve the readiness and resilience of roughly 74,000 SOF and their families, as well as justify program expenditures of about $79.6 million in fiscal year 2022, which was more than triple the fiscal year 2015 expenditures.

POTFF offers a holistic system of care that targets physical, psychological, spiritual, and other areas of well-being. SOCOM directs subordinate commands to use an embedded service-provider model to build trust with unit leaders, SOF personnel, and families to identify early indicators for opportunities for services and intervention. For example, POTFF offers SOF personnel direct access to a range of sports medicine, strength and conditioning, and performance nutrition with the goal of maximizing physical performance and providing access to care to reduce injury duration. Related to family, POTFF provides workshops and training that are tied to deployment cycles to help SOF personnel and their families prepare for and reintegrate after deployment. POTFF program management consists of about 820 contract, active duty, and civilian service providers from SOCOM, the service components, and Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOCs) in 32 locations

worldwide.[1] SOCOM plans, programs, budgets, and executes resources with SOF service component commands and TSOCs locally executing the delivery of POTFF services.

In December 2021, we reported on the POTFF program and found that SOCOM guidance had not clearly defined key terms. We also found that availability and access to POTFF services varied, and the program did not have clear data governance or management guidance.[2] DOD concurred with our five recommendations—including defining key objectives, developing a staff deployment strategy, and issuing guidance on POTFF data governance—and has taken actions to address them. According to SOCOM officials, SOCOM issued a revision of SOCOM Directive 10-12 to clearly articulate program requirements by defining key terms, roles, responsibilities, and parameters of POTFF personnel. According to SOCOM, the command is also implementing a new staffing model that relies on data for unit size, expected demand for services, and time spent on tasks to calculate desired staff levels. The command plans to add a requirement for annual reassessment of staff allocation to its POTFF guidance. Finally, according to SOCOM, the command has also instituted a mandatory orientation for POTFF staff to address the lack of understanding about the role and responsibilities of POTFF leadership.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 included a provision for us to review additional aspects of the POTFF program.[3] This report evaluates the extent to which SOCOM has (1) identified the performance goals of POTFF and the measures required to demonstrate effectiveness and (2) collected and analyzed data to determine how well POTFF is achieving desired outcomes.

To address our first objective, we reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12, including the current January 2023 version, which added a performance assessment framework, and we compared it with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* to understand the extent to which the

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[1]SOF service components include U.S. Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command. SOCOM's seven TSOCs are Special Operations Command Africa, Special Operations Command Central, Special Operations Command Europe, Special Operations Command Korea, Special Operations Command North, Special Operations Command Pacific, and Special Operations Command South.

[2]GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Additional Actions Needed to Effectively Manage the Preservation of the Force and Family Program*, GAO-22-104486 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 16, 2021).

[3]Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 569B (2021).

command has specific and measurable objectives and metrics.[4] We also interviewed or obtained information from officials from SOCOM, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD-SO/LIC), the four service component commands, and all six TSOCs regarding program performance assessment.

To address our second objective, we reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12 to understand SOCOM's data identification, collection, analysis, and reporting practices. We also interviewed SOCOM and service component command officials responsible for data collection and analysis. We compared SOCOM's processes against recommended practices for data identification, collection, and analysis found in our prior work on program evaluation.[5] We also reviewed SOCOM Directive 71-4 on the command's policy, processes, procedures, and products to identify and assess capability requirements and associated gaps, and to develop, review, validate, manage, and—if necessary—revise capability requirements.[6] We also reviewed SOCOM and DOD guidance on data governance and management. Specifically, we reviewed SOCOM's *Enterprise Data Strategy* and the DOD *Data Strategy*, which outlines the department's visions for making data available to those who need it.[7] See appendix I for a more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2022 to April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that

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[4]U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 10-12, *U.S. Special Operations Command Preservation of the Force and Family* (Jan. 7, 2023) (hereafter SOCOM Directive 10-12). *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* states that management should define objectives in specific terms so they are understood at all levels of an entity. This involves clearly defining what is to be achieved, who is to achieve it, how it will be achieved, and the time frames for achievement. Measurable objectives are those that are generally free of bias and do not require subjective judgments to dominate their measurement. Measurable objectives are also stated in a quantitative or qualitative form that permits reasonably consistent measurement. GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

[5]GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, GAO-12-208G (Washington, D.C.: January 2012).

[6]U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 71-4, *Special Operations Forces Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Jan. 22, 2020).

[7]U.S. Special Operations Command, *Enterprise Data Strategy* (Dec. 4, 2019) and Department of Defense, *DOD Data Strategy* (2020).

the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

POTFF Program

SOCOM created POTFF in 2013 in response to recommendations from a task force assigned to identify the issues contributing to the strains and pressures experienced by SOF and their families from multiple deployments and busy training schedules. The task force issued a report in 2011 that proposed major paradigm shifts in the organizational culture and behavior of the force and identified best practices to meet SOF's continuous deployment and combat. SOCOM established POTFF with the goal of improving the well-being of military personnel and their families, with the ensuing benefits of enhancing the military readiness and operational effectiveness of SOF.

According to SOCOM Directive 10-12, the SOCOM POTFF Director is to provide strategic guidance for POTFF, support subordinate commands' resourcing needs, and explore emerging technologies that could be beneficial to SOF and their families. The POTFF Director, acting on behalf of the SOCOM commander, is also responsible for planning, programming, budgeting, and executing resources for POTFF programs and activities at the headquarters level. The directive also states that service components and TSOCs are responsible for identifying requirements and overseeing the development and implementation of POTFF programs to meet identified needs.

SOCOM intended for POTFF to fill gaps in existing programs that are provided by the conventional military services and defense-wide agencies. According to SOCOM, the command intervenes only when programs common to the general-purpose forces do not meet specific SOF needs.[8] SOCOM has defined five major areas of effort, called domains, within the POTFF program: physical, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, and social and family. See Figure 1

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[8]SOCOM refers to these as special operation peculiar needs, meaning equipment, material, supplies, and services required for special operations missions for which there is no service common requirement. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub. 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations* (Sept. 22, 2020).

Figure 1: Preservation of the Force and Family Program Domains
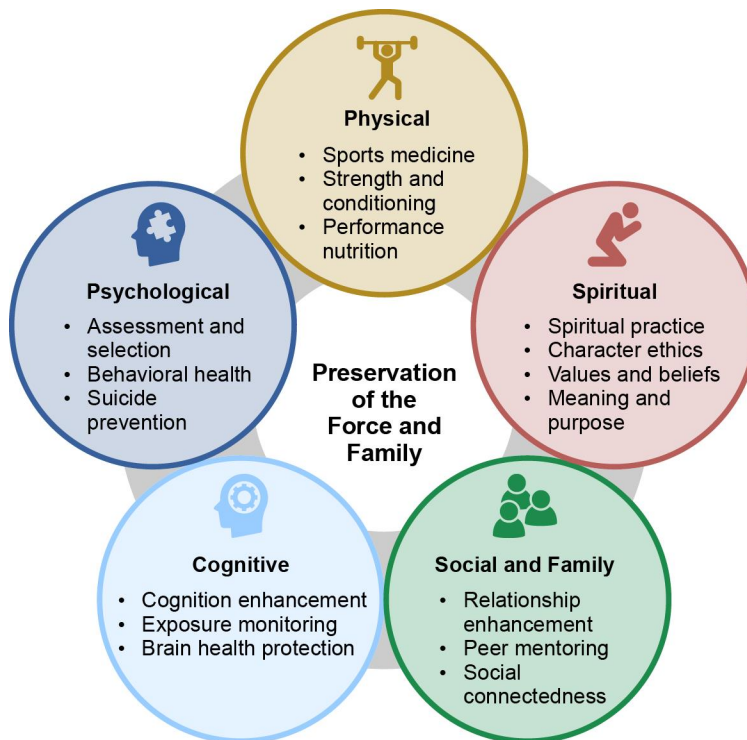
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command information. | GAO-23-105644

- **Physical.** The physical domain is designed to optimize and sustain physical performance for individual and collective SOF readiness. This domain emphasizes the functional performance of SOF operators through physical conditioning, exercise physiology, kinesiology, nutrition guidance, and rehabilitative support (physical therapy, see Figure 2) services to its participants, among other things.

