Army's virtual recruiting team receives some 200 applications per day

U.S. Army

FORT KNOX, Ky. (Feb. 11, 2013) -- Most people know the Army has hundreds of recruiting centers across the United States, but few realize there is also a Virtual Recruiting Center tucked inside the Recruiting Command headquarters here, sifting through an average of 233 enlistment applications per day.

Since the end of July 2012, the six-person team has been pre-qualifying and building enlistment packets for individuals who choose not to be assigned a recruiter in their local area, but instead to begin the application process online through the Army Career Explorer, or ACE, section of goarmy.com.

The Virtual Recruiting Center, or VRC, mission "is not to replace the recruiter; we are a combat multiplier," said George Silva, chief of Recruiting Command's Virtual Recruiting and Social Media Center here. "We help save recruiters' time by serving as an additional avenue for individuals to begin the enlistment process, ask questions and work their application at their own pace."

The VRC receives applications in varying stages of completion, some have only a few details filled out and others might just be missing one or two items of information, according to Ray Loos, VRC commander. The team, half of whom are former recruiters, reviews records as soon as there is enough information to make the initial determination of enlistment eligibility. He said about half of the records received do not have enough information to make a full determination of qualifications.

The VRC team immediately sends an email to applicants who do not meet basic eligibility requirements -- such as age, height, weight and education -- to thank them for applying and explain why they are ineligible for enlistment. Being overweight and being a single parent are the top two factors for disqualification of online applicants, according to Silva.

Those who are initially qualified receive an email opening the dialogue between VRC team members and the applicant.

"We deal one-on-one with the applicant until the packet is complete," Loos said, adding there is often a lot of emailing and calling back and forth with the applicants to ensure information is as accurate as possible.

When the online packet is complete, the VRC representative sends a congratulatory email to let the applicant know his or her packet is being forwarded to the local recruiter. The email provides complete contact information for the recruiting station, as well as what source documents the recruiter will need. Then Loos

completes a final packet inspection before transferring the record to the recruiting center commander to finish the enlistment. Recruiters need to make the final verification and face-to-face determination of the applicant's eligibility, character, attitude and desire to serve, Loos said.

"We never lay eyes on these people, so they could be filling in information online that is not totally accurate. Until they are face-to-face with a recruiter, we can't be 100 percent certain about their qualification," Loos said.

The team is working to improve its processes to provide better service to both the recruiters and the applicants, Silva added.

Applicants choose to begin the application process online vs. going to a station for a number of reasons, the most important of them being the convenience of doing it at home, according to a survey of Army Career Explorer applicants. Not knowing the location of recruiting centers or any local recruiters round out the top three responses for using Army Career Explorer, followed by the convenience and ease of applying online for applicants with a full-time work schedule.

Feedback from applicants has been very positive, according to Silva. He said the team has even received complimentary feedback from applicants who are disqualified, thanking the team for their sincerity, helpfulness and timeliness in responding.

Recruiter feedback has been equally positive, and Loos encourages recruiters to share their feedback as soon as possible after receiving applicant records so the VRC team can continue improving the process and better support the recruiters.

"It was the fastest applicant I put into the Army," said Miami recruiter Sgt. Julio Maceo, who received the first record the VRC team qualified and sent to the field in August. "It helped out a lot that he was already committed to joining, had a completed packet and had no issues. I just had to complete the physical paperwork and verify the information provided online."

Maceo added that it reduced a lot of the time typically required to gather information from an applicant, sit down with parents, track down and verify information.

"It is a substantial time-saver for the engagement team," said Staff Sgt. Steven Key, a recruiter for 18 months in Augusta, Ga., who agrees it is very helpful having the packet built before meeting with the applicant. Key's recruiting center has received four ACE applicants in the past couple of months: two have already contracted.

"An ACE applicant requires significantly fewer man hours to enlist," Key explained. "I didn't have to go out prospecting, conduct the Army interview or spend time completing the packet for this individual. We only had to verify his information, test him and take him to the [Military Entrance Processing Station]."

As of Jan. 30, the team had processed 18,083 applicant records, approximately 37

percent of which were disqualified on the first look. They have sent 531 completed qualified packets on to recruiters, thus far resulting in 80 contracts, 83 percent of whom are grad alphas (high school graduates who test in the highest Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery category).

"If we can contribute to the force's mission accomplishment by ensuring the applications are complete and qualified based on the applicant's responses, everyone wins," Silva said.

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