

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106618](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Military service performance evaluation systems provide necessary performance information for approximately 215,000 active duty commissioned officers across the Department of Defense (DOD). They also support decisions about officer promotions and placements. These decisions affect the composition and quality of the military's current and future leadership.

Public Law 117-263 includes a provision for GAO to review the military services' officer performance evaluation systems. This report examines (1) the extent the military services' active duty officer performance evaluation systems incorporate key practices for performance evaluation, and (2) how officer performance evaluations inform promotion board determinations and support officer development.

GAO developed 11 key practices for performance evaluation; reviewed military service policies, manuals, forms, and other documentation; conducted nongeneralizable interviews with 19 promotion board members and 31 active duty officers; and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a total of 20 recommendations, including that three services develop a training plan and align performance expectations with organizational goals; two services address communication of performance expectations and competencies and require feedback; and all four services develop a plan to evaluate their systems. DOD generally agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-25-106618](#). For more information, contact Kristy Williams at (404) 679-1893 or williamsk@gao.gov.

November 2024

MILITARY OFFICER PERFORMANCE

Actions Needed to Fully Incorporate Performance Evaluation Key Practices

What GAO Found

Out of 11 key practices for performance evaluation, all four military service systems fully incorporated the same five key practices and partially incorporated one key practice. The service systems varied in their implementation of the remaining five practices. Some fully incorporated the practices, some partially incorporated them, and most did not incorporate one practice.

Assessment of the Military Services' Officer Performance Evaluation Systems against GAO's Key Practices for Performance Evaluation

Eleven Key Practices		Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
Design	Establish and communicate a clear purpose for the system	●	●	●	●
	Allow for personnel to be directly involved in the process	●	●	●	●
	Create and update guidance on procedures for the system	●	●	●	●
	Provide training on procedures for the evaluation system	◐	◐	●	◐
Implementation	Align performance expectations with organizational goals	●	○	○	○
	Communicate performance expectations and competencies	●	◐	◐	●
	Evaluate performance based on relevant competencies	●	●	●	●
	Make meaningful distinctions in performance	◐	●	●	●
	Conduct performance evaluations in a timely fashion	●	●	●	●
Evaluation	Provide timely and actionable feedback on performance	◐	●	◐	●
	Regularly evaluate the performance evaluation system	◐	◐	◐	◐

● Fully incorporated ◐ Partially incorporated ○ Not incorporated

Source: GAO analysis of military service documentation and information. | GAO-25-106618

Note: Fully incorporated: GAO found complete evidence that satisfied the key practice.

Partially incorporated: GAO found evidence that satisfied some portion of the key practice.

Not incorporated: GAO found no evidence that satisfied the key practice.

For example, GAO found that all four service systems fully incorporated the key practice that organizations should establish and communicate a clear purpose for the performance evaluation system by stating the purpose of their systems in relevant policies. In contrast, GAO found that three service systems did not incorporate the practice that organizations should align individual performance expectations with organizational goals because their systems' policies neither align performance expectations with organizational goals nor direct rating officials to do so. By fully incorporating all 11 key practices, the services will have better assurance that their performance evaluation systems are designed, implemented, and regularly evaluated to ensure effectiveness.

The 19 promotion board members and 31 active duty officers GAO interviewed provided differing perspectives on the value of information in officer performance evaluation reports and on the extent to which reports support officer development. Promotion board members stated that evaluation reports provided sufficient information to inform their decisions about which officers to recommend for promotion. Some active duty officers stated that the reports provide a clear and relevant tool for assessing performance and supporting officer development. Conversely, others stated that factors such as misused or overused narrative may prevent a clear picture of officer performance areas in need of growth.