- **Psychological.** The psychological domain is aimed at enhancing the psychological health of SOF to optimize performance, promote resilience, and decrease stigma. Domain service providers address the mental health needs of SOF by assimilating into SOF units. They attempt to address issues before they become critical, improve access to care, increase participants' trust in providers, and reduce stigma associated with seeking mental health care.

- **Cognitive.** The cognitive domain is focused on optimizing the cognitive functioning of SOF by offering performance-based mental skills training. Domain service providers attempt to help operators maintain their cognitive capabilities during stressful situations through

accurate assessments, enhancement training, monitoring, and protection from brain injury exposure.

- **Social and Family.** The social domain is designed to optimize the support systems needed to encourage healthy relationships, empower use of resources, and increase social connectedness and family readiness. This domain focuses primarily on family cohesion and healthy social networks for SOF personnel.

- **Spiritual.** The spiritual domain is intended to enhance service members' core spiritual beliefs and strengthen their ability to deal with life challenges. The domain addresses many aspects of life, including family and professional relationships, morality and ethics, and religion. Opportunities exist in this domain for SOF personnel to participate in activities intended to strengthen their sense of meaning and purpose.

Figure 2: Physical Therapy Appointment at Patch Barracks, Germany

Source: U.S. Army/Staff Sgt. Thomas Mort. | GAO-23-105644

In fiscal year 2022, SOCOM reported that the command made about $79.6 million available for POTFF program activities—a 201 percent increase since fiscal year 2015, as shown in Figure 3. Since 2015, SOCOM reported that the majority of expenditures were in the physical and psychological domains. In fiscal year 2022, the reported amount of

physical and psychological domains expenditures was $43.4 million and $15.5 million, respectively.[9] By comparison, reported expenditures for the social and family and spiritual domains were about $8.9 million and $1.6 million, respectively, in the same period. In addition, the service components reported about $17.7 million in expenditures for POTFF administrative support, as well as for the acquisition of supplies and equipment for the program. Furthermore, SOCOM reported about $3.6 million in military construction for POTFF-related facilities in fiscal year 2022.

[9]According to a SOCOM official, in fiscal year 2022, the Defense Health Agency transferred approximately $28.9 million to SOCOM to be used for clinical psychological care. This is in addition to the approximately $15.5 million that SOCOM reported in the psychological domain not traditionally provided by the military health care system, such as assessment and selection, suicide prevention, and non-clinical counseling.

Figure 3: Preservation of the Force and Family Program Expenditures by Program Domain for Fiscal Years 2015–2022

Expenditures (in millions)
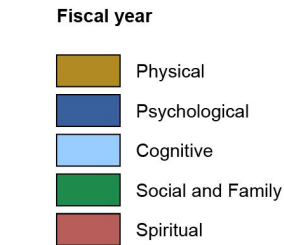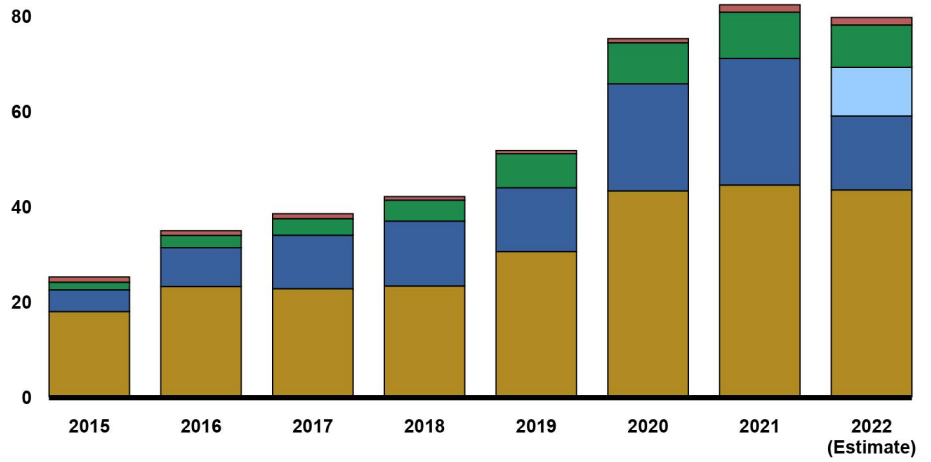
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command data. | GAO-23-105644

Data table for Figure 4: Preservation of the Force and Family Program Expenditures by Program Domain for Fiscal Years 2015–2022

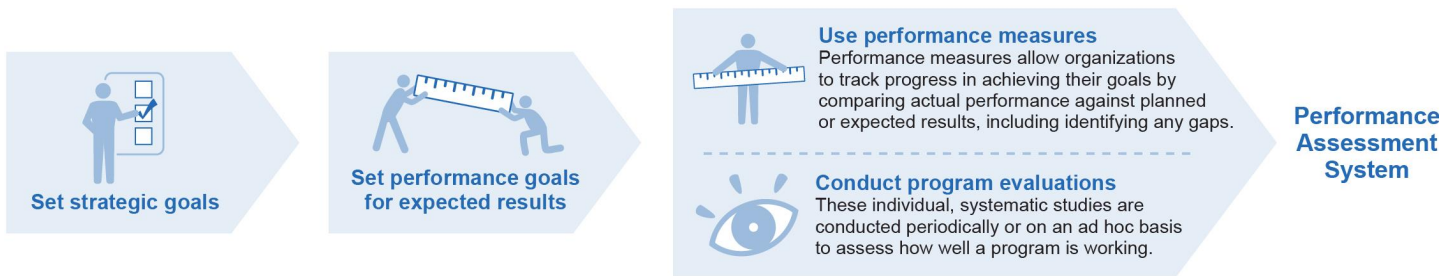| Fiscal year	Physical	Psychological	Cognitive	Social & Family	Spiritual
2015	17.843	4.566	NA	1.608	1.139
2016	23.1	8.169	NA	2.563	1.02
2017	22.649	11.219	NA	3.486	1.062
2018	23.221	13.609	NA	4.426	0.751
2019	30.437	13.411	NA	7.146	0.69
2020	43.188	22.471	NA	8.62	0.89
2021	44.402	26.6	NA	9.691	1.569
2022	43.382	15.514	10.236	8.874	1.612

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command data. | GAO-23-105644.

Program Performance Assessment

Evaluative information helps the executive branch and congressional committees make decisions about the programs they oversee; that is, evaluative information tells them whether and why a program is working well or not. We previously reported that program assessment is an important way to obtain such information and identified key elements of program assessment (see

Figure 5).[10]

Figure 5: Key Elements of Program Performance Assessment Systems

Set strategic goals

Set performance goals for expected results

Use performance measures
Performance measures allow organizations to track progress in achieving their goals by comparing actual performance against planned or expected results, including identifying any gaps.

Conduct program evaluations
These individual, systematic studies are conducted periodically or on an ad hoc basis to assess how well a program is working.

Performance Assessment System

Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105644

Text of Figure 6: Key Elements of Program Performance Assessment Systems

- Set strategic goals.

- Set performance goals for expected results.

- Use performance measures; conduct program evaluations.

  - Performance measures allow organizations to track progress in achieving their goals by comparing actual performance against planned or expected results, including identifying any gaps.

  - These individual, systematic studies are conducted periodically or on an ad hoc basis to assess how well a program is working.

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[10]GAO, *Veterans Justice Outreach Program: VA Could Improve Management by Establishing Performance Measures and Fully Assessing Risks*, GAO-16-393 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 28, 2016); *Program Evaluation: Strategies to Facilitate Agencies' Use of Evaluation in Program Management and Policy Making*, GAO-13-570 (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2013); *Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships*, GAO-11-646SP (Washington, D.C.: May 2011); and *Managing for Results: Enhancing Agency Use of Performance Information for Management Decision Making*, GAO-05-927 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 9, 2005).

- Performance assessment system.

Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105644

According to our prior work, a program performance assessment system is an important component of effective program management and contains three key elements:

1. Program goals communicate what the agency proposes to accomplish and allows agencies to assess or demonstrate the degree to which those desired results were achieved.

   - Strategic goals and related objectives are long-term goals that set a general direction for a program's efforts.

   - Performance goals are the specific results an agency expects its program to achieve in the near term.

2. Performance measures are concrete, objective, observable conditions that permit the assessment of progress made toward the agency's goals. Performance measures show the progress the agency is making in achieving performance goals.

3. Program evaluations are individual systematic studies using performance measures and other information to answer specific questions about how well a program is meeting its objectives.

SOCOM Has Improved Performance Assessment Guidance, but Has Not Fully Established Clear Goals and Measures

SOCOM Has Taken Steps to Improve Its Performance Assessment Guidance

In January 2023, SOCOM updated key POTFF program guidance—specifically SOCOM Directive 10-12—to include a performance assessment framework. SOCOM Directive 10-12 establishes the policies and procedures for the POTFF program, describes its strategic goals and activities, and outlines responsibilities for performance assessment. The directive defines five subject-area domains, each with a desired end state and three or four primary lines of effort. Each line of effort includes a description of the purpose of the line of effort and its subordinate activities. For example, the four lines of effort for the spiritual domain are to: (1) provide support to spirituality through counseling, support of individual beliefs, and facilitation of spiritual practices; (2) connect

individuals with purposes and belonging; (3) strengthen individual character though the development of ethical values, morals, and beliefs; and (4) assess spiritual fitness. Within the first line of effort, examples of activities include prioritizing spiritual and religious practices through chaplains, Chaplains Corps, and Religious Support Teams as well as increasing spirituality by supporting individual beliefs and faith through spiritual guidance and mentorship.

According to a senior SOCOM official, the officials at SOCOM headquarters who are responsible for each of the five program domains reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12, eliminated vague or aspirational language, and identified performance goals.[11] According to this official, after identifying program goals, the officials linked each goal with a performance measure taken from existing POTFF guidance. SOCOM packaged these goals and measures in a framework and included it as an appendix in the update to SOCOM Directive 10-12.

SOCOM's revisions to the directive addressed some gaps in POTFF's performance assessment framework by more clearly identifying performance goals or objectives for each domain and linking measures to these goals. The framework identifies 21 performance goals including a brief description of reporting periods, analysis plans, and intended results. It also identifies 14 performance measures that are linked to SOCOM's performance goals. For example, the framework identifies "improve sleep quality" as a new performance goal for the cognitive domain and links this goal with a sleep assessment as a performance measure. The framework also describes the intended result of this goal, stating that levels of program participation in certain training will be associated with higher sleep quality.

SOCOM Has Not Fully Defined Specific and Measurable Performance Goals for the POTFF Program

SOCOM's performance assessment framework does not fully define performance goals in specific and measurable terms. According to federal internal control standards, specific and measurable goals clearly define the following five characteristics: 1) what is to be achieved, 2) how it is to

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[11]During the course of our review, we found that SOCOM guidance did not clearly define performance goals or link measures to these goals and discussed it with SOCOM officials. According to these officials, the command decided to update SOCOM Directive 10-12 to include a performance assessment framework based on our discussion as well as our prior work. See GAO-22-104486.

be achieved, 3) when it is to be achieved by, 4) who is responsible for achieving it, and 5) how it is to be measured.[12] Clearly defining specific and measurable goals enables entities to identify, analyze, and respond to risks related to achieving those goals.[13] Performance goals communicate the results an organization seeks and allows organizations to assess or demonstrate the degree to which those desired results are achieved.

When we compared SOCOM's performance assessment framework with the five characteristics of specific and measurable goals, we found that the framework clearly defines two characteristics—how the goals will be achieved and how they will be measured. SOCOM Directive 10-12 includes a hypothesized outcome for each performance goal, which describes how program activities will contribute to the achievement of goals. In addition, the performance assessment framework clearly links each performance goal with a measure of effectiveness. However, the performance assessment framework does not clearly state the other three characteristics: 1) what is to be achieved, 2) time periods for achievement, and 3) who is responsible for achieving each goal.

First, none of the existing performance goals in SOCOM's performance assessment framework clearly state what is to be achieved as a quantifiable target. SOCOM Directive 10-12 includes a description of a hypothesized outcome of each performance goal, but it does not do it in a form that would allow SOCOM to assess progress toward achievement. For example, the psychological domain goal "treat mental health" defines the hypothesized outcome as "reduce subjective sense of distress". This definition does not provide a benchmark, desired target reduction in distress levels, or unit of analysis. To define a target for performance goals, SOCOM stated that SOCOM Directive 10-12 included a statement that the command will use a statistical measure of effect size as the benchmark for success for all performance goals. However, it is unclear how SOCOM plans to calculate the effect size for each measure as SOCOM Directive 10-12 does not specify a methodology for calculation.

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[12]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C: Sept. 10, 2014).

[13]We have previously found that results-oriented organizations set performance goals to clearly define desired program outcomes. See GAO, *Transit Workforce Development: Improved Strategic Planning Practices Could Enhance FTA Efforts*, GAO-19-290 (Washington, D.C.: March 14, 2019) and GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act.* GAO/GGD-96-118. (Washington, D.C.: June, 1996).

Second, none of the existing performance goals in SOCOM's performance assessment framework clearly state time periods for achievement. SOCOM's performance assessment framework includes a description of time frames which, according to SOCOM officials, describes the frequency of data collection and assessment. These time frames are divided into four possible categories: continuous, short-term (3 to 6 months), mid-term (6 to 12 months), and long-term (12 months or more). While SOCOM officials stated that these time frames describe the frequency of monitoring activities, they do not provide a date by which the goal's target or intended outcome should be achieved. SOCOM officials stated that there is no need to specify a target date for each goal because program data is collected and assessed frequently according to the time frames. However, best practices for federal performance management state that performance goals should include a time period for accomplishment so that agencies can determine when they have reached the goals.[14]

Third, none of the existing performance goals in SOCOM's performance assessment framework clearly state who is responsible for achieving each goal. SOCOM Directive 10-12 provides a broad overview of POTFF program roles and responsibilities and gives service component command leads the responsibility of overseeing the execution and resourcing of POTFF programming within their respective commands. However, the directive does not provide any guidance on which POTFF staff members should be responsible for each performance goal. According to a SOCOM official, there is no need to specify who is responsible for each goal because the POTFF program's performance work statement and historical precedent establishes these roles. The performance work statement establishes some performance requirements for contractor-provided personal services. It also includes a requirement for the contractor to exercise oversight over performance of contractor team members. However, these requirements apply to individual contractor positions and do not apply to government personnel. Leading practices for the design of agency performance plans states that agencies should identify the agency officials responsible for the achievement of

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[14]Office of Management and Budget Circular No. A-11, *Preparation, Submission and Execution of the Budget*, pt. 6 *The Federal Performance Framework for Improving Program and Service Delivery* (August 2021).

each performance goal.[15] Relying on historical precedent could result in confusion or misunderstanding regarding who is responsible for achieving desired outcomes.

While SOCOM Directive 10-12 identifies performance goals and links performance measures to them, the directive does not have specific and measurable goals that clearly state 1) quantifiable targets, 2) time periods for achievement, and 3) staff responsibility. According to a SOCOM official, in 2018, the Defense Health Agency produced a predecisional program evaluation report on the POTFF program in an effort to improve DOD's psychological health and traumatic brain injury programs.[16] Though the report was not published, it highlighted several program strengths, including 1) use of an annual needs assessment of the target population; 2) partnerships with external organizations, and 3) evidence-based goals and objectives. The report also made four recommendations for future program development. Specifically, one of the recommendations was that SOCOM develop goals that incorporate the SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound). A SOCOM official noted that SOCOM did not take any action in response to the recommendations in the predecisional Defense Health Agency's report.

Without fully defined performance goals in specific and measurable terms, SOCOM will have difficulty ensuring that POTFF activities are performing as intended. Without clearly defining what each goal intends to achieve, it will be difficult for SOCOM to ensure that POTFF stakeholders understand the program's outcomes and results. Additionally, without clearly defining time-bound targets for each performance goal, it will be difficult for SOCOM to determine when the POTFF program has met its goals and how to adjust programming if needed. Finally, without clearly defining responsibility for each

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[15]See, for example, GAO, *5G Deployment: FCC Needs Comprehensive Strategic Planning to Guide Its Efforts*, GAO-20-468 (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2020) where we previously stated that Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 requirements that apply at the departmental level can also serve as leading practices for planning at lower levels within federal agencies, such as individual programs or initiatives. See also 31 U.S.C. § 1115(b)(5)(E).

[16]The evaluation employed a rapid evaluation process to assess quality and effectiveness, including onsite evaluations to verify information previously collected in fiscal year 2014 as well as phone-based structured interview to assess baseline information across five dimensions (Need, Structure, Process, Outcome, and Finance) of the Defense Health Agency's Program Evaluation Framework. The Defense Health Agency considers the report predecisional since no final determinations were made within the department and it was never published.

performance goal, SOCOM lacks reasonable assurance that POTFF providers and stakeholders will be accountable for program outcomes and may not understand POTFF organization and responsibilities.

SOCOM Has Not Incorporated Key Attributes of Successful Performance Measures to Evaluate Progress toward Strategic Program Goals

The performance measures in SOCOM's performance assessment framework do not have key attributes of successful performance measurement that we have identified in prior work. Federal internal control standards call for federal program managers to use quality information to achieve that program's objectives and make informed decisions.[17] According to leading practices we identified in our previous work, results-oriented organizations develop performance measures that are clearly linked to performance goals and demonstrate the degree to which desired results are achieved.[18]

Our prior work has highlighted key attributes of successful performance measures, which include having linkage with goals and being clear.[19] When we compared the performance measures in SOCOM's performance assessment framework with these attributes, we found that they 1) are not linked to the POTFF program assessment hierarchy and 2) do not have clear definitions.[20]

First, we found that 13 of 21 of the performance measures in SOCOM's performance assessment framework are not linked to POTFF strategic goals—called end states.[21] SOCOM Directive 10-12 organizes the

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[17]GAO-14-704G.

[18]GAO/GGD-96-118 and GAO-16-393.

[19]GAO, *DHS Training: Improved Documentation, Resource Tracking, and Performance Measurement Could Strengthen Efforts*, GAO-14-688 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 10, 2014) and *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, GAO-03-143 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002).

[20]Performance measures exhibit linkage when they are aligned with goals and are clearly communicated throughout the organization. Measures exhibit clarity when they are clearly stated and their names and definitions are consistent with the methodology used to calculate them.

[21]Strategic goals are long-term goals that set a general direction for a program's efforts. They are distinct from performance goals, which are the specific results an agency expects its program to achieve in the near term. See GAO-16-393.

program into a hierarchy of domains, end states, and lines of effort; however, the performance measures are generally not linked to it. For example, SOCOM Directive 10-12 states that the end state for the psychological domain is to enhance the psychological health of SOF to optimize performance, promote resilience, and decrease stigma. Utilization rate and Subjective Units of Distress Scale are the performance measures listed for the psychological domain, but neither describes which lines of effort or end state the measures are intended to support.[22] It is unclear whether high utilization of psychological domain services accomplishes the desired end state. A SOCOM official stated that performance measures are not connected to domain lines of effort because the lines of effort are used only to organize the text of SOCOM Directive 10-12. However, as we have previously reported, agencies should connect their strategic goals to the day-to-day activities of their managers and staff by creating a logical hierarchy of major goals and subordinate objectives that cascade through the organization.[23] In other words, strategic goals, performance goals, and measures should all be linked to ensure that an organization's activities support achieving agency goals.

Second, the performance measures in SOCOM's performance assessment framework are unclear. We previously reported that a performance measure is clear if the name and definition are consistent with the methodology used to calculate it.[24] While SOCOM has included the titles, or names, of performance measures in the framework, SOCOM has not provided definitions or methodologies for the measures. For example, one of the cognitive domain's measures is listed as "neurocognitive assessments." However, SOCOM Directive 10-12 does not provide any information, definitions, or descriptions other than to specify which assessment or assessments it is referencing. It is not clear from the directive what this instrument specifically measures or what methodology SOCOM will use to collect and analyze the data.

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[22]The Subjective Units of Distress Scale is a subjective measure of distress, fear, anxiety, or discomfort. The scale ranges from 0 to 100, "totally relaxed" to the "highest distress/fear/anxiety/discomfort ever felt".

[23]See GAO, *Managing for Results: Enhancing Agency Use of Performance Information for Management Decision Making*, GAO-05-927 (Washington, D.C.: September 2005); and *Risk Management: Further Refinements Needed to Assess Risks and Prioritize Protective Measures at Ports and Other Critical Infrastructure*, GAO-06-91 (Washington, D.C.: January 2006).

[24]GAO-14-688.

SOCOM has taken steps to define performance measures and link them to POTFF goals. However, the department has not ensured that SOCOM establishes fully defined performance measures for the POTFF program. In August 2019, ASD-SO/LIC directed SOCOM to develop a logic model for the POTFF programs with standardized outcome metrics to evaluate program effectiveness. A SOCOM official stated they satisfied ASD-SO/LIC's direction with a draft logic model submitted in December 2019. However, that model was not included in SOCOM Directive 10-12 and they did not take any further action.

Without fully defining the key characteristics of performance measures, SOCOM will have difficulty ensuring that POTFF activities are achieving their desired goals. First, without creating an evident link between all performance measures and strategic goals, SOCOM lacks reasonable assurance that the behaviors and incentives created by SOCOM Directive 10-12's performance measures support POTFF's desired end states. Second, without clearly stated performance measures including consistent names, definitions, and methodologies, SOCOM cannot guarantee that all parties will collect and interpret data the same way.

SOCOM Made Progress Implementing Its Data System, but Lacks a Program Evaluation Plan to Guide Data Collection, Reporting, and Analysis

SOCOM Made Progress Implementing a POTFF Data System, and Has Begun Reevaluating System Requirements

SOCOM completed implementation of the new Human Performance Data Management System—called Smartabase—at three of the four service components and all the TSOCs as of January 2023, according to a senior official. A senior official at SOCOM noted that Smartabase implementation has not begun at the Naval Special Warfare Command. Smartabase is a tracking platform used by SOCOM to aggregate data and create real-time visualizations on the physical performance of SOF service members. SOCOM updated its POTFF data system because the program's first data system—SPEAR—had several limitations that made

it unsuitable for managing POTFF program data.[25] Additionally, officials reported that SOCOM is developing some features, such as connections to other databases like Advana and user interfaces.[26]

However, the command experienced significant delays in fully implementing Smartabase (see Figure 7). We reported in December 2021 that SOCOM initially planned to complete implementation of Smartabase by the end of fiscal year 2020. SOCOM revised its implementation plans multiple times due to delays.

Figure 7: Smartabase Project Milestones and Estimated Timeline
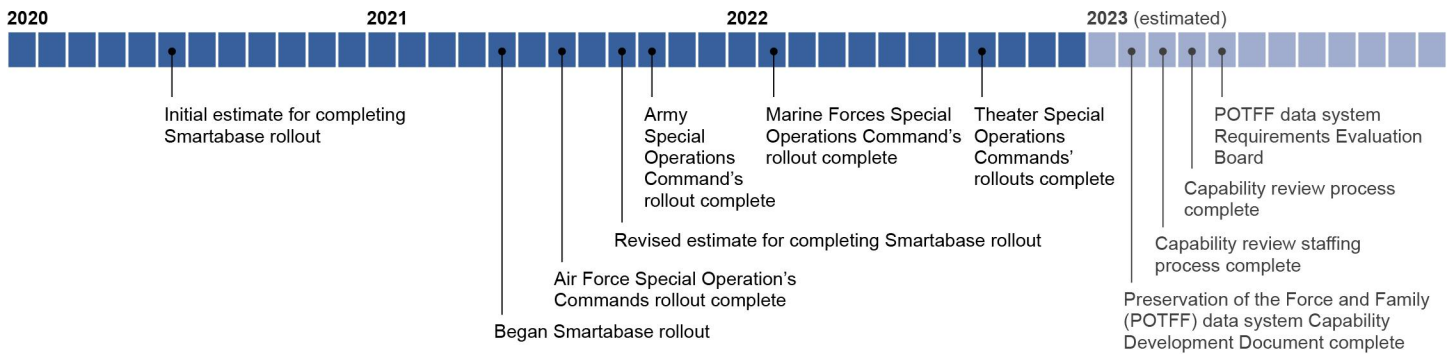
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Special Operations Command information. | GAO-23-105644

According to SOCOM officials, the command provided training on the new system to the Army Special Operations Command, Air Force Special Operations Command, and Marine Forces Special Operations Command and is in the initial stages of collecting POTFF data. However, component officials reported varied experiences using the new system and in migrating historical POTFF data. For example,

- o *Army Special Operations Command* officials told us that most of the command's historical data could not be migrated into Smartabase, but officials can access it for reference outside of the new system.

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[25]According to a SOCOM official, the command implemented the SPEAR database in 2013.

[26]Advana (derived from the term "Advancing Analytics") is a common enterprise data repository for the DOD. According to DOD, Advana is a centralized data and analytics platform that provides DOD users with common business data, decision support analytics, and data tools.

- o *Marine Forces Special Operations Command* officials said they experienced challenges migrating POTFF data and were working to make data usable for analysis.

- o An *Air Force Special Operations Command* official reported that the command did not have historical POTFF data.

- o *Naval Special Warfare Command* officials reported that the command has not implemented Smartabase at the command due to uncertainty regarding the system's capabilities.

According to officials, SOCOM is pursuing a two-track process, continuing to implement Smartabase while also reevaluating requirements for it. According to SOCOM officials, SOCOM decided to make Smartabase an official system of record for the POTFF program in January 2022. This decision triggered SOCOM's standard process to certify, endorse, and validate specific special operations capabilities, called the Special Operations Forces Capabilities Integration and Development System (see

Identifying SOF Capabilities

U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) uses the Special Operations Forces Capabilities Integration and Development System to manage the review and approval of Special Operations Forces' (SOF) capability requirements. SOCOM identifies gaps in SOF capabilities, develops a proposal for specific solutions—such as a new weapon or data system—and identifies the capability requirements against which the usefulness of that system will be measured. According to SOCOM, the process provides a streamlined, tailored, and responsive capabilities integration and development system that meets the unique needs of special operations.

Source: SOCOM. | GAO-23-105644

sidebar).[27] SOCOM officials stated that the command will follow this process to identify and assess capability requirements and gaps and to develop, review, validate, manage, and if necessary, revise capability requirements for Smartabase. As of November 2022, a SOCOM official told us that the command developed a draft outline of the requirements.

Several service component officials expressed concerns regarding SOCOM's reevaluation after the initial implementation of Smartabase. Specifically, they told us that reevaluating the data system or making changes to the data collection framework could delay the availability of data, which could ultimately affect their ability to evaluate the POTFF program. For example, the official leading the Air Force Special Operations Command's POTFF expressed concerns that changing Smartabase management could result in the loss of experienced developers. The official added that even small changes to the data collection requirements could result in years of delay before meaningful data analysis becomes possible, because it can take multiple years to collect a dataset that is suitable for analysis.

According to SOCOM officials, Smartabase and data collection requirements could change as a result of SOCOM's reevaluation. Changes to the system, data collection processes, and system management could delay the development of sufficient, credible data for

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[27]U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 71-4, *Special Operations Forces Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Jan. 22, 2020).

program evaluation. According to SOCOM officials, depending on how SOCOM develops the initial capabilities document, Smartabase may not fulfill the identified gap or meet the requirements. These officials also stated that SOCOM has not specified final roles and responsibilities, but POTFF officials stated that they believe the roles will be shared between the Program Executive Office SOF Warrior and SOCOM POTFF staff.[28] Specifically, the Program Executive Office SOF Warrior will perform an administrative or system management role over the data system. According to SOCOM officials, POTFF staff will maintain responsibility for developing requirements for the data system, monitoring vendor performance, and using data for analysis. POTFF officials estimated that the process could be completed by April 2023.

SOCOM Inconsistently Collects, Reports, and Analyzes POTFF Data to Measure Performance and Lacks a Program Evaluation Plan

SOCOM Directive 10-12 defines minimum data collection requirements for all SOCOM POTFF domains. Specifically, within each domain the directive defines data elements and associated measures. For example, in the physical domain, the directive includes a data element "Injuries/Severity" and specifies "type and severity of injury" as the measure. For each data element, the directive also specifies a collection method (such as Smartabase) and reporting timeframe (such as monthly). See appendix III for a complete list of the data collection requirements included in SOCOM Directive 10-12.

However, the command's data-collection practices vary among SOF service components, resulting in inconsistencies in data and metrics. Component officials reported that they collect data on many metrics that are not specifically identified in SOCOM Directive 10-12. For example, SOCOM officials told us that participation rates are an important measure and that they collect this data for all five domains. SOCOM has collected some POTFF information on rates of participation using Smartabase, but

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[28]The Program Executive Office SOF Warrior focuses on the acquisition of specific special operations capabilities for SOCOM. The office is comprised of over 200 military, civilian, and contractor personnel and manages a portfolio that includes 130 programs and projects. The portfolio has six focus areas: 1) Ground Mobility; 2) Operator Target Acquisition and Visual Augmentation Systems; 3) Operator Weapon Systems and Accessories; 4) Operator Ammunition/Demolition; 5) Operator Equipment, Protection, and Survival; and 6) Operator First Aid Kits, Medic Kits, and Casualty Evacuation.

SOCOM officials stated that the data was incomplete.[29] Moreover, as we reported in December 2021, SOCOM does not collect data that POTFF staff told us they rely upon to manage their domains. Therefore, performance measures are inconsistent across service components.[30]

According to a senior SOCOM official, the command tracks use of POTFF services across all five POTFF domains by logging encounters with service providers—part of the minimum data requirements. However, this official also stated data entry was in a preliminary state at some components and TSOCs.[31] Specifically, this official told us that components and TSOCs recorded encounter data inconsistently—some reported encounters for individuals, while others reported groups. Additionally, some POTFF organizations entered historical data going back to late 2019, but others began logging encounter data when Smartabase was implemented. A senior SOCOM official stated that this data did not represent comprehensive rates of participation and that the command expects to have reliable data by the fall of 2023.

In addition, service component officials told us that they use data sources that are not included in SOCOM's minimum data collection requirements to evaluate their POTFF operations.[32] For example, Air Force Special Operations Command tracks rates of negative behaviors such as driving under the influence, sexual assaults, and domestic violence, among others. Additionally, Marine Forces Special Operations Command officials noted that they previously collected data that was not useful, but were working to identify meaningful metrics. SOCOM Directive 10-12 states that component commands may collect additional information beyond the minimum requirements identified in SOCOM Directive 10-12; however, SOCOM's POTFF officials stated they were not aware of all the potential data sources available at each component or TSOC.

SOCOM also attempts to identify SOF needs through annual needs assessments surveys of active-duty military members, reservists, and National Guard members assigned to the command. The surveys solicit

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[29]According to SOCOM officials, Naval Special Warfare Command has not yet adopted the Smartabase platform and uses an alternative data management system to track POTFF utilization. Thus, Naval Special Warfare Command data are not included.

[30]GAO-22-104486.

[31]According to a SOCOM official, POTFF encounters include all assessment, treatment, training, enhancement, and education activities.

[32]See appendix III for a list of SOCOM's minimum data requirements for the POTFF program.

responses to a variety of issues including deployment, physical fitness, resilience, support services, sleep, lifestyle choices, and family information.[33] SOCOM produced reports based on survey responses to help guide future decisions and measure program performance and effectiveness. The reports presented notable findings. However, in June 2015, the Defense Health Agency contracted with the MITRE Corporation to perform an independent assessment of the POTFF program.[34] The assessment found that the anonymous nature of the needs assessment survey combined with a low response rate made the data inappropriate for generalizing across the entire SOF population.[35] Further, the MITRE Corporation could not verify the accuracy of the responses.

In August 2019, ASD-SO/LIC tasked SOCOM with providing a description of POTFF's data collection and aggregation processes, as well as enterprise-level data reporting. The tasking specified that SOCOM was to document the data collection process and how the data will be aggregated for department-wide reporting. Furthermore, ASD-SO/LIC tasked SOCOM to provide a timeline for the first annual data report summarizing key output data and outcome metrics. An ASD-SO/LIC official told us that SOCOM has not reported any POTFF data to them as part of the command's oversight responsibilities, nor provided a timeline for the first data report.

As of January 2023, SOCOM added two new reporting requirements to SOCOM Directive 10-12. The directive requires the SOCOM POTFF Director to provide an annual report on POTFF to ASD-SO/LIC and the

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[33]SOCOM did not complete annual needs assessment surveys in calendar years 2013, 2020, and 2021. The command reinitiated the needs assessment survey in 2022. SOCOM officials stated that the command attempts to identify the needs for all SOF collectively because the POTFF program is open to all SOF service members. Specifically, SOCOM does not have processes to identify the unique needs of underrepresented groups, but POTFF staff refer SOF to specialized services when the needs arise.

[34]Section 586 of the Carl Levin and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 directed the Secretary of Defense to provide for an independent assessment of the POTFF program that included assessments of factors contributing to mental, behavioral, and psychological health challenges, the extent to which measures were being used to assess progress, and the effectiveness of the POTFF program in addressing mental, behavioral, and psychological health. Pub. L. No. 113-291, § 586 (2014).

[35]Participation numbers for the surveys varied, but ranged from around 10,300 to 16,300 SOF. In calendar years 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2016 respondents included civilian spouses with the number of respondents ranging from around 1,400 to 2,200. However, in 2017, civilian spouses were not surveyed due to the difficulty in obtaining an adequate sample.

SOCOM Commander summarizing data related to program utilization and the extent to which the objectives of the program are being achieved based on data collected and assessed. The directive also requires that the POTFF Director hold quarterly program reviews with ASD-SO/LIC to facilitate its oversight responsibilities. Further, SOCOM Directive 10-12 states that POTFF data will serve as a basis for determining the allocation of POTFF staff and funding for SOCOM units. It also states that the service components and TSOCs will collect and report data to SOCOM headquarters related to the provision of services by all POTFF staff. SOCOM officials reported that the command removed evaluation and assessment requirements from the service components. Specifically, the service components are no longer tasked with implementing comprehensive evaluation and assessment plans for the POTFF program. According to a SOCOM official, the service components did not conduct evaluations or assessment between when the requirement was introduced in January 2021 and when it was rescinded January 2023.

However, SOCOM has not developed a detailed program evaluation plan for the POTFF program to support its annual reports. SOCOM does not have a plan that identifies relevant data sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis procedures. Program evaluations are systematic studies that use research methods to address specific questions about program performance.[36] Evaluation is closely related to performance measurement and reporting. Whereas performance measurement entails the ongoing monitoring and reporting of program progress toward preestablished goals, program evaluation typically assesses the achievement of a program's objectives and other aspects of performance in the context in which the program operates. Furthermore, our work on program evaluation states that agencies should (1) identify data sources and collection procedures to obtain relevant, credible information and (2) develop plans to analyze the data in ways that allow valid conclusions.[37]

SOCOM officials told us that they are aware that SOF service components collect other, non-standardized data, but their primary interest is in data reported in Smartabase in response to the minimum data requirements identified by SOCOM guidance. As we previously

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[36]Program evaluation is an assessment—through objective measurement and systematic analysis—of the manner and extent to which federal programs achieve intended objectives. 31 U.S.C. § 1115(h)(12).

[37]GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, GAO-12-208G (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2012).

reported, one SOCOM official noted that the POTFF program faced poor compliance from its subordinate commands when it previously identified specific data metrics.[38] A detailed program evaluation plan could help SOCOM further communicate standard data sources and collection procedures across the command, as well as demonstrate how it plans to align the collected data with performance measures and address key questions regarding performance goals to support its evaluative annual program report. Further, a detailed program evaluation plan could help position SOCOM to demonstrate the efficacy of POTFF activities and help increase the credibility of evaluation results. As a result, SOCOM will be better positioned to draw valid conclusions regarding program performance and justify the program to oversight entities, such as ASD-SO/LIC and Congress.

Conclusions

Given increased POTFF program expenditures and that high operational tempo has fatigued and worn service members and their families, it is increasingly important that SOCOM develop the capacity to evaluate and demonstrate the effects of the POTFF program. Assessing program performance is critical to determining a program's progress in meeting its intended outcomes and allowing the Congress, DOD, and SOCOM to assess effectiveness and make necessary operational changes. SOCOM has taken steps to establish POTFF program evaluation, such as revising SOCOM Directive 10-12 to clarify program objectives, identifying minimum data requirements, and implementing a new data system. However, POTFF does not have fully defined performance goals, measures, or a detailed program evaluation plan that will consistently provide SOCOM with actionable information for managing the program and making improvements, if necessary, to meet program objectives.

Without taking additional actions to define specific and measurable performance goals and measures as well as planning data analysis, SOCOM may encounter difficulty demonstrating how POTFF delivers a return on investment through improvements in SOF readiness and resilience. By addressing these areas, SOCOM will be better positioned to validate program expenditures and advancing program performance and effectiveness.

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[38]GAO-22-104486.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following three recommendations to DOD.

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of SOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SO/LIC, establishes specific and measurable performance goals for the POTFF program that define quantifiable targets, time periods for achievement, and staff responsibilities. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of SOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SO/LIC, establishes performance measures for the POTFF program that are linked to strategic goals and are clearly stated. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of SOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SO/LIC, develops a detailed program evaluation plan for evaluating the POTFF program to support its annual program reports that includes relevant data sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis procedures. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for review and comment. In written comments, reproduced in appendix IV, DOD concurred with all three of our recommendations.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict, the Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at RussellC@gao.gov or (202) 512-5431. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report evaluates the extent to which U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) has (1) identified the performance goals of POTFF and the measures required to demonstrate effectiveness and (2) collected and analyzed data to determine how well POTFF is achieving desired outcomes.

To address our first objective, we reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12, including the current January 2023 version which added a performance assessment framework. We compared it with *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, which states that management should define objectives in specific and measurable terms to enable the design of internal control for related risks.[1] We also conducted content analysis of SOCOM Directive 10-12 to identify objectives, assess the degree to which these objectives were specific and measurable, and assess the degree to which performance metrics in SOCOM Directive 10-12 aligned with the program's objectives. We conducted the content analysis by:

1. <u>Developing definitions for terms.</u> We used Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government and guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to identify definitions for the terms: objective, specific, measurable, and metric or indicator.

2. <u>Coding the data.</u> Two analysts reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12 and coded objectives using these definitions. In subsequent rounds they evaluated whether the objective language matched definitions for specific and measurable and if objectives were linked with measures.

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[1]U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 10-12, *U.S. Special Operations Command Preservation of the Force and Family* (Jan. 7, 2023) (hereafter SOCOM Directive 10-12). *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* states that management should define objectives in specific terms so they are understood at all levels of an entity. This involves clearly defining what is to be achieved, who is to achieve it, how it will be achieved, and the time frames for achievement. Measurable objectives are those that are generally free of bias and do not require subjective judgments to dominate their measurement. Measurable objectives are also stated in a quantitative or qualitative form that permits reasonably consistent measurement. GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

3. <u>Assessing intercoder reliability.</u> An independent third analyst reviewed each round of coding and identified any discrepancies. To resolve discrepancies, the third analyst made the final decision on coding and the two initial analysts noted concurrence or conflict.

4. <u>Summarizing results.</u> One analyst compiled the three rounds of analysis to develop a summary.

We also reviewed the January 2023 revision to SOCOM Directive 10-12 and determined that SOCOM identifies 14 performance measures to assess POTFF's effect. We assessed these measures against two of nine selected key attributes for performance measures identified in our prior work.[2] We previously identified these two attributes as foundational for performance measurement- having linkage with division- and agency-wide goals and being clear.[3] We selected linkage because aligning measures with agency-wide goals and mission helps ensure that the behaviors and incentives created by the measures support the agency-wide goals or mission. With regard to clarity, if a measure is not clearly stated and the name and definition are not consistent with the methodology used to calculate it, performance data could be confusing and misleading to users, such as department leadership and congressional constituents.

We also interviewed or received information from officials from SOCOM, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, the four service component commands, and six Theater Special Operations Commands regarding program performance assessment, among other things. The following is a complete list of the organizations and officials we interviewed or obtained documentation from during the course of our audit:

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[2]GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, GAO-03-143 (Washington, D. C.: Nov. 22, 2002). GAO developed these nine attributes of performance goals and measures based on previously established GAO criteria, consideration of key legislation, and review of performance management literature. In GAO-03-143, GAO applied the attributes to assess Internal Revenue Service performance measures. However, because the attributes are derived from sources generally applicable to performance measures, they are also relevant for assessing SOCOM performance measures.

[3]GAO, *DHS Training: Improved Documentation, Resource Tracking, and Performance Measurement Could Strengthen Efforts*, GAO-14-688 (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

- Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special
  Operations/Low Intensity Conflict

- Special Operations Command Headquarters: POTFF leadership
  and management, data science, resource management, and
  financial management

- Subordinate commands: POTFF leadership and management,
  domain leads, data scientists, and service providers

- Air Force Special Operations Command

- Marine Forces Special Operations Command

- Naval Special Warfare Command

- U.S. Army Special Operations Command

- Special Operations Command Africa

- Special Operations Command Central

- Special Operations Command Europe

- Special Operations Command Korea

- Special Operations Command North

- Special Operations Command South

- Defense Health Agency

To address our second objective, we reviewed SOCOM Directive 10-12
to understand SOCOM's data identification, collection, analysis, and
reporting practices. We also interviewed SOCOM and service component
officials responsible for data collection and analysis. We compared
SOCOM's processes against recommended practices for data
identification, collection, analysis, and reporting found in our prior work on
program evaluation.[4] Our prior work states that evaluators should follow
five steps to design program evaluations, specifically:

1. Clarify understanding of the program's goals and strategy;

2. Develop relevant and useful evaluation questions;

3. Select an appropriate evaluation approach or design for each
   evaluation question;

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[4]GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, GAO-12-208G (Washington, D.C.: January
2012).

4. Identify data sources and collection procedures to obtain relevant, credible information; and

5. Develop plans to analyze the data in ways that allow valid conclusions to be drawn from the evaluation questions.

We also reviewed SOCOM Directive 71-4 on the command's policy, processes, procedures, and products to identify and assess capability requirements and associated gaps, and to develop, review, validate, manage, and—if necessary—revise capability requirements.[5] We also reviewed SOCOM and DOD guidance on data governance and management. Specifically, we reviewed SOCOM's Enterprise Data Strategy and the DOD Data Strategy, which outlines the Department's visions for making data available to those who need it.[6] We also interviewed SOCOM officials responsible for developing data collection requirements and data specialists from SOCOM and relevant subordinate commands responsible for implementing and maintaining POTFF data systems.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2022 to April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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[5]U.S. Special Operations Command Directive 71-4, *Special Operations Forces Capabilities Integration and Development System* (Jan. 22, 2020).

[6]U.S. Special Operations Command, *Enterprise Data Strategy* (Dec. 4, 2019) and Department of Defense, *DOD Data Strategy* (2020).

Appendix II: U.S. Special Operations Command Responsibilities and Organizational Structure

U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is the functional combatant command responsible for organizing, training, equipping, and providing fully capable special operations forces (SOF) to defend the United States and its interests. In addition, SOCOM is responsible for developing special operations strategy, doctrine, and tactics; the employment of forces of the command to carry out assigned missions; requirements validation; acquisition of special operations peculiar equipment and services; and formulating and submitting requirements for intelligence support, among other things. Subject to the authority, direction and control of the Secretary of Defense, the commander of SOCOM is responsible for and has the authority to conduct all affairs of command for the following special operations activities: (1) direct action, (2) strategic reconnaissance, (3) unconventional warfare, (4) foreign internal defense, (5) civil affairs, (6) military information support operations, (7) counterterrorism, (8) humanitarian assistance, (9) theater search and rescue, (10) countering weapons of mass destruction, and (11) other activities such as may be specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.[1]

SOCOM has established seven Theater Special Operations Commands (TSOC) as subordinate commands that perform broad, continuous missions uniquely suited to SOF capabilities. The Secretary of Defense has assigned operational control to the TSOCs and attached SOF tactical units to their respective geographic combatant commander. Additionally, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps each have a designated component to train, equip, and provide SOF from their respective services. Figure 8Figure 8 illustrates SOCOM's command structure.

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[1]See section 167 of title 10, United States Code and DOD Directive 5100.01, *Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components*, (Dec. 21, 2010, Change 1, Sept. 17, 2020).

Figure 8: U.S. Special Operations Command Structure
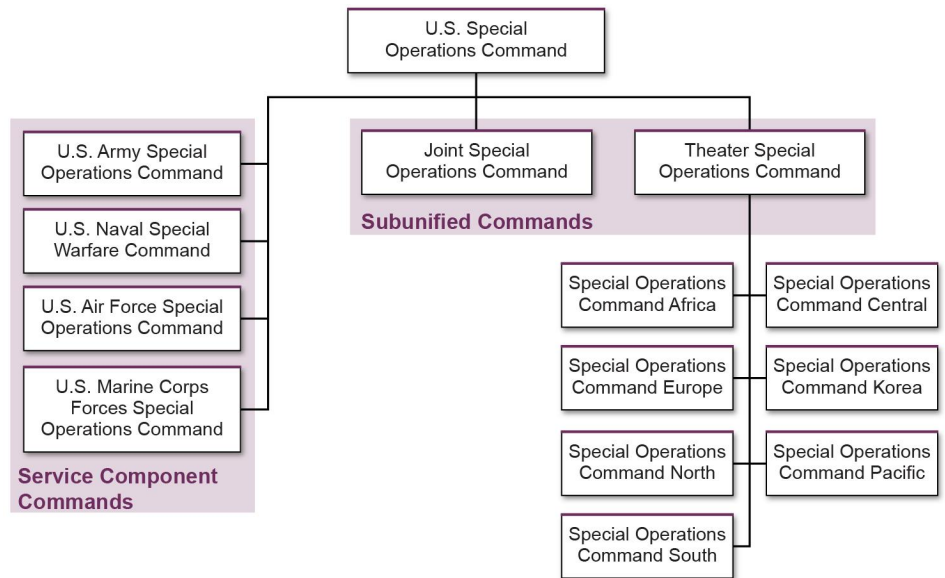
The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict is the principal staff assistant and civilian advisor to the Secretary of Defense for special operations, low-intensity conflict, and special operations' peculiar administrative matters. In this role, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict is in the administrative chain of command and exercises authority, direction, and control of the Commander, SOCOM for special operations-peculiar administration including the readiness and organization of special operations forces, resources and equipment, and civilian personnel in accordance with section 167(f) of title 10, United States Code.[2]

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[2]Department of Defense Directive 5111.10, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict* (May 5, 2021).

Appendix III: U.S. Special Operations Command Minimum Data Collection Requirements for Preservation of the Force and Family Program

Table 1: U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Minimum Data Collection Requirements for Preservation of the Force and Family Program

Domain	Data element	Measure	Method	Reporting
Physical	Utilization	Number of individual and group encounters; time spent in direct encounters	Smartabase	Monthly
	Physical Assessment	Strength, aerobic capacity, and body composition[a]	Smartabase	Monthly
	Injuries/Severity	Type and severity of injuries	Smartabase	Monthly
	Access to Care or Service	Time from request for care or service to first in-person encounter	Smartabase	Monthly
	Operational Availability	Functional limitations status[b]	Smartabase	Monthly
	Quality of Life	Standard Form-10	Smartabase	Monthly
Psychological	Utilization	Number of individual and group encounters; time spent in direct encounters	Smartabase	Monthly
	Presenting Condition	Topic	Smartabase	Monthly
	Condition Acuity	Measured using instruments in the Behavioral Health Data Portal[c]	Smartabase	Monthly
	Access to Care/Services	Time from request for care or service to first in-person encounter	Smartabase	Monthly
Cognitive	Utilization	Number of individual and group encounters and time spent in direct encounters	Smartabase	Monthly

Domain	Data element	Measure	Method	Reporting
	Cognitive Assessment	Self-regulation processing speed, working memory, attention, inhibitory control, and sleep hygiene	Smartabase	Monthly
	Access to Services	Time from request for service to first in-person encounter	Smartabase	Monthly
	Referrals	Referrals to and from other providers and external resources	Smartabase	Monthly
Social and family	Utilization	Number of participants per event	Smartabase	Monthly
	ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale	A survey completed by participants in activities designed to improve marital relationships	Web-based survey	As required
	Parent-Child Relationship Scale/Parent-Adolescent Scale	A survey completed by participants in activities designed to improve parent/child relationships	Web-based survey	As required
	Referrals for Support	All referrals made by staff to other agencies for support	Smartabase	Unspecified
	Universal Metric	Participants in activities other than family or parent-child relationships or a customized assessment, as appropriate	Smartabase	As required
Spiritual	Utilization	Undefined in SOCOM Directive 10-12	Web-based survey	As required
	Spiritual Fitness Scale	Undefined in SOCOM Directive 10-12	Web-based survey	As required

Source: SOCOM Directive 10-12. | GAO-23-105644

[a]SOCOM Directive 10-12 allows subordinate commands to determine which metrics to use for these three measures.

[b]SOCOM Directive 10-12 identifies three status to stratify individuals based on how mission-capable they are: (1) green is no functional limitations; (2) yellow is some functional limitations for mission essential training or deployment; and (3) red is significant functional limitations—member advised to not participate in mission essential training or deployment.

[c]SOCOM Directive 10-12 states that providers will assess individuals for mood disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorders using instruments in the Behavioral Health Data Portal.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Defense

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

SPECIAL OPERATIONS /
LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

Mr. Cary Russell
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington DC 20548

Dear Mr. Russell,

Attached is the Department of Defense's response to GAO Draft Report GAO-23-105644, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program," dated March 10, 2023 (GAO Code 105644).

My point of contact is Dr. Yuko K. Whitestone. She may be reached at 703-614-4701 or via email at yuko.k.whitestone.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Logan

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Policy and Programs

Enclosure:

The DoD response to the GAO Draft Report GAO-23-105644, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program"

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MARCH 10, 2023
GAO-23-105644 (GAO CODE 105644)

"SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: ACTIONS NEEDED TO ASSESS
PERFORMANCE OF THE PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND FAMILY
PROGRAM"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SOLIC, establishes specific and measurable performance goals for the POTFF program that define quantifiable targets, time periods for achievement, and staff responsibilities. (Recommendation 1)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SOLIC, establishes performance measures for the POTFF program that are linked to strategic goals and clearly stated. (Recommendation 2)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense should ensure that the Commander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-SOLIC, develops a detailed program evaluation plan for evaluating the POTFF program to support its annual program reports that includes relevant data sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis procedures. (Recommendation 3)

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

Text of Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Defense

Mr. Cary Russell

Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington DC 20548

Dear Mr. Russell,

Attached is the Department of Defense's response to GAO Draft Report GAO-23-105644, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program," dated March I 0, 2023 (GAO Code I 05644).

My point of contact is Dr. Yuko K. Whitestone. She may be reached at 703-614-470 I or via email at yuko.k.whitestone.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Logan

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Policy and Programs

Enclosure:

The DoD response to the GAO Draft Repo11GAO-23-105644, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program"

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MARCH 10, 2023 GAO-23-105644 (GAO CODE 105644) "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: ACTIONS NEEDED TO ASSESS PERFORMANCE OF THE PRESERVATION OF THE FORCE AND

<u>FAMILY PROGRAM" DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE RECOMMENDATION</u>

**RECOMMENDATION1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense
should ensure that the Commander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-
SOLIC, establishes specific and measurable pe1formance goals for the POTFF
program that define quantifiable targets, time periods for achievement, and
staff responsibilities. (Recommendation I)**

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secreta,y of Defense
should ensure that the Cornmander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-
SOLIC, establishes performance measures for the POTFF program that are
linked to strategic goals and clearly stated. (Recommendation 2)**

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: The GAO recommends that the Secreta1y of Defense
should ensure that the Commander of USSOCOM, in coordination with ASD-
SOLIC, develops a detailed program evaluation plan for evaluating the POTFF
program to support its annual program reports that includes relevant data
sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis
procedures. (Recommendation 3)**

DoD RESPONSE: Concur.

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cary Russell, (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Marcus Oliver (Assistant Director), Adam Anguiano (Analyst in Charge), Karl Antonsson, Tracy Barnes, Clifton Douglas, Benjamin Licht, Kathryn Long, David Jones, Neelaxi Lakhmani, Phillip McIntyre, Zina Merritt, Richard Powelson, Terry Richardson, Sarah Rouff, and Michael Zose made key contributions to this report.

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